

Czech Republic: Extremism and Terrorism

On February 22, 2023, former Czech Republic President Miloš Zeman signed legislation designed to stop the spread of terrorist content online. The new law will provide police with the authority to order Czech and European Union Internet service providers (ISPs) to block terrorist content online, including but not limited to images of terror attacks and posts promoting extremist ideologies. Although the Ministry of the Interior has stated that the “occurrence of terrorist content in the Czech online environment is relatively low,” the legislation provides a new regulatory system that aims to prevent the future dissemination and accessibility of extremist content online. ISPs that fail to remove or prevent access to online terrorist content will be charged with a misdemeanor. However, content will be subject to the judgment of police as to whether it qualifies as terrorist content under the law. (Sources: [Website of the President of the Czech Republic](#), [Expats CZ](#))

The Czech Republic has openly opposed Russia’s February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, with the Czech Republic Parliament passing a resolution declaring the Russian regime a terrorist state on November 16, 2022. The move followed a resolution adopted a month earlier by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, which declared Russia a “terrorist regime.” The Czech resolution further condemned Russia’s annexation of parts of four eastern Ukrainian regions through referendums widely denounced as illegitimate. Anti-Russian sentiment has historically been present in Central and Eastern Europe, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine has only intensified hostility towards the Kremlin. Despite the designation, a small group of Czech citizens have traveled to Ukraine to fight alongside pro-Russian separatists. Between 2014 and 2022, at least 16 Czech citizens have taken up or attempted to take up arms in Ukraine. A number of those foreign fighters were found guilty of fighting for a foreign army or carrying out a terrorist act, with prison sentences ranging from three years to 21 years. (Sources: [Radio Free Europe](#), [Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe](#), [Ministry of the Interior](#), [Radio Prague International](#), [Radio Free Europe](#), [Radio Prague International](#), [Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group](#), [Radio Prague International](#), [Kyiv Post](#), [Reuters](#))

Given the Czech Republic’s support for sanctions against Russia, on September 3, 2022, an estimated 70,000 protestors from both the far right and far left demonstrated in central Prague in opposition of the government’s stance towards the Kremlin. Among the groups represented at the “Czech Republic First” protest were the populist anti-migrant Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD) Party and the Communist Party. Additionally, the protestors were contesting rising inflation and energy prices, COVID-19 vaccination policies, and a growing immigrant population. Government authorities claimed the protest was organized by forces that are “pro-Russian, are close to extreme positions and are against the interests of the Czech Republic” and were encouraged by “Russian propaganda and disinformation campaigns.” (Sources: [Deutsche Welle](#), [Soufan Center](#))

Overview

The Czech Republic, or Czechia as it is sometimes referred, has a history steeped in anti-Roma sentiment. The Roma, or Romani, are an Indo-Aryan, traditionally nomadic ethnic group. Since the splitting of the former Czechoslovakia into the Czech Republic and Slovakia in 1993, the Czech Roma have faced continued societal discrimination and violence that has been only spottily addressed by Czech authorities. Between 1989 and 1995, an estimated 27 Roma were murdered in the Czech Republic, and in 1995 alone, at least 181 documented attacks targeted Roma or foreigners in the country. Despite the Roma (population 300,000) and Muslims (population 20,000) amounting to a fraction of the Czech Republic’s 10.5 million people, violent attacks and rhetoric against the Roma, Muslims, and other minority groups have intensified as right-wing political groups seek to attract support throughout the country. According to a 2020 report by the European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), the Czech police in recent years have taken a more proactive role in countering anti-Roma protests led by extremists in or near areas with large Roma populations. (Sources: [Human Rights Watch](#), [Ministry of the Interior](#), [European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance](#))

Although the Czech Republic does not have an extensive history of violent extremism, the extreme right continues to attract a following. Since the Czech Republic was established in 1993, neo-Nazi sentiments, as well as skinhead subculture, have been heavily represented in violent attacks against marginalized groups, particularly the Roma and foreigners. Groups within extreme right subculture sometimes differ in terms of political beliefs. In 1996, for example, some skinheads even advanced the SHARP (skinheads against racial prejudice) movement, and there were anti-fascist and anti-racist streams of the movement as well. However, these exceptions were never as pronounced as the traditionalist skinheads and ultimately the National Socialist (NS) skinheads. Although there is not one singular far-right umbrella organization, far-right groups have a history of participating in similar targeted attacks, marches, and propaganda. Although the skinhead subculture saw a steady decline of outward support from the early 2000s onward, far-right political groups have filled the gap and attracted the support of enough Czech citizens to earn a dozen or more seats within the Czech parliament since the early 2020s. (Source: [Human Affairs](#))

In recent years, the Czech Republic has dealt with the movement of Czech citizens to other countries undergoing violent conflicts. Media sources have more often noted the movement of Czech citizens into Ukraine than into other conflict zones such as Iraq and Syria. Although the Czech

Czech Republic: Extremism and Terrorism

government has firmly positioned itself as anti-Moscow, Prague has contended with a steady flow of Czech citizens who have fought on the side of Russian separatists in Ukraine since 2014. According to the High Court in Prague, fighting on the side of “the separatist groups in eastern Ukraine seeking to secede from Ukraine and create a separate state entity, the so-called ‘Donetsk people’s republic’” is considered terrorism under the country’s current criminal code. (Source: [Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group](#))

The Czech Republic has actively prosecuted these foreign fighters, and sentences have ranged from three to 21 years in prison. Although there are no official figures regarding the current number of Czech citizens who have traveled to Ukraine to fight alongside the pro-Russian separatists, media sources reported at least 16 incidents of Czech support to Russian fighters between 2014 and 2022. (Sources: [Radio Prague International](#), [Radio Prague International](#))

While the Czech Republic has not had to respond to a large-scale terrorist attack or terror plot in the past decade, Europe remains a target for global extremist groups such as al-Qaeda and ISIS and as such, Czech security forces cannot rule out the possibility of an extremist attack. Additionally, as more foreign fighters return to Europe following the defeat of ISIS’s so-called caliphate, the Czech Republic will also have to deal with the potential risks of cross-border radicalization as well as cross-border attacks. (Source: [Prague Institute of International Relations](#))

Radicalization and Foreign Fighters

Right-Wing Extremism

Right-wing extremism has remained a persistent threat throughout the history of the Czech Republic, expressed through hate-filled demonstrations and violent incidents aimed at minority groups, particularly the Roma, Muslims, and Jews. From 1990 to 1998 alone, far-right extremists—specifically those of the skinhead subculture—committed 1500 violent attacks against the Roma, resulting in at least 30 deaths. In a move to curtail extremist activity, in March 2003, the Ministry of the Interior dissolved the National Alliance (NA), a civic association that propagated Holocaust denial and incited racial intolerance through publications and gatherings. Despite this action, between January 2008 and July 2012, there were at least 47 attacks against the Roma and their property. The attacks were mostly carried out by extreme-right wing supporters and consisted primarily of physical assaults and arson. Far-right incidents appear to spike during national election campaigns, as right-wing parties scapegoat minority groups in an effort to increase support. In 2013, extreme-right parties and their neo-Nazi supporters planned and carried out at least 30 anti-Roma demonstrations during the election campaign season. In 2015, one Prague protest featured extreme-right, anti-immigrant demonstrators brandishing gallows and nooses that they sought to use on “all traitors of the nation.” (Sources: [European Eye on Radicalization](#), [Ministry of the Interior](#), [EU Observer](#), [Conversation](#), [BBC News](#), [Human Affairs](#), [European Roma Rights Centre](#), [Europe Asia Studies](#))

The Roma not only endure institutionalized racism but are also subject to entrenched social and cultural attitudes that are deeply discriminatory to the minority group. According to international organizations and media sources, authorities are still prone to overlooking anti-Roma activity due to longstanding prejudices against the demographic. Given the plight of the Roma, in 2010, the government provided financial support to campaigns that would inform the public of the Roma genocide carried out by the Nazis in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Nonetheless, neo-Nazi groups continued to mobilize, with the Ministry of the Interior estimating in 2012 that there were approximately 500 “hard core” neo-Nazi followers and between 4,000 and 5,000 supporters of the movement. According to the Canadian Embassy of the Czech Republic, in 2012, there were multiple groups who were “united in their anti-Roma agenda” including the Workers’ Party of Social Justice as well as informal neo-Nazi groups such as Odpor (Resistance), Svobodný Odpor (Free Resistance), Odporuj (Oppose!), Autonomní Nacionalisté (Autonomous Nationalists), and Národní Aktivisté (National Activists). As Roma were unfairly targeted and considered an inferior race subject to extermination by the Nazis, neo-Nazi support and activity remains a significant threat to the Roma. More than 500,000 Roma were exterminated by the Nazis and given documented attacks against the Roma from the 1990s to the 2020s, neo-Nazi groups have adopted the same ideology of targeted violence. As of 2022, media sources reported that the Czech Roma are still subject to violence and aggression from far-right mobs and police. Anti-Roma sentiment is even pervasive among political officials, with one official of the center-right government coalition in March 2022 calling for Roma to be shot. (Sources: [Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada](#), [Wilson Center](#), [Al Jazeera](#), [United Nations Office of the High Commissioner](#), [Euractiv](#))

A resurgence in the neo-Nazi and extreme-right wing movement came in 2019 with the National and Social Front (NSF) leading the revival. NSF, which the Ministry of the Interior categorizes as neo-Nazi, was reportedly effective in bringing together experienced right-wing extremists and quickly cultivated international partnerships. In August 2019, NSF launched an international gathering in Hořice that featured white supremacists and White Power musical groups. NSF has also reportedly participated in events in Hungary and Poland. According to a 2021 report by the Financial Action Task Force, NSF and ?eskoslovenští vojáci v záloze (Czechoslovak soldiers in reserve or ?sVZ)—a paramilitary, anti-migrant and

Czech Republic: Extremism and Terrorism

anti-Muslim organization—are the two leading extreme-right wing groups in the Czech Republic. Media sources have also noted that ?sVZ supports Russian President Vladimir Putin and considers NATO a criminal organization. In April 2021, five ?sVZ members who created a militant pro-Russian group in eastern Ukraine were arrested and charged with acts of terrorism and promoting terrorism. Although neo-Nazi groups remain active in the Czech Republic, media sources have reported that they have concentrated their outreach online and have not appeared as often in public. (Sources: [Ministry of the Interior](#), [Ministry of the Interior](#), [Romea](#), [Radio Prague International](#), [Financial Action Task Force](#), [Romea](#), [Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group](#))

Combat 18

Combat 18 (a.k.a. C18, 318, nicknamed “Terror Machine”) is a neo-Nazi group that seeks to create white-only countries through violence and intimidation. The group was established in the United Kingdom and is now present in at least 18 countries worldwide, including the Czech Republic. The “18” in the name refers to the first and eighth letters of the English alphabet, A and H, for Adolf Hitler. Combat 18 was founded in 1992 by Paul “Charlie” Sargent. It largely drew its membership from white supremacists associated with the Chelsea Headhunters soccer hooligan gang and the British neo-Nazi record label and political organization Blood and Honour (B&H). (Source: [Independent](#))

According to the group’s propaganda magazine, Combat 18 seeks to create all-white countries by shipping “all non-whites back to Africa, Asia, Arabia, whether alive or in body bags,” execute “all Queers” and “white race mixers,” “weed out all Jews in the government, the media, the arts, the professions,” execute “all Jews who have actively helped to damage the white race,” and “put into camps the rest until we find a final solution to the eternal Jew.” Over time, Combat 18 has ceased functioning as a centralized organization. Instead, the group’s ideology and brand have become a transnational rallying call for neo-Nazi action. Combat 18 encourages the creation of independent cells and lone-wolf terrorism under the slogan “whatever it takes!” While the group may have once had an official roster, supporters of Combat 18 now claim that membership is achieved through participation in violent neo-Nazi activities. (Sources: [FBI](#), [Deutsche Welle](#))

On October 10, 2010, Václav Cojocar, Jaromír Lukeš, Ivo Müller, and David Vaculík were charged with attempted murder after they threw Molotov cocktails into the home of a Romani family in Vitkov on April 18, 2009. Three people were injured, including a two-year-old girl who suffered extensive burns. The men reportedly carried out the attack to mark Adolf Hitler’s birthday. Vaculík was accused by the prosecution of being a member of Combat 18 and reportedly had a “C18” tattoo on his chest. The Ostrava Regional Court sentenced Lukeš, Müller, and Vaculík to 22 years in a high-security prison and Cojocar to a 20- year jail term. (Sources: [BBC News](#), [CNN](#))

A Prague cell called Division Bohemia operated from 2011 to 2012 and maintained a website to spread propaganda and recruit. The founder of the group, Jan B., served as the main representative of the Czech branch of B&H and Combat 18. In February 2015, a group of nine alleged neo-Nazis, including Jan B., appeared before the Regional Court in Plzeň after being indicted for allegedly planning attacks on specific persons and, through Division Bohemia’s website, calling for violent attacks on the headquarters of political parties and on representatives of the government or police. The group reportedly carried out at least two arson attacks. The defendants were charged with establishing, promoting, and supporting a movement aimed at suppressing human rights and freedoms. Additionally, sources reported that a German chapter of Combat 18 received firearms training in the Czech Republic in September 2017. (Sources: [Romea](#), [Romea](#), [Guardian](#))

Skinheads

The Czech skinhead—named as such due to members having shaved heads or very short haircuts—ideology endorses a platform of “The Czech Republic for the Czech people.” Their efforts are focused towards amplifying white supremacy and destroying those who threaten the homogeneity of the Czech nation. Czech skinhead subculture started to become an issue for the Czech police in the early 1990s, with the Presidium of the Police of the Czech Republic noting the “increasing aggressiveness of the skins...[as the] nature of their crimes is more serious with increasing material property damage.” In the 1990s there were an estimated 5,000 active skinheads in the Czech Republic who primarily targeted the Roma. Additional victims were workers from Vietnam, Arab and African students, and foreign tourists. According to interviews conducted by news publication Romea, skinhead crimes in the 1990s were commonly underreported as police minimized and at times shifted the blame onto the victims. (Sources: [Human Affairs](#), [Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada](#), [Kultura Spoleczenstwo Edukacja](#), [Lidovky](#), [Romea](#))

One of the first Czech skinhead groups was the Bohemia Hammerskins (BHS). BHS served as the leading Czech National Socialist (NS) skinhead organization until 1997. Skinhead groups were known for being boisterous football fans, excessive drinkers, and resenting alternative and hippie groups. The traditionalist skinheads were known for propagating patriotism, anti-communism, and a distrust of non-transparent governments espousing more globalized and multicultural politics. The activities of BHS were reportedly limited to provoking interventions by state security

Czech Republic: Extremism and Terrorism

forces. However, following 1997, Blood and Honour and other factions of neo-Nazi supporters also carried out several marches that heavily featured antisemitic and anti-Roma displays. Between 1998 and 2011, there were at least six anti-Roma marches that attracted more than 300 nationalist and extreme-right demonstrators. The demonstrations featured not only anti-Roma Czech citizens, but also included members from the neo-Nazi “Free Youth” movement and garnered the support of the extreme-right Workers Social Justice Party (DSSS). Following the 2010s, the bulk of communication and information among skinheads has transitioned from zines to the Internet via chat forums and websites. (Sources: [Minorities at Risk Project](#), [European Roma Rights Centre](#), [Kultura Społeczeństwo Edukacja](#))

Antisemitism

Antisemitic attitudes remain strong within specific political and cultural demographics in the Czech Republic, and as a result, anti-Jewish incidents have not declined in recent years. Most antisemitic attacks have been verbal, with a minority of crimes relating to violence against people and property. Approximately 3,900 Jews live in the Czech Republic and have established themselves throughout the Czech social fabric. Zbynek Tarant, a scholar on antisemitism in the Czech Republic, reported that the typical Czech antisemite in 2020 was not a “neo-Nazi hooligan, fanatical Islamist, or anti-Israel activist, but rather a ‘mysteriologist’ or conspiracist.” According to Tarant, conspiracists adhere to the belief that the “world is governed by esoteric secret societies such as Freemasons, the Illuminati, but most importantly—the Jews.” In 2003, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) reported that most of the groups targeting Jews hailed from the skinhead movement. As of 2020, however, there were reportedly 24 antisemitic groups in the Czech Republic who also endorsed conspiracism, nationalism, and Catholic traditionalism. Political groups that have openly endorsed antisemitic platforms—such as the neo-Nazi Workers’ Party and the fascist National Democracy party—have not managed to gain enough votes to secure seats in parliament, but as more far-right supporters enter the political ranks, the OSCE asserts that “their hateful ideology and propaganda is not spread directly, but they use arguments which are on the edge of the law.” Tarant also reports that proponents of radical Islam contribute to antisemitism in the Czech Republic, with most of the anti-Jewish incidents occurring as part of antisemitic sermons in mosques and during anti-Jewish chanting at rallies. (Sources: [Antisemitism Studies](#), [OSCE](#))

Antisemitic literature and paraphernalia remain in circulation throughout the Czech Republic, with publishers defending themselves under the code of Civil Law for freedom of speech. In 2020, police dealt with three publishing houses selling books and other items popular in the neo-Nazi movement. Following an investigation, the publishing house Bodyart Press and its managing director were fined for publishing *The Myth of Six Million*, a controversial book popular among Holocaust deniers. Another publishing house, Our Troops (Naše Vojsko), came under fire for selling calendars and mugs brandishing the images of “Personalities of the Third Reich,” and was charged with promoting a movement suppressing human rights and freedoms. A third publisher, Guidemedia, produced a Czech translation of Germar Rudolf’s Holocaust-denying *Dissecting the Holocaust* and the antisemitic children’s book *Poisonous Mushroom*. Four individuals and two companies associated with Guidemedia were charged. (Sources: [Jerusalem Post](#), [U.S. Department of State](#), [Ministry of the Interior](#))

Antisemitic physical attacks have reportedly remained stable since the 1990s. There were at least four instances between 2002 and 2007 of Jewish cemeteries being vandalized by unknown culprits. Anti-Jewish sentiments have escalated, however, in the online space since 2010. For example, online-based antisemitism increased fourfold, from 26 incidents in 2011 to 82 in 2012. In 2013, that number doubled again. Anonymous servers and extremist websites were the main perpetrators as they propagated antisemitic and racist narratives as well as conspiracy theories. Antisemitic incidents in the Czech Republic further increased during the Covid-19 pandemic beginning in 2020. According to the Federation of Jewish Communities in the Czech Republic (FJC), 98 percent of anti-Jewish incidents took the form of hate speech and conspiracy theories propagated online. In 2020, there were 874 antisemitic incidents and in 2021, the figure rose to 1,128 incidents. One openly antisemitic assault was reported in 2021. According to the FJC, however, unreported incidents make that figure misleading. Despite the volume of online incidents, the Ministry of the Interior and the FJC claim that antisemitism is not present in most of society or the political sphere and that the Czech Republic remains a relatively safe country for Jews compared with other European countries. (Sources: [Council of Europe](#), [Federation of Jewish Communities in CR](#), [World Jewish Congress](#), [UPI](#), [European Jewish Congress](#), [OSCE](#), [Society for the History of Czechoslovak Jews](#), [Antisemitism Studies](#))

Far-Right Political Parties

The country’s Supreme Administrative Court has undertaken some actions to limit far-right activity within the political system. On February 18, 2010, the court banned the far-right Workers’ Party, the first political party banned since the founding of the Czech Republic. According to the Court, the Workers’ Party, established in 2003, was a threat to Czech democracy, was xenophobic, antisemitic, and homophobic. Additionally, the group shared the ideology of Hitler’s Nazi party and maintained links to openly white-supremacist and racist groups. The ban against the party was instigated by a legal complaint from the government. The party later reorganized, however, calling itself the Workers’ Social Justice Party (DSSS) and is still active as of 2023. (Sources: [New York Times](#), [BBC News](#), [EU Observer](#))

Czech Republic: Extremism and Terrorism

In the 2010s, the Czech Republic saw a new wave of far-right parties entering the political milieu. The parties raised some alarms as political groups who win a minimum of one percent in legislative elections are entitled to taxpayer money. The funds are allocated based on the share of votes in the previous election and representation in the elected body. Parties that win three percent of valid votes receive a contribution of six million Czech koruna (CZK)—approximately \$270,000 a year—and the funding is increased for each additional voting percentage obtained, up to five percent of the total vote. This financing system reportedly aims to enable parties to meet public interests, particularly small parties that do not manage to meet the minimum proportion of votes to have representatives in parliament. Support for far-right extremist parties is steady and localized, especially in economically disadvantaged regions, which provides a stable electorate for future elections. As extreme right parties are able to operate within the political system while continuing to endorse anti-refugee, anti-Muslim, nationalist, and xenophobic rhetoric and legislation, the Czech Republic will have to contend with the divisions exacerbated by these parties and their supporters. (Sources: [Bertelsmann Stiftung](#), [EU Observer](#), [European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation](#))

In October 2017, the far right gained in popularity throughout the Czech Republic as groups such as Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD) won 22 seats in legislative elections, gaining 10.6 percent of the national vote. The party's predecessor, Dawn of Direct Democracy, previously won 6.8 percent of the national vote in the 2013 parliamentary elections, taking 14 of the 200 available seats. However, infighting led the group to split in 2015, after which party leader Tomio Okamura founded SPD. According to the Ministry of the Interior, SPD is the political party with "dominant xenophobic and virulently nationalist elements." SPD leader Okamura claimed the group works to "stop any Islamization of the Czech Republic" and will "push for zero tolerance of migration." Critics of Okamura, however, claimed he previously endorsed a more migrant-friendly agenda and only adopted more hardline views to court more voters. In the 2020 regional elections, SPD maintained support—with a particularly strong base in structurally and economically disadvantaged regions—and gained six percent of the vote. Okamura continued to endorse an anti-immigrant platform into May 2022, declaring that Romani refugees were "inadaptable," which was highly criticized by fellow members of parliament. SPD does not label itself as a far-right party and makes no mention on its website of its political identification. Yet, its platform aligns with the anti-migrant, anti-Islamization positions propagated by traditional far-right and populist groups. (Sources: [Reuters](#), [Romea](#), [Bertelsmann Stiftung](#), [European Consortium for Political Research](#), [Ministry of the Interior](#), [SPD](#))

Islamism

According to the Czech Republic's Ministry of the Interior, the Czech Muslim community lacks religious authorities within the country, which has led security agencies to prioritize monitoring cases of individual radicalization. Instances of violent extremism within the Muslim community have been relatively limited but support for jihadist groups has been noted in a few instances. In certain cases—like those of imam Samer Shehadeh and mechanic Jan Silovsky—individuals were prosecuted for sending funds to jihadist groups abroad, fighting abroad with a foreign terrorist organization, or attempting to join a terrorist organization. (Source: [Ministry of the Interior](#))

The government has begun to pay attention to the possible radicalization of Muslims within prisons as well as individuals involved with petty crime gangs from Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the Middle East that have some association with Islamic extremism. Additionally, given the incidence of foreign fighters returning to Europe following the fall of the ISIS's so-called caliphate in Syria and Iraq, experts have noted a potential risk of cross-border radicalization and attacks if those individuals are not adequately monitored. (Sources: [European Eye on Radicalization](#), [Prague Institute of International Relations](#))

Foreign Fighters

The Czech Republic did not experience a large number of its citizens traveling to Iraq and Syria to join ISIS. As of 2019, only 11 Czech citizens joined extremist outfits in Syria. On August 2, 2016, a regional court in Plzen, western Czech Republic, convicted Jan Silovsky, a 22-year-old mechanic, of attempted terrorism. Silovsky reportedly was arrested at an international airport in Turkey and later confessed to police that he planned to enter Syria to join and fight with ISIS. Silovsky was sentenced to three years and three months in prison, the first Czech citizen convicted on terrorism charges. In another high-profile case, in February 2020, Prague's Municipal Court sentenced imam Samer Shehadeh to 10 years in prison for being part of a terror group and financing terrorism. Shehadeh reportedly helped his brother and sister-in-law travel to Syria to join al-Nusra Front. According to prosecutors, Shehadeh also sent an unspecified amount of money to the group to support replacing the Syrian regime with an Islamic state. (Sources: [European Eye on Radicalization](#), [European Eye on Radicalization](#), [Associated Press](#), [New York Times](#), [New York Times](#))

The number of Czech citizens who have taken up arms in support of Russia's invasion of Ukraine poses a significant security risk to Prague. According to national security sources, those who have gained direct military experience potentially can use their battlefield skills against the state. Those skills could also be taught to like-minded Czech citizens. Beginning in 2019, Czech law enforcement agencies prosecuted more than a dozen

Czech Republic: Extremism and Terrorism

Czech citizens involved in the conflict in Ukraine. (Source: [Ministry of the Interior](#))

Although there are no official estimates of the number of Czech citizens who have traveled to Ukraine to fight alongside pro-Russian separatists, media sources reported at least 16 incidents of Czech citizens fighting for Russia between 2014 and 2022. In June 2014, a Czech national appeared on Russian television claiming he traveled to Ukraine to fight alongside pro-Russian separatists. If he returns to the Czech Republic, he will face up to a five-year prison sentence for serving in a foreign army. In May 2019, Erik Eštu, an army veteran, was charged with committing a terrorist attack while a member of the Republican Guard of the Donetsk People's Republic, a pro-Russian militia. He was handed a three-year sentence and was stripped of his military rank. Criminal proceedings for alleged involvement in the combat against Ukraine was also initiated against a foreign national and a man from the Carlsbad region in July 2019. However, information has been limited on those respective proceedings. In December 2020, the High Court of Appeal in Prague sentenced a Czech citizen to three years imprisonment for fighting with the Donetsk People's Republic. On April 21, 2021, the Czech national police detained between five and 20 people suspected of planning to travel to Ukraine to join the militant group the Donetsk People's Republic. Czech citizen Martin Kantor was sentenced to 20 years imprisonment in June 2021 for fighting on the side of pro-Russian separatists in Ukraine. In July 2021, the Supreme Court sentenced a Belarusian to 21 years imprisonment on the same charges. Furthermore, in 2022, the Supreme Court handed down one 21-year sentence, and two 20-year prison sentences to three other Czech men on similar charges. Another man was charged in March 2022 with killing at least four Ukrainian government troops while serving as a sniper with pro-Russian separatists. However, in September 2022, the Supreme Court overturned his original verdict of a 20-year prison sentence, ruling there was no solid evidence that he killed anyone. (Sources: [Ministry of the Interior](#), [Radio Prague International](#), [Radio Free Europe](#), [Radio Prague International](#), [Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group](#), [Radio Prague International](#), [Kyiv Post](#), [Reuters](#))

Major Extremist and Terrorist Incidents

- **September 3, 2022:** An estimated 70,000 protestors from both the far right and far left demonstrate in central Prague against the pro-Western Czech government and its support for Ukraine. Among the groups represented at the “Czech Republic First” protest are the populist anti-migrant Freedom and Direct Democracy Party (SPD) and the Communist Party. The protestors demand an end to sanctions against Russia, which they blame for inflation and higher energy prices, as well as the government policies on COVID-19 and immigrants. Sources: [Deutsche Welle](#), [Soufan Center](#)
- **May 11, 2022 - May 23, 2022:** Czech and Slovak authorities search one location in Slovakia and another location in the Czech Republic, ultimately arresting a 22-year-old far-right sympathizer suspected of committing several terrorist and extremist crimes. Upon searching the two premises, the authorities discover a 3D printer. The suspect allegedly published instructions and diagrams for producing cold steel weapons and automatic firearms. The suspect—who reportedly identified with the neo-Nazi alternative right, the ideology of accelerationism, and Siege culture—also shared guidelines on carrying out sabotage attacks. Source: [Eurojust](#)
- **July 27, 2021:** The High Court in Prague sentences a Belarusian to 21 years in prison for terrorism. The defendant, Alexei Fadeyev, reportedly fought with pro-Russian militants in the Donbas region of Ukraine. According to the High Court, the act is considered terrorism, defined in the Criminal Code as an act against the Czech Republic. Source: [Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group](#)
- **June 10, 2021:** Prague's Municipal Court sentences Martin Kantor to 20 years in prison for traveling to Ukraine to fight on the side of pro-Russian separatists. Kantor is prosecuted in absentia as his whereabouts are unknown. Source: [Novinky](#)
- **April 23, 2021:** The Municipal Court in Prague sentences Iraqi-native Watheg Mohammed Jousif Al Sammaraie to 15 years imprisonment for fighting for ISIS as well as becoming involved in the terror group's propaganda activities. Sammaraie, a Czech Republic permanent resident, is being prosecuted as a fugitive. Sammaraie reportedly traveled from the Czech Republic to northern Iraq in January 2015, where he actively participated in attacks and eventually worked as an ISIS propaganda instructor. Sources: [Ministry of the Interior](#), [Global Fight Against Terrorism Funding](#), [Remix News](#)
- **April 22, 2021:** The Czech National Center against Organized Crime arrests five individuals on terrorism charges. According to authorities, the suspects include members of the paramilitary association Czechoslovak Soldiers in Reserve for Peace. The suspects are charged with terrorist offenses, participation in a terrorist group, financing of terrorism, and support and promotion of terrorism. The paramilitary group reportedly organized trips for Czechs to Ukraine to fight for pro-Russian separatists. Source: [Novinky](#)
- **March 30, 2021:** The Brno Regional Court sentences Benedikt ?ermák to six years in prison for promoting terrorism. The defendant reportedly praised the 2019 Christchurch Mosque shooter in online forums, writing “That's giving them a taste of their own medicine. Good job????!” under video footage of the attacks. Source: [Romea](#)
- The Plzeň Regional Court sentences Michal Trykar to 30 months in prison for promoting terrorism. Trykar reportedly posted a comment online praising the 2019 Christchurch Mosque shooter. Source: [Romea](#)
- **December 21, 2020:** The District Court in Ústí nad Labem sentences Oldřich Grund in absentia to 15 years in prison for his role in fighting alongside pro-Russia units in the Donbas.

Czech Republic: Extremism and Terrorism

According to the court, Grund has been fighting in the Donbas since 2014 and rose to the rank of lieutenant colonel. Source: [Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group](#)

- The High Court in Prague sentences Pavel Kafka to three years in prison for his role in fighting on the side of pro-Russian militants in Ukraine. Source: [Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group](#)
- **July 9, 2020:** A regional court in Pardubice hands down a three-year suspended sentence to Mohammed Yousef Al Samarrai for financing terrorism. In 2017, Samarrai sent \$2,000 to his son, Watheg Mohammed Jousif Al Sammaraie, an ISIS fighter in Iraq. Sources: [Ministry of the Interior](#), [Alamy](#)
- **February 28, 2020:** Prague’s municipal court sentences Samer Shehadeh, an imam in Prague, to 10 years in prison for being part of a terror group and financing terrorism. Shehadeh reportedly helped his brother and sister-in-law to travel to Syria to join al-Nusra Front. According to prosecutors, Shehadeh also sent an unspecified amount of money to the group in an effort to help replace the Syrian regime with an Islamic state. Czech police first investigated Shehadeh in 2016 after he reportedly sought to radicalize Czech Muslims. Sources: [Associated Press](#), [Arab News](#)
- **May 17, 2019:** The Pardubice Regional Court sentences former soldier Erik Eštu to three years imprisonment for his role in combat operations in Ukraine, specifically for involvement in a criminal organized gang with terrorist intentions. Eštu is demoted from Corporal to the rank of private and expelled from the Czech armed forces. Sources: [IDNES](#), [Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group](#), [Ministry of the Interior](#), [Radio Free Europe](#)
- - **January 14, 2019:** In 2017, a retired electrician named Jaromir Balda cuts down trees to block train tracks near the city of Mlada Boleslav, just outside of Prague. Two passenger trains hit the trees separately in June and July, but no one is injured. Balda reportedly attempts to blame Muslim immigrants for the felled trees by leaving behind leaflets featuring the Arabic words “Allahu Akbar” (God is the Greatest). Additionally, the notes called for violence against “Czech unbelieving dogs.” Balda is detained by authorities and charged with terrorism in February 2018. On January 14, 2019, the regional court in Prague sentences Balda—who ultimately admits that he hoped to spread fear of Muslim migrants—to four years in prison and mandatory psychiatric treatment. Sources: [Associated Press](#), [BBC News](#)
- - **September 6, 2018:** In late July 2018, three members of a local right-wing extremist group attack a group of Indian citizens in Písek. Four people are injured. On September 6, the three men are charged with felony rioting, violence against a group and its individual members, and battery. Source: [Romea](#)
- **November 18, 2017:** A Benešov court charges a man with promoting race hate and endangering the upbringing of a child. The man receives a one year suspended sentence and will be monitored by probation and mediation services. The defendant posted a video online of himself encouraging his young daughter to beat a pillow with a baseball bat as if it was a “Gypsy” or a Muslim. Source: [Radio Prague International](#)
- **August 23, 2016:** Anti-immigration group “We Don’t Want Islam in the Czech Republic” dress up as ISIS fighters and stage a fake terror attack in Prague’s city center. The demonstration is reportedly pre-approved by City Hall officials and known to police. The group, led by Martin Konvicka, shouted “Allahu Akbar” from an army truck. According to Konvicka, Muslim community members “derailed” the demonstration from proceeding as planned. Source: [Independent](#)
- **August 2, 2016 - February 24, 2017:** On August 2, 2016, a regional court in Plzen, western Czech Republic, charges Jan Silovsky, a 22-year-old mechanic, with attempted terrorism for trying to travel to Syria to join ISIS. Silovsky, the first Czech citizen to be charged for that specific crime, reportedly was arrested at an airport in Turkey and later confessed to police that he planned to enter Syria to join and fight with the ISIS. On February 24, 2017, Silovsky is sentenced to three years and three months in prison. Sources: [New York Times](#), [New York Times](#)
- - **February 2, 2016:** In February 2015, a group of nine alleged neo-Nazis appear before the Regional Court in Plzeň. According to the indictment, 22-year-old Jan B. serves as the main representative of the Czech branch of the neo-Nazi organizations Blood and Honour and Combat 18 and is a founding member of the Prague branch of Division Bohemia. Jan B. allegedly planned attacks on specific persons and, through the organizations’ websites, called for violent attacks on the headquarters of political parties and on representatives of the government or police. The defendants are charged with establishing, promoting, and supporting a movement aimed at suppressing human rights and freedoms. On February 2, 2016, Jan B. is sentenced to three years and eight months in prison. The other defendants are handed suspended sentences for either supporting the group or being an active member of the group. Sources: [Romea](#), [Romea](#)
- **April 26, 2012:** A Czech man armed with a crossbow shoots and kills Martini Hospodi, a Romani who was searching for scrap metal around the Czech man’s home. The assailant is charged with committing grievous bodily harm resulting in a fatality. About a month later, promoters of the ultra-right Workers’ Social Justice Party (DSSS) hold a demonstration in support of the assailant. Source: [European Roma Rights Centre](#)
- **September 17, 2011:** Following an anti-Roma rally in Varnsdorf town square, members of DSSS join a march of 400 participants toward Romani residences. Around 50 neo-Nazis reportedly shout nationalist and xenophobic slogans. The demonstrators verbally assault the Roma for an hour before dispersing. Source: [European Roma Rights Centre](#)
- **September 10, 2011:** DSSS holds three separate anti-Roma demonstrations in the towns of Nový Bor, Rumburk, and Varnsdorf. Two of the demonstrators are arrested and charged with promoting a banned movement as they were wearing banned symbols on their clothing. Source: [European Roma Rights Centre](#)

Czech Republic: Extremism and Terrorism

- **September 3, 2011:** Several hundred ethnic Czechs, including members of the neo-Nazi “Free Youth” movement, march through Varnsdorf intending to attack Romani residents at Sport, a residential hotel. The crowd shouts racial epithets before being stopped by police. Source: [European Roma Rights Centre](#)
- **August 26, 2011:** Approximately 500 people march through Rumburk to purposely provoke Romani residents. The demonstration—which involves thrown tree branches, stones, and a broken-down fence—occurs after a rally that sought to establish a commission of violence against the Roma. (Source: [European Roma Rights Centre](#))
- **March 13, 2011:** A group of 20 neo-Nazis attack and injure three Romani in Nový Bydžov. Police reportedly arrest the assailants. Source: [European Roma Rights Centre](#)
- **April 18, 2009 - October 10, 2010:** On April 18, 2009, four men throw Molotov cocktails into the home of a Romani family in Vitkov. Three people are injured, including a two-year-old girl who is left with extensive burns. The men reportedly carry out the attack to mark Adolf Hitler’s birthday. On October 10, 2010, Václav Cojocar, Jaromír Lukeš, Ivo Müller, and David Vaculík are charged with attempted murder. Vaculík is accused by the prosecution of being a member of Combat 18 and reportedly had a “C18” tattoo on his chest. The Ostrava Regional Court sentences Lukeš, Müller, and Vaculík to 22 years in a high-security prison and Cojocar to 20 years. Sources: [BBC News](#), [CNN](#)
- **November 17, 2008:** DSSS holds a rally in Litvinov, after which a reported 500 neo-Nazis march towards a Romani neighborhood. Police then prevent an attack in the nearby town of Most, where 300 alleged extremists are stopped after police discover weapons in some of their cars. Source: [European Roma Rights Centre](#)
- **May 2, 2000:** Two men brutally attack and scream racist epithets at a Romani couple in Orlová, northeastern Czechia. The assailants are charged with rioting, aggravated bodily harm, and coercion. However, the police stop short of considering the attack a racially motivated crime. That same day, a group of five skinheads shoot at Romani children in Orlová. The assailants flee. Source: [European Roma Rights Centre](#)
- **May 11, 1998:** A group of skinheads beat a Romani man, leaving him unconscious. The victim is later run over by a passing truck. Source: [Minorities at Risk Project](#)
- **November 8, 1997:** Two skinheads named Jan Schimperk and Petr Zbornik attack two students from Sudan at a nightclub in Prague. The assailants shout racist slurs at the students before chasing them and stabbing both multiple times. One student, Hassan Elamin Abdelradi, dies from his injuries. On March 23, 1998, the Municipal Court in Prague sentences Zbornik to 14-and-a-half years in a maximum-security prison, and Schimperk to seven-and-a-half months in juvenile prison. The assailants later appeal their sentences; Abdelradi’s is reduced to 13-and-a-half years and Schimperk is given a suspended sentence. Source: [Romea](#)
- **May 13, 1995:** Four skinheads attack a Roma family of seven in Žďár nad Sázavou. The assailants beat the father of the household, Tibor Berki, to death. On December 13, 1995, the Regional Court in Brno sentences one assailant to 12 years in prison for felony murder, trespassing, and violence against a group. The other assailants are charged with trespassing and violence against a group and are handed sentences ranging from two months to 19 months in prison. Sources: [Human Rights Watch](#), [Romea](#)
- **September 23, 1993:** A group of “Landa kids”—skinheads who are fans of the singer Daniel Landa from the racist band Orlík—attack four Roma on the banks of the Otava River. The attack results in the drowning of one young Roma named Tibor Danihel. The majority of the defendants are acquitted, but in 1998, the Supreme Court of the Czech Republic reclassifies the case as racially motivated murder. Despite the new investigation, the defendants are given prison sentences ranging from six-and-a-half years to eight years and three months—a fraction of the customary 15 to 20 years for murder. Source: [Romea](#)

Domestic Counter-Extremism

Counterterrorism Agencies and Legislation

The Czech Republic first adopted its National Action Plan to Combat Terrorism in 2002. The key bodies responsible for combating terrorism are the Ministry of the Interior, the country’s police force, and the Security Information Services (BIS). BIS is the Czech Republic’s central intelligence agency, responsible for processing analytical and field intelligence related to domestic security and the fight against terrorism. The National Action Plan has undergone revisions over the years but continues to specify a number of domestic and international counterterrorism objectives including, but not limited to: improving communication and coordination among intelligence and law enforcement agencies; protecting the public and critical infrastructure; preventing the isolation and radicalization of immigrant communities; and conducting foreign policy to counter international terrorism. Additionally, the National Action Plan seeks to increase cooperation between the Czech Republic’s military and police to identify and arrest persons of interest, to prevent threats to public order and security, and to provide increased intelligence sharing. (Sources: [Ministry of the Interior](#), [Security Information Service](#))

The Ministry of the Interior set up the Centre Against Terrorism and Hybrid Threats in May 2016 to tackle new asymmetric or hybrid threats. The Centre is an analytic and communications unit that monitors threats directly related to domestic security. Potential threats monitored by the center include terrorism, soft target attacks, the security aspects of migration, extremism, public gatherings, violations of public order, and disinformation

Czech Republic: Extremism and Terrorism

campaigns. Additionally, the Centre is tasked with detecting challenges, proposing legislative solutions, and implementing solutions when possible. (Source: [Ministry of the Interior](#))

The Czech Parliament approved additional counterterrorism legislation on October 17, 2022. The Czech Magnitsky Act allows the Czech government to impose sanctions on foreign entities and individuals who violate human rights, support terrorism, or commit cybercrimes. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs oversees the process of adding names to the sanctions list, and the government decides whether sanctioned individuals can enter or stay in the country, and if their assets held in Czechia will be frozen. Former President Miloš Zeman signed the bill into law on December 7, 2022. (Sources: [Euractiv](#), [President of the Czech Republic](#))

Given that the Czech Republic is a member of the European Union, the country adheres to the Digital Services Act (DSA). The DSA, which took effect in November 2022, aims to regulate the digital space so that what is illegal offline will also be illegal online. Each Member State defines what it considers illegal content when applying the act. Among other things, the act seeks to remove hate speech, violent extremist content, disinformation and misinformation, misogyny, abuse against children, and consumer fraud. Additionally, each Member State specifies the penalties that will be imposed on offenders of the DSA. (Sources: [Eurojust](#), [Guardian](#), [Mondaq](#), [Just Security](#))

On February 22, 2023, former Czech Republic President Miloš Zeman signed legislation aimed at stopping the spread of terrorist content online. The new law will provide police with the authority to order Czech and European Union Internet service providers (ISPs) to block terrorist content online, including but not limited to images of terror attacks and posts promoting extremist ideologies. Although the Ministry of the Interior has stated that the “occurrence of terrorist content in the Czech online environment is relatively low,” the legislation provides a new regulatory system that will attempt to prevent the future dissemination and accessibility of extremist content online. ISPs that fail to remove or prevent access to online terrorist content will be charged with a misdemeanor. However, content will be subject to the judgment of police as to whether it qualifies as terrorist content under the law. (Sources: [Website of the President of the Czech Republic](#), [Expats CZ](#))

Hate Speech

In July 2020, the Czech government approved the 2020 Counter Extremism and Hate Crime Strategy. The strategy was designed to counter extremism and radicalization through communication, prevention, and education. The strategy also reportedly targets hate crimes and extremism on the Internet. Additionally, on December 15, 2022, the Czech Republic, along with 13 other EU Member States, participated in Europol’s second Referral Action Day (RAD) that involved combating violent right-wing extremist and terrorist content online. Specialized units detected and flagged extremist content that was then brought to the attention of the ISPs. The units then evaluated the responses of the providers as well as invited them to evaluate and remove the content that breached their terms of service. Among the material referred were livestreams, manifestos, and celebrations of attacks. The units referred 831 items to 34 affected platforms. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#), [Europol](#))

Combating the Financing of Terrorism

The Czech Republic is a member of the Committee of Experts on the Evaluation of Anti-Money Laundering Measures and the Financing of Terrorism (MONEYVAL). MONEYVAL is a permanent monitoring body of the Council of Europe responsible for assessing compliance with international standards to counter money laundering and the financing of terrorism and the effectiveness of their implementation, as well as with making recommendations to national authorities to improve their systems. (Sources: [Council of Europe](#), [Council of Europe](#))

International Counter-Extremism

The Czech Republic is one of 83 members of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, organized by the United States. The anti-ISIS Coalition has worked to consolidate gains in Iraq and Syria, while broadening efforts to counter the growing ISIS threat in West Africa and the Sahel. Following the defeat of ISIS’s so-called caliphate in Iraq and Syria, the Czech Republic continues to support Syria’s fight against ISIS through humanitarian aid allocated towards refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs). Additionally, the Czech Republic provides support for medical, sanitation, and educational services. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#), [Global Coalition](#), [Chamber of Deputies Parliament of the Czech Republic](#))

On May 14, 2021, the Czech Republic officially joined the Christchurch Call initiative following an Australian gunman’s attack on two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand on March 15, 2019. The attacks killed 51 people and injured 50 others. The initiative, led by then-New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern and French President Emmanuel Macron, seeks to prevent terrorist content from being spread massively online and misuse

Czech Republic: Extremism and Terrorism

of the Internet for the purposes of terrorism and violent extremism. (Source: [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic](#))

Regional Cooperation

On November 16, 2022, the Czech parliament passed a resolution declaring the current Russian regime a terrorist state, following Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. A month earlier, a resolution adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe declared Russia a "terrorist regime." The Czech resolution further condemned Russia's annexation of parts of four eastern Ukrainian provinces through widely ridiculed referendums. Existing anti-Russian sentiment in Central and Eastern Europe was further intensified by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. On the same day as the passage of the resolution, the Czech government announced plans to provide training to as many as 4,000 Ukrainian troops over the following year. In February 2023, the Deputy Defense Minister of the Czech Republic announced that the Czech army completed the first of four training cycles for Ukrainian soldiers planned for the year. In addition, Czechia plans to send 55 troops to Ukraine as instructors or members of command structures. (Sources: [Radio Free Europe](#), [Defense Express](#))

Iraq

The Czech Republic has actively supported the Global Coalition to Defeat Daesh since its establishment in 2014. The Czech army initially provided emergency deliveries of military equipment and material to the Iraqi Armed Forces and provided a field surgical team. Prague also deployed additional assistance teams to train police, advise the air force, and improve chemical protection. Czech police officers are reportedly stationed at Camp Dublin in Baghdad and assist in training their Iraqi counterparts. According to data from February 2021, the Czech Republic maintained six personnel in Iraq to assist in the structures of foreign operations. In November 2022, the Czech Republic's Chamber of Deputies approved an extension of Czech participation in the NATO mission to Iraq. The lower house also approved an additional 20 Czech troops who could be deployed to Iraq in 2023 and 2024. (Sources: [Global Coalition](#), [Czech Army and Defence Magazine](#), [Chamber of Deputies Parliament of the Czech Republic](#))

Afghanistan

In 2002, the Czech Republic sent its first soldiers to the NATO mission in Afghanistan to counter the Taliban. The first deployment served in field hospitals, followed by special units trained in combatting chemical and biological weapons, and then surgical and reconstruction teams. There were also soldiers deployed to patrol; protect bases; and train Afghan troops, helicopter pilots, and other specialists. On June 28, 2021, the last of the Czech soldiers deployed to Afghanistan returned home, ending a 19-year campaign. (Sources: [Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces](#), [Radio Prague International](#), [MENAFN](#))

Mali

Beginning in April 2013, the Czech Republic joined the European Union Training Mission (EUTM) in Mali to support that country's efforts to counter a brutalizing Islamist insurgency. The Czech Armed Forces (CAF) provided military support and training to Malian soldiers with a force of 50 soldiers that was increased to 120 soldiers by 2018. However, on November 3, 2022, Czech Defense Minister Jana ?ernochová announced that the Czech Army would suspend its mission in Mali by the end of the year. Mali's political instability, sudden hostility to EU forces, and the welcoming of the Russian mercenary Wagner Group contributed to Prague's decision to pull out. However, the Czech Republic seeks to maintain a presence in the region and reportedly conducted cooperation talks with Mauritania, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad, Sudan, and Ethiopia. (Sources: [Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces of the Czech Republic](#), [Euractiv](#), [Radio Prague](#))

Public Opinion

Anti-Roma and anti-Muslim sentiment remain persistent across the Czech Republic. According to a 2019 poll conducted by Pew Research, 64 percent of those surveyed had an unfavorable view of Muslims. The figure jumped to 85 percent if the respondents were supporters of populist parties. In the same survey, 66 percent of respondents held an unfavorable view of the Roma. The two groups remain the primary targets of hate speech based on a survey by the Czech Ombudsman of hate speech cases occurring between 2016 and 2019. According to the findings, the Roma were victims in 49 percent of the cases, whereas Muslims were victims 23 percent of the time. (Sources: [Pew Research](#), [Department of State](#))