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Shaping the narrative of (dis)information, a view from the Czech Republic

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Abstract: This paper examines how narratives concerning Ukraine are constructed and adapted within the Czech public sphere through the interaction of media visibility, social capital, business interests, and access to political institutions. Rather than approaching disinformation exclusively as the dissemination of false content, the study focuses on the social and institutional environment in which narratives acquire legitimacy and political influence. It analyses the public discourse and professional networks of two prominent Czech entrepreneurs and philanthropists, Libor Winkler and Jan Barta, between 2014 and 2026.

The research combines social network analysis with a qualitative examination of approximately 3,000 media outputs retrieved from the Newton Media Archive, comparing narrative developments before and after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The paper highlights the importance of examining the relationship between values-based communication, elite networks, and material interests when assessing how influential public narratives about Ukraine are produced and sustained.

Keywords: (dis)information, narratives, social capital, elite networks, Ukraine, Czech Republic.

The topic of disinformation has been widely researched in the past decade in the whole area of the CEE and SEE regions. The mainstream of attention has focused on media, dissemination of disinformation, or tracking financial flows of specific campaigns related to election campaigns. Significantly less attention is paid to the issue how to capture the space in which certain narratives of (dis)information are shaped. Namely, how a narrative is created within a specific milieu of media, public figures, NGOs as well as how this milieu operates when it comes to institutional and personal capacity.

This paper analyses how the war in Ukraine has become a significant element in shaping the narrative of (dis)information when it comes to content as well as structure. The main scope of analysis is the systematic elements of shaping the narrative: background – movers – of the media space and public figures who have significantly participated in the narrative regarding

the Russian aggression towards Ukraine. That said, the paper examines two public figures, Libor Winkler and Jan Barta. They are among the most visible figures shaping the structure as well as managing the narrative through, business activities, public profile. To do so, the paper pays attention to the context of the war in Ukraine, and evolution of their media presence in that context. Through this, the paper focuses on narrative shaping that conforms to generally accepted views and serving their business interests. The paper argues that these figures do not represent their consistent and genuinely pro Ukraine views, but rather conforming to generally accepted attitudes with a significant impact on their positioning through their public and economic influence. In this context, (dis)information is a tool protecting their political and economic interests exerted as influence over state institutions and access to decision makers. Therefore, the use of the (dis)information is more a matter of private interests rather than the institutional (state) one.

The analytical design of the paper follows the logic of social network analysis investigating structure, interconnections, social background gained at the beginning of their professional careers. For purposes of this article, social networks and structure provided by it is considered as a key determinant for the pursuit of social, political, and business interests. In that context, the key determinant is the nature of relations: social capital providing justification for political, social, and economic influence. The influence is understood as an ability to shape the political process, public opinion using media influence, to be able to pursue private interests through state institutions in financial terms. For the purpose of this paper, disinformation is defined as a coordinated and strategically designed set of information operations conducted directly by actors, indirectly through side-actors, or via proxy networks, with the objective of manipu-

lating public perception, influencing political decision-making, and advancing specific political interests through the dissemination of false, misleading, selectively framed, or emotionally manipulative content within public space and providing them with legitimacy through state institutions.

In this context, the identification of the narrative or certain information campaign is not executed by a couple of individuals or by a specific institution. It is a process that includes public figures known for its passion without questioning its background, including support of independent media as well as certain political parties and to be vocal about it as a means to cultivate democratic culture emerging from the narrative – rhetorical support for Ukraine against Russian aggression. In this context, questioning the intentions of these individuals and institutions is labelled a “response of Russian troll farms aiming to discourage them from supporting Ukraine”. As a consequence, access to institutions and exerting influence using state subsidies for companies and institutions controlled by these individuals translates into the logic of defence against Russian information campaigns regardless of whether they are a real threat or a “wag the dog” to fill up the information space with content instead of attention to substance, such as the legacy of communist State Security (StB) as the key business associates of Libor Winkler who emerged from this milieu.

Relevance of social networks as a source of social influence

Similar mapping of social networks translated into shaping of narrative has been done in Central Europe for example by Alen Toplišek (2024)¹ focusing on a battery manufacturer based

¹ Alen Toplišek, “Beyond Dependent Development? The Unlikely Emergence of an Upgrading Alliance in the Case of InoBat in Slovakia,” *Studies in Comparative International Development* 59, no. 4 (June 28, 2024): 767-793, available at <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12116-024-09440-4>, accessed on 09/08/2026.

in Slovakia, Inobat. He analysed how the social capital of the founder, Marián Boček, contributed to the narrative of a Slovak-based electric battery producer manufacturing and even part of an innovation cluster of EU electric cars industry. Boček built Inobat largely through the strategic use of social capital and elite networks connecting Slovak business, government, and European institutions. Drawing on his background in international finance and investment banking, Boček leveraged relationships with key Slovak and EU decision makers, particularly the EU Commissioner for Energy, Maroš Šefčovič, and one of the key personalities behind the leading think tank in Central Europe, Globsec, Vazil Hudák, to position Inobat as a strategically important European battery producer aligned with EU industrial and energy policy objectives. It needs to be noted that both Šefčovič and Hudák studied together in Moscow at the prestigious MGIMO. Through networking opportunities such as the Globsec/Tatra Summit and direct access to lobby state actors in Slovakia, Boček secured early government backing and political legitimacy for the project, which subsequently helped attract major international investors. Yet the project faces significant delays which call its credibility into question, particularly in the case that there are neither functioning production facilities nor an R&D centre regardless of significant EU and Slovak state support in size roughly 50 million EUR.² That said, the Inobat case shows the strength of narrative in the public space, in this case portraying Slovakia as part of European innovative industry with an imaginary production facility, yet with claimed credibility provided by the social capital of Marián Boček. This case shows how social environment and social capital shape

(state/public) interests and creates conditions for policy action, in this case creating a narrative of strategic investment in electric battery production which does not exist.

The story of philanthropists across four decades

For an understanding of both Winkler's and Barta's public role, their early professional careers offer an interesting perspective. They both share the fact that their early stages of business activity contains many blind spots primarily related to the environment of the communist intelligence agency, State Security, (StB). More specifically the so-called Science and Technology Intelligence unit that focused on spying primarily on Western countries and their allies when it came to Western advanced technologies, such as computing technologies.³ At the same time, the StB agents were tasked to create a network of cover companies to hide financial and know-how flows. They were often tasked by the USSR secret service, KGB, to focus on certain technologies and specific environments/companies, such as New York Stock Exchange, NYSE.⁴ During the early years of the post-1989 transformation period these individuals smoothly transitioned into driving the economic transformation utilizing their networks and skills gained while being stationed in the West and managed to maintain the network which they maintained for years. It needs to be stressed that both Winkler and Barta gained their social capital through this network being pushed as front-runners of the new social and economic establishment in Czechia.⁵

³ Ministerstvo vnitra, document k čs. rozvědce (April 16, 1968), available at: <https://www.ustrcr.cz/data/pdf/projekty/srpen1968/rozvedka/info680416.pdf>, accessed on 09/08/2026.

⁴ Johann von Elbogen (@von_Elbogen), "Plotnik je zde:" X (August 10, 2025), available at: https://x.com/von_Elbogen/status/1954546737495802292/photo/1, accessed on 09/08/2026.

⁵ Daniel Novák, "Skupina RSJ se mění. Winkler popisuje investice, spory i útoky na síti X," *Seznam Zprávy* (April 10, 2026) available at: <https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/>

² InoBat, "InoBat has secured another significant investor, Slovak Investment Holding," (January 31, 2024), available at: <https://www.inobat.eu/newsroom/inobat-has-secured-another-significant-investor-slovak-investment-holding/>, accessed on 09/08/2026.

Libor Winkler worked as a researcher at the Crop Research Institute of the Academy of Science, where he focused on modelling water movement in the landscape using Western technologies connected to controversial agricultural company JZD Slušovice. In 1991, he moved into the private sector and became director of the computing centre at Agrostav Hustopeče within the early stages of its privatisation.

At the time Libor Winkler was active around Agrostav Hustopeče, he obtained a broker's license (1993) and worked at the brokerage firm Katnek Securities.⁶ By the late 1990s, he became one of the founders of RSJ, specializing in algorithmic trading on global markets. Alongside this professional career, he supports the DOX Centre for Contemporary Art,⁷ the Anti-Corruption Endowment Fund, and independent journalism projects such as Deník N.⁸ Winkler, one of the founders, shareholders, and executives of the company RSJ, is generally known primarily for his philanthropic activities, having supported numerous NGOs, modern art initiatives⁹, and the election campaign of the pro-Western Czech president Petr Pavel together with other businessmen. However, this media image carefully

[clanek/ekonomika-byznys-rozhovory-skupina-rsj-se-meni-winkler-popisuje-investice-spory-i-utoky-na-siti-x-303529](#), accessed on 09/08/2026.

⁶ Petr Weikert, "Dlouhé peníze pro dlouhé příběhy," *E15 magazín* (September 2024), available at: <https://www.rsj.com/documents/e15-magazin-2024-09-04-dlouhe-penize-pro-dlouhe-pribe.pdf>, accessed on 09/08/2026.

⁷ Simona Janíková, "Nebaví mě shromažďovat majetek," říká Libor Winkler, který na dobročinnost věnoval stovky milionů korun," *Hospodářské noviny* (July 29, 2022), available at: <https://vikend.hn.cz/c1-67096950-bdquo-nebavi-me-shromazdovat-majetek-lidquo-rika-libor-winkler-ktery-na-dobrocinnost-venoval-stovky-milionu-korun>, accessed on 09/08/2026.

⁸ Jakub Jetmar, "Investoři Deníku N předali své podíly nové nadaci," *Médiář* (January 19, 2021), available at: <https://www.mediar.cz/investori-deniku-n-predali-sve-podily-nove-nadaci>, accessed on 09/08/2026; Deník N, "Vlastníci," available at: <https://denikn.cz/vlastnici>, accessed on 09/08/2026.

⁹ Marek Pokorný, "Fond Pro arte miliardáře Winklera se chtěl pochlubit obrazem od Zrzavého. Zabavila ho policie," *Hospodářské noviny* (August 1, 2017), available at: <https://archiv.hn.cz/c1-65831450-winkler-pro-arte-zrzavy-obraz-hofman-policie>, accessed on 09/08/2026.

and deliberately cultivated over more than twenty years reveals significant contradictions upon closer examination. Setting aside his former business associate, Karel Janeček, known for sharing pro-Russian narratives and having successive Russian wives, as well as members of the Altman family, who appear in several major Russian money laundering scandals (including the "Malaysian Sultan,"¹⁰ and Callisto cryptocurrency project¹¹) and other white-collar organized crime networks connected to the investment funds managed by this network.

A demonstrably crucial role in Winkler's professional career and wealth portfolio was played by Katnek Securities, where around ten former informants and collaborators of the StB operated alongside Winkler. The company, together with its sister company Katnek s.r.o., was founded by former Communist youth official and Prague district official Jiří Nekovář and Russian citizen Oleg Katarskiy.¹² Another important figure was Václav Okleštěk, former deputy head of the analytical and information department of the Scientific-Technical Intelligence branch of the StB, who was among others stationed in the 1980s in the United States. Okleštěk and Winkler became the first citizens in the democratic Czech Republic who obtained licenses for stock exchange trading.

Press reports show that Katnek Securities significantly participated in promoting the Harvard Funds of Viktor Kožený,¹³ the

¹⁰ ČTK, "Zámek Protivín koupila Rodina malajského sultána: Do českého skvostu nasype půl miliardy," *Blesk* (September 7, 2021), available at: <https://www.blesk.cz/clanek/zpravy-udalosti/689465/zamek-protivin-koupila-rodina-malajskeho-sultana-do-ceskeho-skvostu-nasype-pul-miliardy.html>, accessed on 09/08/2026.

¹¹ Adéla Gajdicová, "Callisto: Bitva miliardáře a kryptotěžaře o ztroskotaný projekt za stamiliony," *Investigace.cz* (January 27, 2025), available at: <https://www.investigace.cz/callisto-krypto/>, accessed on 09/08/2026.

¹² Johann von Elbogen (@von_Elbogen), "Oleg Katarskiy a I. správa SNB," *X* (November 20, 2025), available at: https://x.com/von_Elbogen/status/199144194252286552/photo/1, accessed on 09/08/2026.

¹³ Jan Velinger, "Czech Shareholders Ripped Off by Kožený Could Gain from Sale of

first major privatization fraud in the 1990s in the Czech Republic.¹⁴ At the same time, it reportedly held approximately 40% of the shares of Chemapol, a subsidiary of Chemapol Group, the most significant petroleum processing company in the Czech Republic. This stake may effectively have represented a controlling package during a key ownership transfer in the mid-1990s. Chemapol itself formed the core of a widely documented business network tied to the monopoly on importing Russian oil before 1989 and, according to government decisions, also during the 1990s. The company was led by former StB informant Václav Junek, who was accused of causing damages estimated at 17 billion CZK.¹⁵ Winkler, through RSJ, has also become involved in lithium mining projects in the Krušné Hory, which focus on extracting lithium from tailings created by historical tin and metal mining. Cínovecká deponie has already received permits for lithium extraction from the Cínovec tailings site; however, the business strategy depends on whether the Czech state provides tangible financial support for the extraction process.¹⁶

A generation younger, Jan Barta, and his broader business and family background illustrates the continuity of post-socialist

elite networks that emerged from the transformation period of the 1990s and were closely connected to former state, intelligence, and foreign trade structures. At the same time, Jan Barta's father, Rudolf Barta, reportedly operated under the code-name "Operátor" within structures of the StB. Meanwhile, his grandfather, Čestmír Barta, who was registered as StB agent, participated in high-tech collaboration on the Soviet space program Mir.¹⁷ Čestmír also introduced him to trading with highly valuable minerals, moldavites (vltavíny). These family and institutional continuities intersect with broader post-1989 business structures connected to Omnipol, Chemapol,¹⁸ and later financial-investment groups also with media influence using network independent media.¹⁹ His wider family members, such as Marek Vydra, have a significant track record of contacts with StB business activities with individuals of questionable reputation during the privatization process in the Czech Republic.

Within this environment, Jan Barta's circle became linked to individuals such as Martin Šenar, whose family members are in the archive materials of the StB. Among others, Šenar was a key personality of shady business operations of the biggest photovoltaics project, Ralsko, in early 2010s.²⁰ He is connected

Aspen Chalet," *Radio Prague International* (May 15, 2012), available at: <https://english.radio.cz/czech-shareholders-ripped-kozeny-could-gain-sale-aspen-chalet-8554325>, accessed on 09/08/2026.

¹⁴ Jan Palascak (@jan_palascak), "Mate to spravne...", *X* (June 19, 2025), available at: https://x.com/jan_palascak/status/1935797690404659260/photo/1, accessed on 09/08/2026.

¹⁵ Vladimír Mlynář, "Ředitel Chemapolu byl agentem rozvědky," *Respekt* (August 15, 1994), available at: <https://www.respekt.cz/tydenik/1994/33/reditel-chemapolu-byl-agentem-rozvedky?srsltid=AfmBOooiAYowL8ktu2tyXCZ1tDWqJoAcvWCKHtPr5YOHwLKxu7w4ewY>, accessed on 09/08/2026; Ivan Hartman, "Jak jsem objevil Klause. Ivan Havel v knižním rozhovoru vzpomíná na bratra prezidenta, ptydepe I StB," *Hospodářské noviny* (May 18, 2017), available at: <https://archiv.hn.cz/c1-65732610-ivan-havel-jan-lukes-prave-proto-ze-jsem-kniha-recenze>, accessed on 09/08/2026.

¹⁶ David Tramba, "Tajemné lithium: RSJ má povolení už 9 let, ale s těžbou na Cínovci stále váhá," *Ekonomický deník* (August 15, 2025), available at: <https://ekonomickydenik.cz/lithium-rsj-ma-povoleni-uz-9-let-ale-s-tezbou-vaha/>, accessed on 09/08/2026.

¹⁷ Karel Pacner and Antonín Vítek, "Češi se v kosmu neztratili. Exkluzivní serial o dobývání vesmíru," *iDNES.cz* (November 28, 2007), available at: https://www.idnes.cz/technet/vesmir/cesi-se-v-kosmu-neztratili-exkluzivni-serial-o-dobovani-vesmiru.A071127_160218_tec_vesmir_vse, accessed on 09/08/2026.

¹⁸ Jiří Šťastný, "Josef Štáva nabízel komunistům obchod se zbraněmi, ukazují dokumenty," *iDNES.cz* (June 13, 2011), available at: https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/josef-stava-nabizel-komunistum-obchod-se-zbranemi-ukazuji-dokumenty.A110608_154758_domaci_js, accessed on 09/08/2026.

¹⁹ Nadační fond nezávislé žurnalistiky, "Kolegium," available at: <https://www.nfnz.cz/kolegium/>, accessed on 09/08/2026; Nadační fond nezávislé žurnalistiky, *Výroční zpráva Nadačního fondu nezávislé žurnalistiky za rok 2023*, available at: https://data.eu.cntmbr.com/nfnz/nfnz-prod/4ea805f8-dfa7-4ce7-b80e-3dfodfdee133/NFNZ_fi-nal_vyrocní_zprava_2023.pdf, accessed on 09/08/2026.

²⁰ Jaroslav Plesl, "Od Elle a Marianne k byznysu za miliardy s Martinem Romanem," *Hospodářské noviny* (September 13, 2010), available at: <https://archiv.hn.cz/c1-46394-180-od-elle-a-marianne-k-byznysu-za-miliardy-s-martinem-romanem>, accessed on

to Barta through family relations and business ties to figures around Portland Trust and networks associated with the financing of Czech political and media projects in the 1990s. Portland Trust is a key real estate entity of StB confidants.²¹ Šenar participated in the process of selling Barta's online business to German-based Bauer Media Group.²² The same networks later extended toward digital media and investment ventures of the early 2000s, including Extra Online, Credo Ventures, Cognitive Security.²³ One of Barta's first operations emerged through a network of intelligence-linked, foreign trade, and financial actors who transitioned into venture capital, technology, media, and energy sectors after 1989.

Philanthropists shaping the narrative

In the following section, media outputs of Libor Winkler and Jan Barta between 2014 and 2026 have been analysed to vividly see the development of narratives regarding Ukraine and their attitudes towards the role of Ukraine in the Czech media space. The analysis was conducted using the Newton media archive which provides access based on keywords. In this case, the analysis covers narratives in two periods, between 2014 and 2022 and between 2022 and 2026. It includes roughly 3,000 media outputs including social media appearances. The time frame allows an in-depth overview to be gained of narrative development with

09/08/2026.

²¹ Into this wider circle belongs also StB agent Petr Bednařík who was stationed in the United States and among others contributed to the story of The Wolf of Wall Street intermediating selling of worthless shares of companies in Central Europe in early 1990s, more Tomáš Plhoň, "Česká investice vlka z Wall Street. Měl vazby i na český byznys," *Lidovky.cz* (July 9, 2017), available at: https://www.lidovky.cz/byznys/ceska-investice-vlka-z-wall-street.A170708_145114_firmy-trhy_pkv, accessed on 09/08/2026.

²² Ondřej Aust, "Burda kupuje Extra Online Media, výrazně posílí na internetu," *Médiář* (June 1, 2023), available at: <https://www.mediar.cz/burda-kupuje-extra-online-media-vyrazne-posili-na-internetu>, accessed on 09/08/2026.

²³ Marek Janouš, "Credo Ventures se podařil první velký exit: Cognitive Security," *Lupa.cz* (January 31, 2013), available at: <https://www.lupa.cz/clanky/credo-ventures-exit-cognitive-security/>, accessed on 09/08/2026.

the decisive moment of February 2022 and full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine. The analysis of narratives tracks the dynamics over time with a focus on changes in framing of Ukraine as a subject of public discussions. Given the high volume of data, the analysis traces narrative development over time with the aim of covering all media outputs of both Winkler and Barta. However, a limitation of this research is that it does not undertake an in-depth content analysis of all public mentions of Ukraine as a subject of interest. At the same time, the outputs provide valuable insight into the development of narratives over time, offering a unique perspective on how the information space is shaped by two leading figures who are portrayed as philanthropists and supporters of Ukraine in the Czech context.

Before 2022, the Libor Winkler's discourse on Ukraine was fundamentally different from the later wartime and postwar narratives. Ukraine was not yet framed as a civilizational, democratic, or geopolitical issue. Instead, the dominant narrative positioned the country primarily as a space of economic underdevelopment and unrealized potential. Winkler repeatedly approached Ukraine through the lens of infrastructure, industry, and investment opportunity, portraying it as a large but overlooked market on the periphery of European economic attention. The core narrative was not about defending Ukraine, but about recognizing opportunities others ignored. Ukraine appeared as a country that had been economically underestimated by Western and Czech investors despite its strategic size and industrial capacity.

Within this framework, the discourse evolved toward a more specific narrative of infrastructural modernization. Ukraine was increasingly described as a country requiring practical transformation such as in energy infrastructure, and industrial mod-

ernization. The focus was highly technocratic and operational: modernization was understood as a process of improving inefficient post-Soviet systems and integrating them into broader European economic logic. In this phase, Ukraine was framed less as a political subject and more as a technical and economic environment suitable for long-term infrastructure investment. The narrative emphasized utility, modernization, and economic rationality rather than ideology or values.

Another important element before 2022 was the idea of Eastern Europe as a delayed transformation space. Ukraine was implicitly compared to the post-1989 experience of Central Europe, but in the sense that its transformation had remained unfinished or incomplete. Winkler's discourse hints that Ukraine represented a 'late modernization frontier'—a place where economic and institutional changes still offered opportunities that had already disappeared in more developed Central European markets. This framing positioned Ukraine as part of a broader regional story about post-socialist transition, economic convergence, and the expansion of European-style capitalism eastward.

At the same time, there was also a developing narrative of strategic early positioning. Ukraine was increasingly discussed as a market in which long-term actors could gain advantage before broader international engagement arrived. This was not yet framed geopolitically, but economically: being active in Ukraine meant entering a difficult but potentially transformative environment ahead of competitors. The emphasis was therefore on foresight, patience, and strategic investment timing rather than moral responsibility or democratic solidarity.

The development of narratives in the Libor Winkler's discourse on Ukraine is less a chronological sequence of isolated topics, and more a gradual transformation of the *meaning* of Ukraine

itself within his worldview. At the beginning of the war, Ukraine was framed primarily through the narrative of immediate defense against aggression. The central logic was reactive: Russia represented destruction and instability, while support for Ukraine was understood as an urgent moral necessity. In this phase, the dominant narratives revolved around military resistance, the need for decisive Western engagement, and preventing European passivity in the face of authoritarian violence. Ukraine appeared mainly as a victim requiring solidarity and rapid assistance.

This initial security-oriented framing evolved into a broader narrative of strategic reconstruction. Ukraine stopped being portrayed merely as a battlefield and became increasingly conceptualized as a future-oriented rebuilding project. Reconstruction was not framed only as humanitarian recovery, but as a transformational historical process comparable to post-communist modernization in Central Europe after 1989. In this stage, Winkler's rhetoric merged moral obligation with economic and institutional opportunity. The key narrative shift was from "Ukraine must survive" toward "Ukraine must be rebuilt as part of Europe." Reconstruction thus became both a geopolitical mission and an investment framework.

A further narrative development occurred when the discourse moved from physical reconstruction toward the protection of civilizational continuity. Ukraine increasingly appeared not simply as territory or infrastructure, but as a cultural and historical entity whose survival depended on preserving books, archives, libraries, intellectual heritage, and collective memory. In this phase, the war was no longer framed only as a military conflict, but as an attempt to erase cultural identity. Winkler's support for preservation projects introduced a new narrative layer: the

idea that defending Ukraine also means defending European culture itself. The meaning of reconstruction therefore expanded from rebuilding cities and energy systems to preserving historical continuity and national identity.

Simultaneously, the discourse evolved toward a narrative of value-based capitalism. Investment in Ukraine ceased to be presented as purely economic activity and instead became connected with ethics, democracy, and geopolitical responsibility. Winkler repeatedly emphasized that engagement in Ukraine has a “value dimension,” meaning that capital allocation itself can become an expression of political and civilizational alignment. This transformed business involvement into a form of democratic participation. Economic engagement was framed not only as profitable or strategic, but as morally meaningful.

In the final stage of development, all previous elements—security, reconstruction, culture, and investment—merged into a narrative of European civilizational defense. Ukraine became symbolic of a wider struggle over the future political identity of Europe. Russia was increasingly framed not merely as a geopolitical adversary, but as a force threatening democratic values, openness, and European continuity. The discourse therefore evolved from humanitarian solidarity into an ideological framework in which support for Ukraine represented a test of Europe’s own moral coherence and historical responsibility. By the end of this development, Ukraine was no longer discussed as an external crisis, but as an integral component of Europe’s democratic and civilizational future.

Overview of narrative development (2014 – 2026)

Narrative Theme / Category	Frequency	Meaning
Support for Ukraine through military aid	30–40 mentions	Direct practical assistance
Drones and tactical technologies	20–30 mentions	Technological warfare and effectiveness
Energy independence from Russia	15–20 mentions	Solar power and decentralization
Anti-Putin / “another Hitler” framing	15–18 mentions	Moral-historical justification
Ukrainian startups and innovation	10–15 mentions	Wartime innovation ecosystem
Strategic philanthropy	10–12 mentions	Maximum measurable impact
Reconstruction through technology	8–10 mentions	Ukraine rebuilding through innovation
Czech leadership	8–10 mentions	Czech investors and networks helping Ukraine
Refugee and humanitarian support	8–10 mentions	Housing and logistical assistance

Europe must resist authoritarianism	5–8 mentions	Democracy-security framing
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Source: *Newton Media*

Before 2022, the Jan Barta’s discourse on Ukraine was relatively limited and lacked the strong geopolitical, military, and anti-authoritarian framing that later became central after the Russian invasion. Ukraine appeared only occasionally within broader discussions about Eastern European entrepreneurship, regional modernization, and technological development. The dominant narrative in this period framed Ukraine primarily as part of a wider post-socialist transformation space—a region characterized by economic catching-up, underdeveloped markets, and emerging entrepreneurial ecosystems. The emphasis was not on security or democracy, but on innovation potential and long-term market development.

The first major narrative before 2022 was the idea of Eastern Europe as an innovation frontier. Ukraine is discussed not as a geopolitical problem, but as part of a broader ecosystem of technologically ambitious but still structurally underdeveloped post-Soviet and post-socialist markets. In this framework, Ukraine represented opportunity through incompleteness: markets were less saturated, technological sectors were still emerging, and regional entrepreneurial cooperation offered possibilities unavailable in Western Europe. The discourse reflects the typical venture-capital logic of identifying future growth areas before they become mainstream.

A second narrative relates to regional entrepreneurial integration into the European market. Ukraine appears mostly in relation to cross-border startup environments, networking, and technological cooperation inside Central and Eastern Europe.

Rather than treating Ukraine as a distinct political subject, his rhetoric positioned it within a wider regional space shaped by digitization, innovation, and economic modernization. The underlying logic was pragmatic and transnational: Ukraine is valuable because it formed part of an emerging technological region rather than serving any broader ideological or strategic purpose.

Another important pre-2022 narrative is that of technocratic modernization. Ukraine was implicitly framed as a country still undergoing delayed transformation processes like those experienced by Central Europe in the 1990s and early 2000s. The emphasis was strongly interest-driven and investment-oriented: modernization meant technological adoption, startup growth, digitalization, and integration into broader European economic structures. There is little emotional or normative language attached to this discourse. Ukraine was primarily treated as an environment for entrepreneurship and future-oriented technological development.

Between 2022 and 2026, the Jan Barta’s discourse on Ukraine underwent a major transformation from immediate wartime solidarity into a broader narrative centered on strategic resilience, technological warfare, and democratic resistance. Unlike Libor Winkler, whose narratives have evolved towards culture and civilizational identity, Barta’s discourse developed towards innovation and security. The first stage of this transformation emerged immediately after the Russian invasion in 2022, when Ukraine was framed primarily through the narrative of emergency mobilization and practical solidarity. The dominant themes involved refugee accommodation, rapid humanitarian assistance, fundraising, and immediate support for Ukraine’s survival. At the same time, the war became connected in his

rhetoric with the issue of European energy vulnerability. Investments in solar energy and energy independence were presented not merely as economic decisions, but as strategic tools weakening Russian influence. In this phase, Ukraine functioned as a catalyst exposing the fragility of Europe's dependence on Russian resources.

The humanitarian and energy-security framing moved into a broader narrative of strategic resistance against authoritarianism. Ukraine appears not only as a country under attack, but also became a symbol of a wider geopolitical confrontation between democratic societies and authoritarian power. Barta's rhetoric became more openly confrontational toward Russia, and the discourse began integrating historical analogies, especially comparisons of Vladimir Putin to Hitler. This marked an important narrative escalation: support for Ukraine was no longer described merely as solidarity, but as a moral necessity aimed at preventing the expansion of authoritarian aggression across Europe. The central meaning of Ukraine shifted from humanitarian crisis to a strategic frontline of democratic defense.

A further shift observed in the discourse moved the discourse from general resistance toward the narrative of technological warfare and measurable effectiveness. Beginning especially in 2024, drones, tactical technologies, and military innovation became the dominant framing. Ukraine is increasingly framed as a laboratory of adaptive warfare in which technology, decentralization, and rapid innovation can compensate for conventional asymmetry. Barta repeatedly emphasizes that support should have "maximum effect," revealing a strongly technocratic logic in which philanthropy, military aid, and investment are evaluated through operational efficiency and strategic impact. This transformed Ukraine in his rhetoric into a proving ground for

new forms of warfare, resilience, and scalable technological solutions. The meaning of support shifted from symbolic solidarity toward quantifiable strategic contribution.

At the same time, another narrative layer developed around innovation and reconstruction ecosystems. Ukraine increasingly appeared not only as a battlefield, but also as a future-oriented technological space capable of generating startups, venture capital opportunities, and reconstruction-driven innovation. Prague is portrayed as a potential hub connecting Ukrainian startups, investors, and reconstruction initiatives. In this phase, Ukraine was reframed from a passive recipient of aid into an active producer of technological creativity and wartime adaptability. War itself is increasingly interpreted as accelerating innovation rather than eliminating it. Reconstruction, therefore, was connected not only with rebuilding infrastructure, but also with building new technological and entrepreneurial ecosystems.

These narratives moved into a broader framework of strategic resilience and civilizational competition. Ukraine was no longer discussed only in terms of immediate military support or reconstruction, but as part of a long-term geopolitical struggle shaping the future technological and political order of Europe. The discourse was increasingly connected to democracy, innovation, military technology, decentralized energy, and investment in a single strategic logic. Unlike humanitarian narratives centered on compassion, Barta's rhetoric emphasizes resilience, scalability, adaptation, and effectiveness. By 2026, Ukraine had become a symbol in his discourse of technologically enabled democratic resistance, a place where the future balance between authoritarianism and open societies was being tested not only militarily, but also economically, technologically, and institutionally.

Overview of narrative development (2014 – 2026)

Narrative Theme / Category	Frequency	Meaning
Military assistance	30–40 mentions	Support for Ukraine's military capabilities
Military innovation	20–30 mentions	Technology provides Ukraine with an asymmetric advantage over Russia
Humanitarian aid and refugee support	20–25 mentions	Immediate solidarity
Energy independence from Russia	15–20 mentions	Reducing dependence on Russian energy
Anti-Putin / "Stopping another Hitler"	15–18 mentions	Preventing the expansion of authoritarian aggression
Ukraine as a frontline defending democracy	15–18 mentions	Ukraine protects Europe from authoritarianism
Strategic philanthropy	10–12 mentions	Donations should maximize measurable military and societal impact
Ukrainian startups and innovation ecosystem	10–15 mentions	Wartime as source of technological innovation

Reconstruction through technology and investment	8–10 mentions	Modernize Ukraine rather than simply rebuild it
Czech leadership in supporting Ukraine	8–10 mentions	Active role in the post-war process
European strategic responsibility	8–10 mentions	Supporting Ukraine is essential for Europe's future security
Technological resilience and adaptation	6–8 mentions	Innovation determines military and economic resilience

Source: Newton Media Archive

Narratives Shaping Public Opinion

The analysis shows how two significant figures are shaping the public narrative with content that corresponds to the very general trends when it comes to both the foreign policy of the Czech Republic as well as public opinion towards Ukraine and its support. In both cases, it is clearly visible how primarily Libor Winkler is adjusting his narratives to his target group – a part of society that is strongly receptive to showing general social support for Ukraine.²⁴ Looking at the period before 2022, the evaluation shows flexibility to react, or rather adjust, to the external political environment. In this case, support for Ukraine is primarily a subject of political action rather than an implementation of strategy or a call for political and institutional action. At the same time, both Winkler and Barta are strengthening their

²⁴ Jiří Zatloukal and Daryna Dziuba, "Чеський мільярдер вже відновлює Україну та інвестує мільйони крон," *Seznam Zprávy* (November 29, 2022), available at: <https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/clanek/ukrajinski-novyny-cheskii-miliarder-vzhe-vidnovliuie-ukrayinu-ta-investuie-milioni-kron-220231>, accessed on 09/08/2026.

domestic image as supporters of Ukraine. Primarily in the case of Libor Winkler, it means that their target audience is in the Czech Republic and has a specific aim – to use the momentum of the war against Ukraine to be filled up with their narratives rather than creating a systematic change or coordinated political action. It also demonstrates the fact that their media footprint in Ukraine is almost invisible alongside the fact that their media presence supporting Ukraine in the Czech Republic does not match the size of economic presence in Ukraine especially in comparison with other Czech businesses present in Ukraine that have significantly smaller media coverage even being present in the same line of business. There is an interesting paradox: Winkler, whose business interests in Ukraine are in Ukraine is significantly larger than Barta's, has very weak media coverage in Ukraine. It shows that the increased emphasis on the emotional narrative shaping in the domestic space does not correspond with the size of business interests in Ukraine that should be presumably growing and thus attract media attention.

To answer the question about shaping narratives of Czech society alongside political action or structural change raises the question why such narratives are present. Firstly, both Winkler and Barta demonstrate significant flexibility in their narratives in order to be perceived as such in the Czech media space. They are mimicking a strategy in terms of support for Ukraine leading to political and structural outcomes. Their focus is thus to use the general expectation to serve their private interests. Yet, with access to the political and media space, it poses a question what their intentions are, as well as the duration limits of these narratives. Secondly, there is a clear misfit between the emphasis on these narratives and having direct economic interests or publicly recognized presence in Ukraine. That said, the information space is shaped by particular and short-lived nar-

ratives. Consequences of such development can easily result in the emergence of counter-narratives based on similar, yet opposite intentions based on similar flexibility, just focusing on other (for example national conservative) demands that exist in society as a counter-response to the emotionally driven Western liberal existential narratives. Lastly, the professional environment primarily surrounding Libor Winkler poses a question if the background and social capital as analyzed above can generate values-based narratives without 'other' intentions.