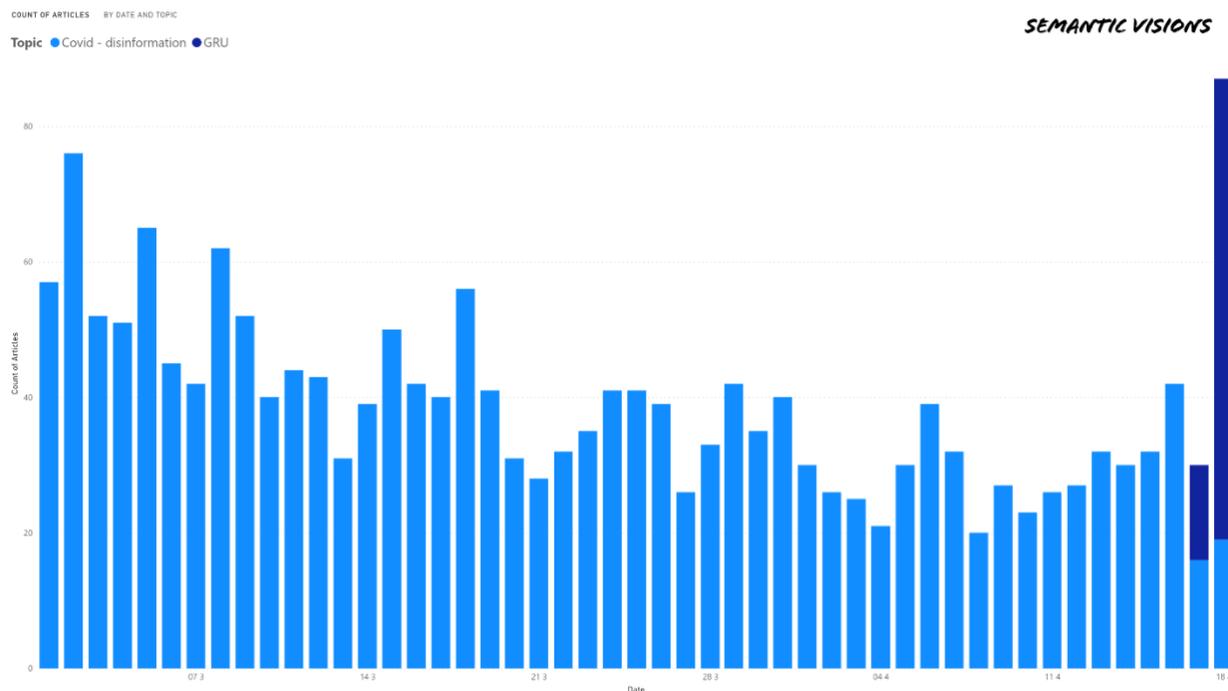
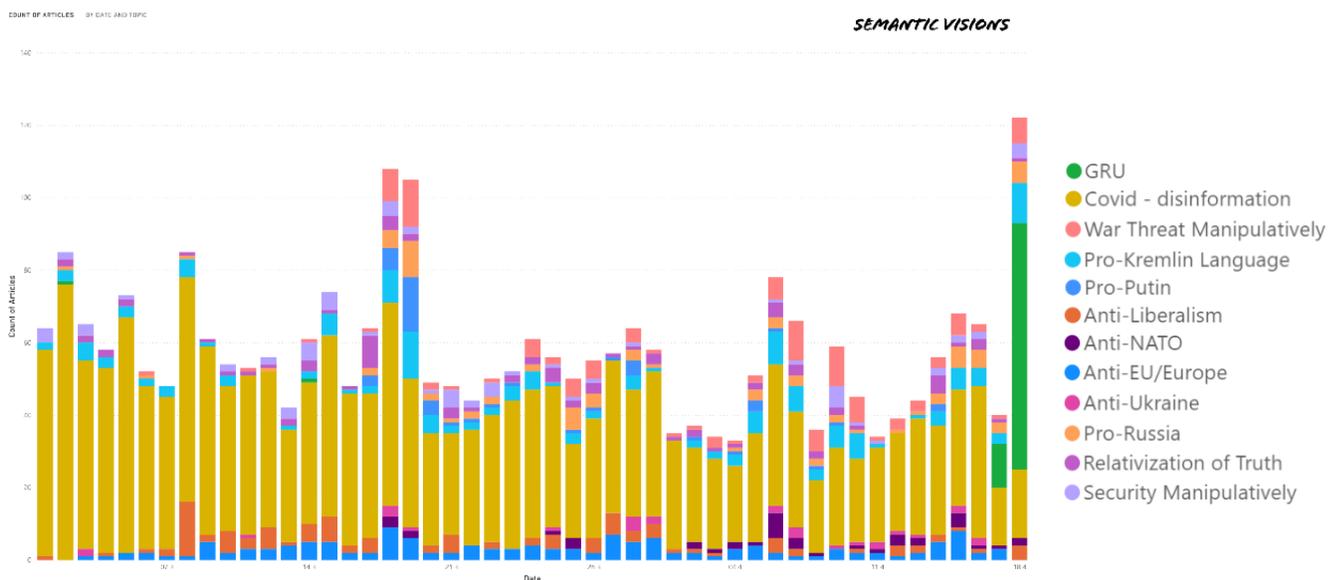


## From COVID-19 to the GRU terror attack: Czech disinformation sources switch gears overnight

*A pro-Kremlin disinformation campaign about the GRU terror attack in Vrbětice is rapidly emerging in the Czech information environment, according to a diagnostic analysis by Semantic Visions.*



SV's analysis finds that on April 17, the same day as Prime Minister Babiš's announcement, Czech disinformation media immediately began pushing false and manipulative messages about the news, notably reorienting their focus from COVID-19, which has been the priority topic for disinformation over the last several months. The graph below illustrates this dramatic shift: in just two days, the GRU terror attack (green) has overtaken COVID-19 (yellow) as the dominant focus of disinformation in the Czech media sphere. On April 18, the number of disinformation articles published about the GRU attack was more than three times greater than about COVID-19 (69 versus 19). That also represents the lowest quantity of COVID-19 disinformation since March 1. For comparison, the average daily number of disinformation articles about COVID-19 from March 1 to April 16 was 39, which is twice as many as published on April 18.



The Czech disinformation ecosystem is characterized by a strongly pro-Kremlin slant: Czech sources frequently amplify Russian disinformation narratives as well as official Kremlin talking points. Accordingly, this significant and coordinated shift in focus by Czech disinformation outlets indicates the emergence of an aggressive pro-Kremlin disinformation campaign that will take cues from the Russian disinformation response to this incident. (Indeed, the Czech-language version of Russia's Sputnik News is already responsible for a large share of the identified disinformation content about the GRU attack.)

We should expect this campaign to mirror the same tactics seen for example in the aftermath of the Salisbury poisoning and the downing of Malaysian airliner MH17: pro-Kremlin sources will go on the offensive to deflect blame from Russia, spreading multiple contradictory narratives and alternative explanations about the incident in order to muddy the waters of reality. The ultimate objective is to make it harder for the Czech Republic and its allies to defend their security interests and coordinate a decisive response to Russian state-sponsored terrorism. In this context, there will likely be a particular emphasis on disinformation related to the tender for the Dukovany nuclear plant, from which Rosatom will almost surely be excluded, and the Kremlin's ongoing efforts to sell the Sputnik V vaccine to EU countries.

## About Semantic Visions

Semantic Visions (SV) is a Prague-based data analytics and risk assessment firm that administers a proprietary military-grade Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT) system. SV's team has over 15 years of experience in OSINT data collection and semantic understanding of textual information across the world's top languages. SV is one of the world's only organizations to see the big picture of the global online news sphere, emphasizing situational awareness and threat detection. In particular, SV has extensive practical experience in detecting disinformation, propaganda, and related digital threats. In March 2019, SV took first place in the US-UK Tech Challenge for its development of proprietary technology that can identify and track disinformation and propaganda around the globe.

SV risk solutions have been successfully integrated into the world's largest business commerce network SAP Ariba, which drives over US \$3 trillion in commerce – more than Amazon, eBay, and Alibaba combined. SV delivers real-time risk detection that covers millions of companies and thousands of geolocations.

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