



# Denying climate science: History and context

**Vojtěch Pecka**

CLIMATE PAPER No. 26

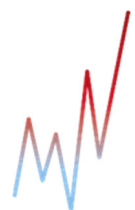




TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1 A concise history of climate science.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2 Denial of climate science .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>3 Climate conspiracies in the Czech Republic and Russia's influence .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>20</b>



## Summary

- There is an extensive and organised movement to deny the climate science results. Some experts claim that the movement represents one of the most extensive documented campaigns against science ever.
- Organised denial of climate science was documented in the US immediately after the commencement of international climate negotiations in the late 1980s. Consecutively, it has spread to Europe, especially after 2000, when European countries started to enforce measures to limit fossil fuels.
- The emergence and expansion of the organised climate science denial movement is supported by groups perceiving climate policy as a threat to their interests (power, economic or ideological).
- The US fossil fuel industry has become the primary driver of organised climate science denial. It has employed the tobacco industry's know-how of fighting against smoking regulation to deny climate science, mobilising its experience of campaigning against the environmental movement going back to the 1970s.
- Fossil fuel interests have long been supported by neoliberal and conservative entities (think tanks, foundations, as well as political parties) ideologically set against private sector regulation as such.
- Misrepresentations and manipulations of information amplify the climate debate's contradictions, purposefully constructed conflicts and culture wars, rendering it extremely difficult to navigate the scientific evidence. In many countries, climate change has developed into a wedge issue.
- The climate science denial movement has consistently undermined public trust in scientists and scientific institutions as its principal instrument.
- We may identify three major groups of climate science deniers in the Czech Republic. First, entities with a strong ideological bias against state intervention in the economy. Second, entities with ties to the national fossil fuel industry. Moreover, third, entities promoting the interests of the Russian Federation.
- After 2010, activities affiliated with disseminating conspiracy theories and the far right became more prominent in the climate change issue.
- The opacity surrounding the climate debate has resulted in the inability to rely on relevant and informed sources, hindering long-term planning and sound strategic decision-making. As a result, policies are ineffective, the economy suffers, resources are misused, and long-term security and political-economic stability are threatened.



## Introduction

The present briefing paper focuses on the history and global context of the emergence of the organised climate science denial movement and its relevance to the Czech Republic. It describes how misrepresentations and manipulations of information serve as political tools to protect economic, political, and ideological interests. AMO has already published one briefing paper addressing the relevance of climate change denial and climate disinformation in the Czech Republic.<sup>1</sup> The current briefing paper expands on the latter but intends to present climate change denial in a broader context and over a more extended historical period.

### 1 A concise history of climate science

Global climate change caused by anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases began to be discussed in academic debates at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup> However, the discourse remained mainly a theoretical research topic until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century and was not considered urgent. Early calculations suggested that significant climate change would occur only in several centuries at the current rate of fossil fuel consumption. Moreover, the scientific discussions at the time focused primarily on the risks associated with the potential onset of another ice age. If anthropogenic warming was referred to, it was regarded as a benefit extending the growing season, mitigating harsh winters and postponing the next ice age.<sup>3</sup>

However, fossil fuel consumption increased exponentially, and the greenhouse effect (heat retention in the atmosphere) grew much faster than anyone predicted. Following the Second World War, geosciences<sup>4</sup> also developed rapidly, dramatically changing our understanding of the Earth system.<sup>5</sup> It became clear that rapid temperature increases could have negatively influenced everything from rising global ocean levels and resulting flooding of coastal areas, to increased temperature stress and disruption of the precipitation cycles (such as monsoon rains), which are crucial for many regions. Space research has provided information that Earth's closest planetary neighbours, Mars and Venus, are both quite inhospitable planets with climates unfavourable to life.<sup>6</sup> Not long before, many scientists had assumed they might have an Earth-like climate and water-filled oceans or even bear (perhaps) intelligent life. Given that both planets shared Earth-like conditions (similar size, composition, and distances from the Sun) and yet their climates were drastically different (frigid Mars versus sweltering Venus), the researchers started wondering if the climate was less stable than assumed. Systems theory, complexity, and cybernetics developments indicated that even seemingly highly stable systems can undergo rapid and far-reaching changes triggered by relatively small disruptions. Early climate models even suggested that the climate system could destabilise to the

---

<sup>1</sup> Dominik Presl, "Změna klimatu a dezinformace v českém informačním prostoru" (Asociace pro mezinárodní otázky/ Association for International Affairs (AMO), November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2021), <https://www.amo.cz/cs/zmena-klimatickych-politik/zmena-klimatu-a-dezinformace-v-ceskem-informacnim-prostoru/>.

<sup>2</sup> Spencer R. Weart, *The Discovery of Global Warming* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> G. S. Callendar, "The Artificial Production of Carbon Dioxide and Its Influence on Temperature," *Quarterly Journal of the Royal Meteorological Society* 64, No. 275 (April 1938): 223–40, <https://doi.org/10.1002/qj.49706427503>.

<sup>4</sup> Paul N. Edwards, *A Vast Machine: Computer Models, Climate Data, and the Politics of Global Warming* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> Joshua P. Howe, *Behind the Curve: Science and the Politics of Global Warming* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016).

<sup>6</sup> Spencer R. Weart, "Venus & Mars – The Discovery of Global Warming," <https://history.aip.org/climate/Venus.htm>.



point where the Earth became utterly uninhabitable, like Venus.<sup>7</sup> Although it was apparent that the early research involved numerous uncertainties, its conclusions were disturbing.

The topic of the negative impacts of global climate change induced by anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases started to gain more and more realistic outlines. Scientists became increasingly aware of the need for further research to map these risks in more depth during the 1960s and 1970s. However, by the 1980s, it became clear that if the rate of anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions continued, the global climate would inevitably change rapidly beyond any precedent in the history of human civilisation. Despite intensive research, no mechanisms could be identified that would compensate for the radiation balance (heat uptake in the atmosphere) and stabilise the climate. Thus, climate change was brought into the political debate and international negotiations in the late 1980s.<sup>8</sup>

#### Scientific facts about climate change

The most detailed and comprehensive source represents the reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC),<sup>9</sup> published every couple of years; the most recent is the sixth. They are compiled by three working groups, which usually publish their reports separately, with a synthesis report at the end. The reports are divided according to their complexity into three sections – a summary for policy-makers (usually consisting of a few dozen pages), a technical summary (about a hundred pages), and the full report (including all references to primary sources, over a thousand pages long).

Up-to-date and detailed information on climate change can also be found, for example, on the Carbon Brief server.<sup>10</sup> Information published there is provided by climate scientists without the simplifications and distortions that tend to prevail in media articles written by journalists. In the Czech Republic, the Fakta o klimatu website offers a valuable overview of climate information, including comprehensive infographics.<sup>11</sup>

## 1.1 The current climate science

The scientific research results have demonstrated that, at least over several millennia (but probably much longer), unprecedented climate change<sup>12</sup> driven primarily by anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere and associated with changes in the Earth's energy balance has occurred.<sup>13</sup> Its primary manifestation is the Earth's rapid warming. However, there are other effects, such as the acidification of the world's oceans due to dissolving carbon dioxide, which destabilises the food chains of marine life, or the change in ocean circulation, the increase in ocean stratification (deterioration in the ocean water mixing).<sup>14</sup> The

<sup>7</sup> Weart Spencer, "Simple Models of Climate Change – The Discovery of Global Warming," <https://history.aip.org/climate/simple.htm>.

<sup>8</sup> Bert Bolin, *A history of the science and politics of climate change: the role of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> "Reports – IPCC," <https://www.ipcc.ch/reports/>.

<sup>10</sup> "Carbon Brief – Clear on climate," <https://www.carbonbrief.org/>.

<sup>11</sup> "Fakta o klimatu," <https://faktaoklimatu.cz/>.

<sup>12</sup> Naomi Oreskes, "The Scientific Consensus on Climate Change: How Do We Know We're Not Wrong?", *Climate Modelling*, ed. Elisabeth A. Lloyd and Eric Winsberg (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 31–64, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-65058-6\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-65058-6_2).

<sup>13</sup> Tomáš Jungwirth, "Energetická nerovnováha Země," 2018, [https://www.amo.cz/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/dysbalance\\_factsheet.pdf](https://www.amo.cz/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/dysbalance_factsheet.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> Guancheng Li et al., "Increasing Ocean Stratification over the Past Half-Century," *Nature Climate Change* 10, No. 12 (December 2020): 1116–23, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-020-00918-2>.



relatively unusual climatic stability<sup>15</sup> characterising the present geological epoch (Holocene) has probably contributed to the development of complex human societies dependent on agriculture.<sup>16</sup> However, Holocene climatic stability did not occur independently; it was created by a series of stabilising mechanisms in the Earth system that rapid global climate change can disrupt.<sup>17</sup> If certain thresholds are crossed, the stabilising processes may even turn into their opposite and start contributing to climate destabilisation. Moreover, such a situation may be irreversible (within the horizons of human lives). Thus, it may be beyond the capacity of human intervention to revert to the previous state. The Earth system can, therefore, rapidly transform from a relatively stable to a wildly changing environment, posing a range of severe to existential risks.<sup>18</sup>

## 1.2 The interface between climate science, politics, and economics

Although science strives to distance itself from politics, both spheres often intersect. For example, when negative impacts of industrial activity are discovered, the lack of legal regulations<sup>19</sup> often becomes apparent. That, in turn, leads to the mobilisation of environmental protests, demands for compensation, remediation or regulation of various industries. Vice versa, the affected entities repeatedly react by trying to defend themselves in various ways. To some extent, the defence is logical and understandable (after all, scientific research can be wrong or overreact despite all the measures). However, the defensive reactions have repeatedly become expedient disinformation campaigns seeking the protection of particular interests without regard to the broader societal implications.

Climate science has, thus, entered the political arena, together with the emergence of an expert consensus that human-induced greenhouse gas emissions will lead to a dangerous destabilising of the climate. However, destabilisation does not threaten everyone equally. Some are in a much better position to protect themselves from the risks. At the same time, different entities are responsible to varying degrees for causing climate change.<sup>20</sup> As a result, perceptions of the risks of climate change vary considerably between different groups. Moreover, there is a wide range of entities that see the climate crisis as a threat to them. Indeed, tackling the climate crisis poses an existential threat to the fossil fuel industry and the groups and states that depend on it. At the same time, the fossil fuel industry remains one of the most profitable industries on the planet. However, its value is based on very specific know-how, infrastructure and fossil fuel reserves,<sup>21</sup> and it is not easy for it to transform itself without major losses.

---

<sup>15</sup> “IPCC – Working Group I: The Scientific Basis. How Stable was the Holocene Climate?” <https://archive.ipcc.ch/ipccreports/tar/wg1/073.htm>.

<sup>16</sup> Joan Feynman a Alexander Ruzmaikin, “Climate Stability and the Development of Agricultural Societies,” *Climatic Change* 84, Nos. 3–4 (August 20<sup>th</sup>, 2007): 295–311, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-007-9248-1>; Joan Feynman a Alexander Ruzmaikin, “Climate Stability and the Origin of Agriculture,” *Climate Change and Agriculture*, ed. Saddam Hussain (IntechOpen, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.83344>.

<sup>17</sup> Will Steffen et al., “Trajectories of the Earth System in the Anthropocene,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 115, No. 33 (August 14<sup>th</sup>, 2018): 8252–59, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1810141115>.

<sup>18</sup> Luke Kemp et al., “Climate Endgame: Exploring Catastrophic Climate Change Scenarios,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 119, No. 34 (August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2108146119>.

<sup>19</sup> Rosanna Xia, “History of DDT Ocean Dumping off LA Coast Even Worse than Expected, EPA Finds,” *Phys.org*, 8 2022, <https://phys.org/news/2022-08-history-ddt-ocean-dumping-la.html>.

<sup>20</sup> Tess Riley, “Just 100 Companies Responsible for 71% of Global Emissions, Study Says,” *The Guardian*, July 10<sup>th</sup>, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2017/jul/10/100-fossil-fuel-companies-investors-responsible-71-global-emissions-cdp-study-climate-change>.

<sup>21</sup> “Unburnable Carbon: Are the World’s Financial Markets Carrying a Carbon Bubble?” *Carbon Tracker*, <https://carbontracker.org/reports/carbon-bubble/>.



At the same time, the fossil fuel industry overlaps strongly with politics, as it provides vital services linked to critical infrastructure. Indeed, the world's strategic dependence on fossil fuels has made them a primary military target since the Second World War,<sup>22</sup> and they have also been implicated in armed conflicts, coups and the emergence of dictatorships in many fossil-rich countries.<sup>23</sup> Fossil fuel dependency has given fossil fuel companies considerable bargaining power, and fossil fuel exporting states have gained geopolitical leverage<sup>24</sup> (as demonstrated by Russia's skilful exploitation of European fossil fuel dependency).

Moreover, countries themselves are vulnerable to the impacts of climate change in different ways, just as the costs of a low-carbon transition vary from country to country. There is also a national distribution of risks - richer segments of the population are much better able to protect themselves from climate risks than poorer ones. Given that the main source of concurrent climate change is carbon dioxide and that its warming effect has been in the atmosphere for hundreds of years, historical differences in responsibility for the resulting problem come into play, particularly in international negotiations.<sup>25</sup> Such circumstances, thus, create tensions, particularly between the rich countries of the global North, which have historically produced high levels of emissions (while the impacts of climate change will be relatively milder), and the countries of the global South, which have historically produced lower levels of emissions (but where the impacts of climate change will be much more pronounced). Therefore, the unequal perception of risks and costs creates the potential for conflict, which often manifests itself in questioning climate science findings and their political-economic or security implications.

When the climate issue entered the political arena in the early 1990s, it quickly became a highly polarising issue. This was probably inevitable, given the gravity of the issue and the difficulty of solving it. However, the public debate also began to be influenced by deliberately disseminated misinformation and distortions of information, and smear campaigns targeting selected experts and institutions, as well as the field of climate science itself, began to proliferate. Rumours and conspiracy theories began to emerge and spread that climate science, climate scientists, and climate scientists were manipulating data.<sup>26</sup> It took about a decade for it to become clear that these attacks were not a random phenomenon but were highly organised by groups who felt their interests were threatened by climate policy.<sup>27</sup>

In fact, the steady escalation of the conflict in the public debate and the constant dissemination of misleading and false information led to the start of social science research and investigative projects that sought to better map it. These have gradually uncovered a broad movement organised by groups seeking to prevent the reduction of fossil fuel use.<sup>28</sup> These groups include state and non-state parties, mainly fossil fuel companies and fossil fuel-dependent states, but also political entities that feel

---

<sup>22</sup> Shawn Keller, "Turning Point: A History of German Petroleum in World War II and Its Lessons for the Role of Oil in Modern Air Warfare," (Defense Technical Information Center, 2011), <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/citations/AD1020261>.

<sup>23</sup> André Månsson, "Energy, Conflict and War: Towards a Conceptual Framework," *Energy Research & Social Science* 4 (December 2014): 106–16, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2014.10.004>.

<sup>24</sup> Aymeric Bricout et al., "From the Geopolitics of Oil and Gas to the Geopolitics of the Energy Transition: Is There a Role for European Supermajors?" *Energy Research & Social Science* 88 (June 2022): 102634, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2022.102634>.

<sup>25</sup> "Share of global cumulative CO<sub>2</sub> emissions," Our World in Data, <https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/share-of-cumulative-co2>.

<sup>26</sup> Fred Pearce, *The Climate Files: The Battle for the Truth About Global Warming* (London: Guardian Books, 2010).

<sup>27</sup> John Cook, "A Brief History of Climate Denial," *Resilience*, June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2016, <https://www.resilience.org/stories/2016-06-23/a-brief-history-of-climate-denial/>.

<sup>28</sup> James Hoggan and Richard Littlemore, *Climate Cover-up: The Crusade to Deny Global Warming* (Vancouver ; Berkeley: Greystone Books, D & M Publishers Inc, 2009).



(geo)politically,<sup>29</sup> economically or ideologically threatened by climate policy. They are all involved in the highly questionable questioning and challenging of climate research findings.<sup>30</sup> Some authors even describe it as one of the most extensive organised campaigns against science ever.<sup>31</sup>

As a result, what was originally a technical issue has become one of the key issues in political divisions<sup>32</sup> and culture wars. Moreover, it has become the core of an identity conflict, with attitudes towards climate change strongly determined by political ideologies. While this is increasingly evident in scientific discourse, the opposite seems to be the case in public and political debate. Although the scientific establishment has traditionally sought to maintain its distance or autonomy from politics, there is inevitably a blurring or sometimes a conflict between the two. In general, this happens when scientific research introduces a new phenomenon into public and political life, the existence of which is seen by some groups as a nuisance or a threat (e.g., medical evidence on the harmful effects of smoking, but also research on the link between acid rain and emissions from the energy sector, the depletion of the ozone layer due to the production of chlorofluorocarbons, the harmful effects of certain pesticides on ecosystems, etc.).

#### **Sources of information for understanding the organised climate science denial movement**

An excellent introduction to the workings of the fossil fuel industry's organised climate science denial movement is Naomi Oreskes and Eric Conway's *Merchants of Doubt*.<sup>33</sup> For a general summary of the issue, see *Climate Obstruction*<sup>34</sup> by Kristofer Ekberg and a team of authors, a journalistic account and historical development in *How to Lose the Earth* by Nathaniel Rich,<sup>35</sup> the insights of a climate scientist in *The New Climate War* by climate scientist Michael Mann,<sup>36</sup> and the background to the funding of disinformation organisations in *Dark Money* by investigative journalist Jane Mayer.<sup>37</sup> The Climate Investigation Center<sup>38</sup> and Amy Westerveld's investigative project *Drilled* report on the latest developments in the climate denial scene.<sup>39</sup> *Desmog's*<sup>40</sup> Climate Disinformation Database is a very comprehensive database of fossil fuel industry-linked organisations involved in climate science denial.

<sup>29</sup> Veli-Pekka Tynkkynen and Nina Tynkkynen, "Climate Denial Revisited: (Re)Contextualising Russian Public Discourse on Climate Change during Putin 2.0," *Europe-Asia Studies* 70, No. 7 (August 9<sup>th</sup>, 2018): 1103–20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2018.1472218>.

<sup>30</sup> Peter J. Jacques, "A general theory of climate denial," *Global Environmental Politics* 12, No. 2 (2012): 9–17; Amy Westerveld, "The Mad Men of Climate Denial," *Drilled*, 2020, <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/s3-the-mad-men-of-climate-denial/id1439735906?i=1000458727231>.

<sup>31</sup> James Lawrence Powell, *The Inquisition of Climate Science* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

<sup>32</sup> Aaron M. McCright and Riley E. Dunlap, "The Politicization of Climate Change and Polarization in the American Public's Views of Global Warming, 2001–2010," *The Sociological Quarterly* 52, No. 2 (May 2011): 155–94, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1533-8525.2011.01198.x>.

<sup>33</sup> Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway, *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming*, 1st U.S. ed (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2010).

<sup>34</sup> Kristoffer Ekberg et al., *Climate Obstruction: How Denial, Delay and Inaction Are Heating the Planet*, First Edition (London New York, NY: Routledge, 2023).

<sup>35</sup> Nathaniel Rich, *Losing Earth: A recent history*, First edition (New York: MCD/Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019).

<sup>36</sup> Michael E. Mann, *The New Climate War: The Fight to Take Back Our Planet*, First edition (New York: PublicAffairs, 2021).

<sup>37</sup> Jane Mayer, *Dark money: the hidden history of the billionaires behind the rise of the radical right*, First Edition (New York: Doubleday, 2016).

<sup>38</sup> "Investigating Climate Deniers and the Fossil Fuel Industry," Climate Investigations Center, <https://climateinvestigations.org/>.

<sup>39</sup> "Drilled," <https://drilled.media/>.

<sup>40</sup> "DeSmog," *DeSmog*, January 11<sup>th</sup>, 2024, <https://www.desmog.com/>.



## 2 Denial of climate science

The beginnings of organised efforts to deny the relevance of climate change can be traced back to the early 1990s in the US, driven by groups with ties to the fossil fuel industry and their political allies, mainly in the Republican Party. One of the earliest organisations to deny the seriousness of human-induced climate change was a coalition of industry groups called the Global Climate Coalition,<sup>41</sup> established in 1989 to prevent regulation of the use of fossil fuels. In particular, it focused on preventing the United States from ratifying the Kyoto Protocol.

The US fossil fuel industry had been aware of climate change issues since at least the 1960s.<sup>42</sup> Many companies even initiated advanced in-house research, including climate modelling, in the 1970s and 1980s. Among the fossil fuel companies, Exxon (now ExxonMobil) stood out, and its climate research proved remarkably accurate in many areas (e.g. estimates of future global temperature or carbon dioxide concentration increases).<sup>43</sup> Indeed, there is considerable evidence that the research departments of fossil fuel companies alerted their management to the severity and urgency of the crisis.<sup>44</sup> Exxon was indeed exploring low-carbon energy pathways at the time but did not find any of the technologies sufficiently profitable. In the 1980s, studies began to demonstrate that climate change was a real and acute threat that needed to be addressed immediately because of the prolonged inertia of energy infrastructures. At the same time, however, research indicated that the effects of anthropogenic warming were unlikely to be detectable for most of the world before the year 2000 because the climate system's natural variability would mask them. Exxon, therefore, began to severely curtail its climate research.<sup>45</sup> In addition, the 1980s also saw a major collapse in fossil fuel prices, which significantly changed the thinking of companies in this particular sector, which began to cut back on investment in other areas, including their scientific research. In response, fossil fuel companies began to invest in a movement that unrealistically emphasised the uncertainties of climate science, downplayed the risks of climate change, questioned possible solutions and publicly denied proven conclusions, including those of their scientific departments.<sup>46</sup> The pioneers of scientific knowledge and partners searching for appropriate policies have gradually become enemies.

It should be noted, however, that the fossil fuel industry's behaviour in this regard is by no means unprecedented. Since at least the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many industry players have understood that their interests depend highly on politics and public opinion. Since then, they have set up several industry organisations to lobby and protect their interests (in the US, for example, the American Petroleum Institute and the National Association of Manufacturers), and a whole new field of public relations and advertising has emerged. The ability to influence public opinion has driven the success of entire industries and has become crucial to the success of the tobacco industry, in particular, which has expanded enormously through the

---

<sup>41</sup> Robert J. Brulle, "Advocating Inaction: A Historical Analysis of the Global Climate Coalition," *Environmental Politics* 32, No. 2 (February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2023): 185–206, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2022.2058815>.

<sup>42</sup> Benjamin Franta, "Early Oil Industry Knowledge of CO<sub>2</sub> and Global Warming," *Nature Climate Change* 8, No. 12 (December 2018): 1024–25, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-018-0349-9>.

<sup>43</sup> G. Supran, S. Rahmstorf, and N. Oreskes, "Assessing ExxonMobil's Global Warming Projections," *Science* 379, No. 6628 (January 13<sup>th</sup>, 2023): eabk0063, <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.abk0063>.

<sup>44</sup> Inside Climate News, "Exxon. The Road Not Taken," Inside Climate News, 2016, <https://insideclimatenews.org/project/exxon-the-road-not-taken/>.

<sup>45</sup> John Cushman, "Exxon Made Deep Cuts in Climate Research Budget in the 1980s," Inside Climate News, November 25<sup>th</sup>, 2015, <https://insideclimatenews.org/news/25112015/exxon-deep-cuts-climate-change-research-budget-1980s-global-warming/>.

<sup>46</sup> Geoffrey Supran and Naomi Oreskes, "Assessing ExxonMobil's climate change communications (1977–2014)," *Environmental Research Letters* 12, No. 8 (August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017): 084019, <https://doi.org/10.1088/1748-9326/aa815f>.



work of public relations experts. However, the success of the tobacco industry had a downside - a dramatic increase in lung cancer and other diseases associated with long-term use of tobacco products. Efforts to counter these effects then had surprisingly immediate consequences for climate science denial.

By the 1950s, the evidence of the harmfulness of smoking was so conclusive that it posed a severe threat to the entire highly profitable industry. The tobacco industry adopted its innovative approach to influencing public opinion, but this time, instead of influencing consumption behaviour (creating a preference for tobacco products), it began to manipulate public awareness of the results of scientific research. After studying the subject, public relations experts concluded<sup>47</sup> that scientific evidence could not be directly refuted but that they could cast persistent doubt on it, thereby obscuring its impact on public opinion and policy.<sup>48</sup> In doing so, they gradually developed a set of techniques and organisations<sup>49</sup> focused on the deliberate creation of pseudoscience and the obfuscation of public debate.<sup>50</sup> An institutional network of organisations and hired, seemingly independent experts protected the tobacco companies from regulation and litigation for 50 years. This strategy was created by experts (consultancies and experts such as Hill & Knowlton, Edelman, APCO Worldwide, Edward Bernays, and Ivy Lee) in corporate propaganda (an industry also known as “public relations”).

The extraordinary success of this disinformation structure has resulted in its later exploitation by other parties who have begun to struggle with the fact that science has exposed the adverse effects of their business. The same actors can then be seen repeatedly denying the conclusions of scientific research on various subjects such as the harmfulness of smoking, acid rain, the ozone layer, leaded petrol, the health effects of asbestos, etc.<sup>51</sup>

## 2.1 The Doubt Industry

A shared ethic based on the veracity of empirical evidence is central to scientists. It is based on the notion that research is judged successful not by its originality, elegance, or consistency with common sense, economic interests, or religious dogma but by its consistency with observed phenomena.<sup>52</sup> Various institutional and methodological arrangements, scientific societies, institutions and organisations collectively maintain this ethic. The scientific research that produces the various observations functions primarily through the publication of research in scientific journals that use a peer-review system, whereby a knowledgeable (usually anonymous) reviewer in the field examines the accepted manuscript. These features have enabled an admirable expansion of knowledge and a high level of public trust in science.<sup>53</sup>

This is how climate research works, and confidence in the relevance of its conclusions builds support for climate policy. Purpose-built pseudo-expert organisations (e.g. The Advancement of Sound Science Coalition, The Global Climate Coalition, Science & Environmental Policy Project, CO<sub>2</sub> Coalition, Information

---

<sup>47</sup> “Hill & Knowlton – TobaccoTactics,” University of Bath, 2018, <https://tobaccotactics.org/wiki/hill-knowlton/>.

<sup>48</sup> Allan M. Brandt, “Inventing Conflicts of Interest: A History of Tobacco Industry Tactics,” *American Journal of Public Health* 102, No. 1 (January 2012): 63–71, <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2011.300292>.

<sup>49</sup> Robert J. Brulle and Carter Werthman, “The Role of Public Relations Firms in Climate Change Politics,” *Climatic Change* 169, No. 1–2 (November 2021): 8, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-021-03244-4>.

<sup>50</sup> Robert N. Proctor, “God Is Watching: History in the Age of near-Infinite Digital Archives,” *Journal of Public Health Policy* 39, No. 1 (February 2018): 24–26, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41271-017-0111-y>.

<sup>51</sup> Oreskes & Conway, *Merchants of Doubt*.

<sup>52</sup> Michael Strevens, *The Knowledge Machine: How Irrationality Created Modern Science*, First edition (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2020).

<sup>53</sup> Naomi Oreskes, *Why Trust Science?* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2021).



Council for the Environment, Global Climate Coalition, Cooler Heads Coalition, Climate Intelligence Foundation, Committee for a Constructive Tomorrow, Friends of Science, and others) and hired, seemingly independent experts (e.g., Frederick Seitz, Fred Singer, Patrick Moore, Patrick Michaels) have sought to undermine this trust by creating the illusion of conflict in the scientific field.

To achieve this goal, they have set up conferences or journals that attempt to mimic scientific publications and conferences but fail to meet academic standards on closer inspection. The movement has even created a counterpart to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) called the Nongovernmental International Panel on Climate Change (NIPCC). In reality, however, these organisations do not produce their research, and the “experts” in question generally do not publish or work in their respective fields. Instead, they are experts at creating the appearance of scientific controversy, which is then disseminated to an unsuspecting public and policy-makers by other groups and the media.

Only a small minority of other experts can judge who the real experts are. It is often difficult for the public to distinguish between the many deliberately created actors. Their names are designed to give the impression that they are independent and expert organisations. However, they are funded by vested interests and do not produce authentic research. Entire epistemic groups and communities emerge because they fail to recognise such sources as pressure groups and then base their perceptions, their understanding of the world and ultimately their subjective identities on them in good faith.<sup>54</sup> They are convinced that they have access to a more privileged source of climate knowledge than climate science provides, and they engage in public discourse in a quite sincere (if misguided) effort to prevent the supposed climate madness. In fact, climate science itself is constructed within epistemic communities as an untrustworthy discipline, often systematically corrupted and riddled with political influence. As a result, they often believe that we are witnessing a grand climatological conspiracy to achieve some form of political or economic domination, typical of various forms of conspiracy theories.

## 2.2 Climate obstruction techniques

The groups mentioned above constitute only a slice of the climate science denial community. Their considerable diversity implies that we can also find considerable diversity in the “climate obstruction” techniques.<sup>55</sup> They include obfuscation of information, misinformation of the public,<sup>56</sup> creation of culture wars and conflicts, organised dissemination of climate disinformation, casting doubt on climate science, long-standing and systematic attacks on the credibility of scientific institutions and climate scientists, dissemination of conspiracy theories, taking otherwise correct facts out of context and creating misleading conclusions.<sup>57</sup> Incidents of the fossil fuel lobby attempting to prevent climate scientists from communicating with the public,

---

<sup>54</sup> Susannah Crockford, “That Which They Will Not See: Climate Denial as a Vector of Epistemological Crisis in the Contemporary United States,” *Ethnos*, August 8<sup>th</sup>, 2023, 1–21, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00141844.2023.2242599>.

<sup>55</sup> Robert Brulle and Riley E. Dunlap, “A Sociological View of the Effort to Obstruct Action on Climate Change,” *Footnotes. A Magazine of American Sociological Association*, <https://www.asanet.org/footnotes-article/sociological-view-effort-obstruct-action-climate-change/>.

<sup>56</sup> Jeremiah Bohr, “The Structure and Culture of Climate Change Denial | American Sociological Association,” *Footnotes. A Magazine of American Sociological Association*, <https://www.asanet.org/footnotes-article/structure-and-culture-climate-change-denial/>.

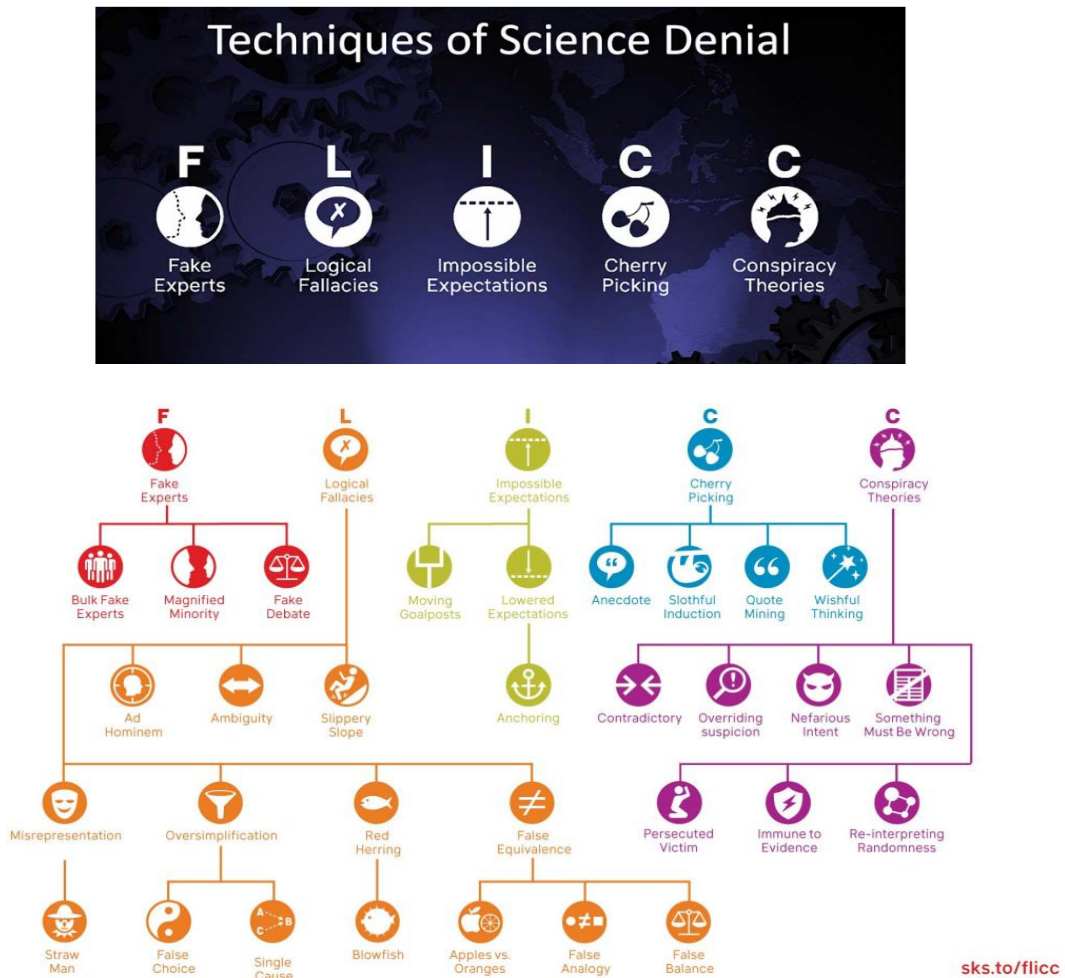
<sup>57</sup> Robert J. Brulle, “Denialism: Organized Opposition to Climate Change Action in the United States,” *Handbook of U.S. Environmental Policy*, David Konisky (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2020), 328–41, <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781788972840.00033>.



withdrawing their funding,<sup>58</sup> or attempting to influence public education curricula have also been documented.<sup>59</sup>

Research by John Cook and his team of authors has identified five main ways climate science is denied. These include promoting the pronouncements of illegitimate experts (i.e. those with no education or published research on the subject), using logical fallacies, creating impossible expectations (e.g. demanding absolute certainty in research that is unattainable in practice), cherry-picking, or using conspiracy theories. More generally, trust in climate science itself is becoming a major target through attacks on the reputations of scientists or accusations of manipulation and fraud by scientific institutions. In addition, the frequency of activities aimed at discrediting possible solutions (particularly discrediting renewable energy) has increased. This branch of denial is growing in importance as the impacts of climate change become more apparent, but also as low-carbon alternatives become more viable.

**Figure 1: The five main types of science denial and their classification: fake experts, logical fallacies, impossible expectations, cherry-picking, and conspiracy theories**



**Source:** John Cook, "A history of FLICC: the 5 techniques of science denial"<sup>60</sup>

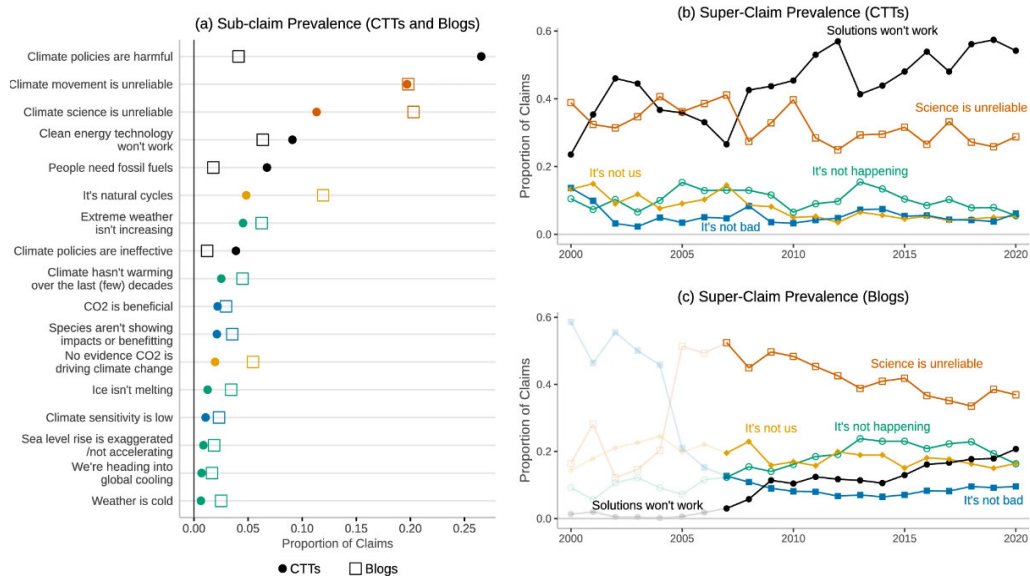
<sup>58</sup> Mark Bowen, *Censoring Science: Inside the Political Attack on Dr. James Hansen and the Truth of Global Warming*, 1st print (New York, NY: Dutton, 2008).

<sup>59</sup> Emily M. Eaton and Nick A. Day, "Petro-Pedagogy: Fossil Fuel Interests and the Obstruction of Climate Justice in Public Education," *Environmental Education Research* 26, No. 4 (April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2020): 457–73, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2019.1650164>.

<sup>60</sup> John Cook, "A history of FLICC: the 5 techniques of science denial", *Skeptical Science*, 2020, <https://skepticalscience.com/history-FLICC-5-techniques-science-denial.html>.



**Figure 2: The evolution of arguments denying the severity or existence of climate change over the last twenty years among conservative think tanks and internet blogs**



**Source:** Travis G. Coan et al., “Computer-Assisted Classification of Contrarian Claims about Climate Change”<sup>61</sup>

## 2.3 Dissemination of doubts

However, social science has also demonstrated that, over several decades, climate science denial has taken on a strong ideological dimension that was not originally so strong. The reach of the above-mentioned purpose-built pseudo-scientific organisations has increased over time through ideologically motivated groups, especially those allied with the promotion of neo-liberal<sup>62</sup> and conservative<sup>63</sup> ideologies. This phenomenon seems to be linked to the opposition of these groups to environmental regulations since the 1960s when a new wave of the environmental movement responded to growing concerns about pollution, the health effects of toxic substances, inadequate regulation and the destruction of natural resources. The first Earth Day, held in 1970, was attended by 20 million people in the US alone, and its rapid rise in popularity, but also its partial coincidence with the radical protests of anti-war activists against the Vietnam War or the psychedelic and sexual revolution of the hippie movement, led some in US industrial and business circles to fear a further radicalisation of the new social movements.

These groups feared that demands for environmental protection would lead to market restrictions or the rise of an authoritarian society or even a totalitarian state.<sup>64</sup> Therefore, they began to get more involved in organising movements against state

<sup>61</sup> Travis G. Coan et al., „Computer-Assisted Classification of Contrarian Claims about Climate Change”, Scientific Reports 11, č. 1 (16. listopad 2021): 2045–2322, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-021-01714-4>.

<sup>62</sup> Anders Fremstad and Mark Paul, “Neoliberalism and Climate Change: How the Free-Market Myth Has Prevented Climate Action,” Ecological Economics 197 (July 2022): 107353, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2022.107353>.

<sup>63</sup> Riley E. Dunlap and Peter J. Jacques, “Climate change denial books and conservative think tanks: exploring the connection,” American Behavioral Scientist 57, No. 6 (2013): 699–731.

<sup>64</sup> “Memorandum: Attack On American Free Enterprise System | Lewis F. Powell Jr. Papers,” Washington and Lee University School of Law, <https://scholarlycommons.law.wlu.edu/powellmemo/>.



regulation.<sup>65</sup> This coincided with the rise of the so-called New Right (supported by new conservative and neoliberal think tanks)<sup>66</sup> with a strongly anti-environmental agenda,<sup>67</sup> which later became the basis for denying climate science.<sup>68</sup>

The success of such projects contributed to neoliberalism's emergence as the West's hegemonic economic policy in the late 1980s. This was the beginning of the era of limiting the state as an active player in setting the rules for big business, controlling it and ensuring redistribution from rich to poor, essentially the post-war mainstream.<sup>69</sup> As part of this shift, environmental concerns were reframed as issues of choice, market regulation and interference with property rights. According to these ideological precepts, almost any regulation was harmful because the abstract 'free market' was essentially the ideal (or only operational) device capable of allocating resources and funds efficiently. According to this theory, unregulated businesses will take care of environmental concerns independently, without government intervention. However, the ideological motive has been central to the climate science denial scene from the beginning, as Naomi Oreskes has described using the examples of climate science doubters Frederick Seitz, Fred Singer and William Nierenberg.<sup>70</sup>

While it is evident that over-regulation brings with it many negative consequences, the fundamentalist preference for property rights overlooks the difficulties of the current economic model in incorporating unintended costs into valuation. In fact, this creates a market failure effect (so-called negative externalities), where simple economic calculation gives irrational signals<sup>71</sup> in the long run and market solutions are implemented based on meaningless input data. Many solutions attempting to remedy this are then blocked for purely ideological reasons. These ideological actors include the world's most prominent climate change denial think tanks, such as the Cato Institute, the Heartland Institute, the Heritage Foundation and the American Enterprise Institute. Many are affiliated with the Atlas Network, a network of more than 500 think tanks that includes the most influential organisations denying climate science for political-ideological reasons.<sup>72</sup>

---

<sup>65</sup> Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway, *The Big Myth: How American Business Taught Us to Loathe Government and Love the Free Market* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2023).

<sup>66</sup> DeSmog, "Atlas Network," DeSmog, December 26<sup>th</sup>, 2022, <https://www.desmog.com/atlas-economic-research-foundation/>.

<sup>67</sup> Mark C.J. Stoddart, David Tindall, a Riley E. Dunlap, "The contours of anti-environmentalism: an introduction to the Handbook of Anti-Environmentalism," *Handbook of Anti-Environmentalism*, ed. David Tindall, Mark C.J. Stoddart, and Riley E. Dunlap (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781839100222.00007>.

<sup>68</sup> Robert J. Brulle and Melissa Aronczyk, "Environmental Countermovements. Organized Opposition to Climate Change Action in the United States," *Routledge Handbook of Global Sustainability Governance* (London: Routledge, 2020).

<sup>69</sup> Gary Gerstle, *The rise and fall of the neoliberal order: America and the world in the free market era* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2022); David Cipler and J. Timmons Roberts, "Climate Change and the Transition to Neoliberal Environmental Governance," *Global Environmental Change* 46 (September 2017): 148–56, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2017.09.003>.

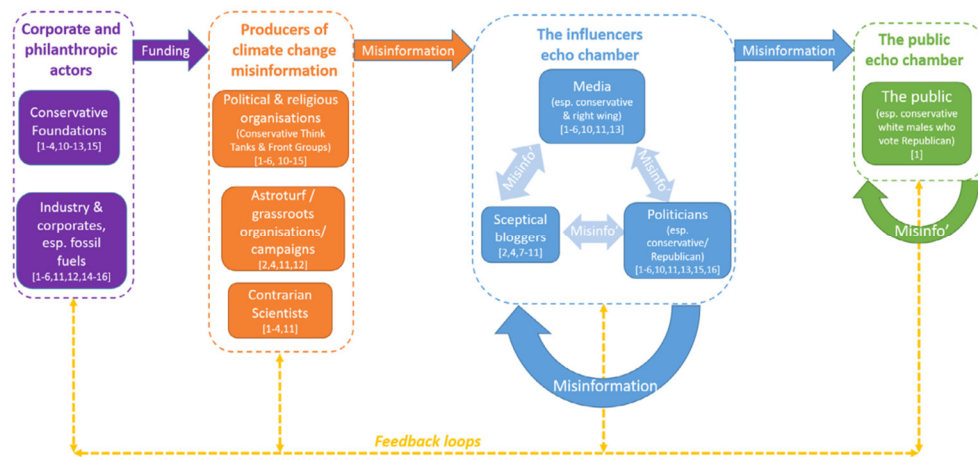
<sup>70</sup> Jodi Heckel, "Science historian Naomi Oreskes to talk about how free market ideology blocks climate action," University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, <https://news.illinois.edu/view/6367/1092374985>.

<sup>71</sup> Alex Bowen, Simon Dietz, and Naomi Hicks, "Why Do Economists Describe Climate Change as a Market Failure?" Grantham Research Institute on climate change and the environment, <https://www.lse.ac.uk/granthaminstitute/explainers/why-do-economists-describe-climate-change-as-a-market-failure/>.

<sup>72</sup> DeSmog, "Atlas Network," DeSmog, <https://www.desmog.com/atlas-economic-research-foundation/>.



Figure 3: Climate misinformation network



**Sourcej:** Kathie M. d'I. Treen, Hywel T. P. Williams, a Saffron J. O'Neill, "Online Misinformation about Climate Change"<sup>73</sup>

## 2.4 Current situation in the Czech Republic

The centre and beginning of the organised denial of climate science was primarily in the USA, and most of the text so far has dealt with this. After 1989, the denial of the seriousness of climate change reached Europe and the Czech Republic with some delay.<sup>74</sup> It was introduced into the Czech Republic primarily in connection with the anti-environmental agenda of conservative and neo-liberal organisations that began to emerge, following the example of US think tanks. As in the US, the primary source of climate science denial is published by neoliberal and conservative organisations - such as the Civic Institute, the Liberal Institute and especially the Václav Klaus Centre for Economics and Politics. However, the local context is characterised by a legacy of over-regulation and the ossification of an oversized, inefficient state apparatus. The neoliberal dogma of state incompetence was, therefore, a breeding ground. Publications and opinions denying the findings of climate science were, therefore, the first to be disseminated through these bodies. On this ideological basis, the broader climate science denial movement later took shape.

<sup>73</sup> Kathie M. d'I. Treen, Hywel T. P. Williams, a Saffron J. O'Neill, "Online Misinformation about Climate Change", WIREs Climate Change 11, č. 5 (září 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.665>.

<sup>74</sup> gPetr Vidomus, Oteplí se a bude líp: Česká klimaskepse v čase globálních rizik, 1<sup>st</sup> edition (Prague: Sociologické Nakladatelství (SLON), 2018); Núria Almiron et al., "Dominant Counter-Frames in Influential Climate Contrarian European Think Tanks," Climatic Change 162, No. 4 (October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020): 2003–20, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-020-02820-4>; Kristoffer Ekberg and Victor Pressfeldt, "A Road to Denial: Climate Change and Neoliberal Thought in Sweden, 1988–2000," Contemporary European History 31, No. 4 (November 2022): 627–44, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S096077732200025X>.



### Verification of climate change information

There is no easy way to verify disputed information. However, there are now reasonably extensive databases tracking the myths, manipulations and hoaxes frequently repeated in the climate debate.

The information environment, a conceptual distinction between different types of misinformation, is described in an article in *Skeptical Science*.<sup>75</sup> The *Skeptical Science* website also offers an extensive database of controversial arguments in the climate debate, along with a survey of the academic literature summarising their relevance.<sup>76</sup> The project, founded by cognitive psychologist John Cook, summarises the results in a short abstract and a more detailed summary. Additional information can often be gleaned from the lively discussion below the paper.

For an overview of the most common manipulation techniques, see John Cook and Haydn Washington's book *Climate Change Denial*.<sup>77</sup> There are also comprehensive classifications of the main disinformation arguments and the evolution of the main lines of argument over time.<sup>78</sup>

The heavy dependence of the Czech economy on fossil fuels, combined with high cumulative emissions, has put the Czech Republic in a difficult situation. Indeed, all indicators show that the Czech Republic is currently and historically a significant emitter of greenhouse gases relative to its size. Decarbonisation is still a major challenge that no political or economic actor has dared to face.

Throughout the 1990s, climate change was a marginal issue in the Czech Republic. In 2004, however, the Czech Republic joined the EU, which had already begun introducing measures to limit fossil fuel use and had a relatively clear long-term vision for phasing them out. In the same year that the Kyoto Protocol came into force, emissions in the Czech Republic stopped falling after a significant decline in the 1990s. As the reality of international commitments to limit greenhouse gases began to catch up with the Czech Republic, we saw a surge in activities denying the seriousness of climate change.<sup>79</sup> Given that one of the main initiators of climate policy is the European Union, it is not too surprising that denial of climate science often overlaps with so-called Euroscepticism (or outright opposition to EU policy as such). Somewhat paradoxically, the issue of climate change was popularised for the general public by Václav Klaus's intense denial of the findings of climate science during his presidency. The path to denying climate science seems to have led through his neoliberal ideological fundamentalism,<sup>80</sup> which tends to ignore free market failures and negative externalities. The long-standing failure of market actors to respond to the climate crisis has created a dilemma for neoliberal dogmatists, and a common solution to this dilemma is to try to deny its existence.

Nevertheless, Klaus sought support for his anti-climate stance from several fossil fuel industry-backed organisations, which he joined after 1989 and began

<sup>75</sup> Cook, "A history of FLICC: the 5 techniques of science denial."

<sup>76</sup> "Global Warming and Climate Change skepticism examined," *Skeptical Science*, <https://skepticalscience.com/>.

<sup>77</sup> Haydn Washington and John Cook, *Climate change denial: heads in the sand* (London: Earthscan, 2011).

<sup>78</sup> Travis G. Coan et al., "Computer-Assisted Classification of Contrarian Claims about Climate Change," *Scientific Reports* 11, No. 1 (November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2021): 2045–2322, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-021-01714-4>.

<sup>79</sup> Ekberg a Pressfeldt, "A Road to Denial."

<sup>80</sup> Vendula Kochanová, "Globální změna klimatu optikou českých printových médií" (Masarykova univerzita, Fakulta sociálních studií, 2009).



attending their conferences.<sup>81</sup> In the 1990s, for example, he joined the Mt. Pelerin Society, an organisation that brings together economists, philosophers and politicians to promote and defend neoliberal ideology, including world-renowned climate science deniers<sup>82</sup> such as fossil fuel magnate Charles Koch.

Despite lacking any expertise on the climate issue, Klaus has made it one of the axes of his presidency. Throughout his presidency, he has invited experts paid by lobby groups to sow doubt about the science. He has screened doctored documentaries,<sup>83</sup> translated books<sup>84</sup> funded by the fossil fuel lobby and, finally, he has often spoken and written books<sup>85</sup> that refer to these sources. Klaus has become the most quoted figure in the Czech Republic on climate change in general and has somewhat shaped the climate discourse.<sup>86</sup>

It should also be mentioned that Václav Klaus has both family and personal ties to the fossil fuel industry – Jan Klaus, his son and co-founder of the Václav Klaus Institute, is the head of ČEZ,<sup>87</sup> the largest owner of fossil fuel resources in the Czech Republic. The multinational PPF Group, founded by Czech businessman Petr Kellner, is the Institute's almost exclusive sponsor. PPF's business success was driven by its investment in fossil fuel giant Gazprom,<sup>88</sup> and its focus on Russia made it one of the largest foreign investors in Russia in 2010.<sup>89</sup> PPF later founded Energetický průmyslový holding (EPH) with J&T Bank and Daniel Křetínský, while ČEZ sold part of its coal portfolio to Pavel Tykač. At the time, however, entering the coal industry was a de facto safe bet for bankruptcy or at least a slowdown in decarbonisation efforts. In the case of Daniel Křetínský's EPH, this bet paid off<sup>90</sup> handsomely to the extent that it rose to become one of the major players in the European energy sector.<sup>91</sup> However, there is evidence that these actors have also acted against their own interests by influencing the public debate through activities denying climate science findings. While Daniel Křetínský has bought up much of the media, including prominent titles that deny climate science, the entities that create PR for Pavel

<sup>81</sup> CEP, "CEP / semináře / 10.10.2007: Global Warming: Man-Made or Natural?", Centrum pro ekonomiku a politiku, 10 2007, <http://cepin.cz/cze/pozvanka.php?ID=116>.

<sup>82</sup> Graham Readfearn, "Exclusive: Mont Pelerin Society Revealed As Home To Leading Pushers Of Climate Science Denial", DeSmog, 16. leden 2014, <https://www.desmog.com/2014/01/15/exclusive-mont-pelerin-society-revealed-home-leading-pushers-climate-science-denial/>.

<sup>83</sup> "Klaus uvedl film popírače klimatických změn | Domov", Lidovky.cz, June 58<sup>th</sup>, 2007, [https://www.lidovky.cz/domov/klaus-uvedl-film-popirace-klimatickych-zmen.A070628\\_194330\\_In\\_domov\\_fho](https://www.lidovky.cz/domov/klaus-uvedl-film-popirace-klimatickych-zmen.A070628_194330_In_domov_fho).

<sup>84</sup> National Center for Policy Analysis, "Globální oteplování - fakta místo mýtů," Centrum pro ekonomiku a politiku, 2007, <http://cepin.cz/cze/kniha.php?ID=83>.

<sup>85</sup> Václav Klaus, Modrá, nikoli zelená planeta: Co je ohroženo: klima, nebo nsvoboda?, 1<sup>st</sup> edition (Praha: Dokořán, 2007).

<sup>86</sup> Kochanová, "Globální změna klimatu optikou českých printových médií".

<sup>87</sup> "Klausův mladší syn získá nový manažerský post v ČEZ," TÝDEN.cz, January 26<sup>th</sup>, 2012, [https://www.tyden.cz/rubriky/byznys/klausuv-mladsi-syn-ziska-novy-manazersky-post-v-cez\\_223670.html](https://www.tyden.cz/rubriky/byznys/klausuv-mladsi-syn-ziska-novy-manazersky-post-v-cez_223670.html).

<sup>88</sup> Leoš Rousek, "Jak Kellnerova PPF k bilionovému majetku přišla. Cesta vedla v divokých 90. letech přes Rusko a akcie Gazpromu," Hospodářské noviny (HN.cz), August 11<sup>th</sup>, 2018, <https://byznys.hn.cz/c1-66214580-jak-kellnerova-ppf-k-bilionovemu-majetku-prisla-cesta-vedla-v-divokych-90-letech-pres-rusko-a-akcie-gazpromu>.

<sup>89</sup> "PPF patří v Rusku k největším investorům ze zahraničí," Hospodářské noviny (HN.cz), February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2010, <https://hn.cz/c1-40296990-ppf-patri-v-rusku-k-nejvetsim-investorum-ze-zahranici>.

<sup>90</sup> David Tramba, "Miliardy místo milionů. Křetínský a PPF zaúčtovali německé uhlí," Euro.cz, August 18<sup>th</sup>, 2017, <https://www.euro.cz/clanky/miliardy-misto-milionu-kretinsky-a-ppf-zauctovali-nemecke-uhli-1366765/>.

<sup>91</sup> Filip Černoč, Jan Osíčka, and Sebastián Mariňák, "The "Coal Villain" of the European Union? Path Dependence, Profiteering and the Role of the Energetický a Průmyslový Holding (EPH) Company in the Energy Transition," Energy Research & Social Science 76 (June 2021): 102066, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2021.102066>.



Tykač's Seven have, in turn, placed fake profiles online that have spoken out against efforts to reduce emissions, discredited environmental activism, and so on.<sup>92</sup>

### 3 Climate conspiracies in the Czech Republic and Russia's influence

In recent years, the conspiracy scene has also taken up the climate issue more aggressively.<sup>93</sup> The fictional conspiracy genre is quite old and can be found in almost every society. In modern society, such conspiracies are mainly (but not exclusively) associated with the far right and anti-Semitism, as anti-Semitic conspiracy theories played a central role in the ideology of Nazi Germany, leading to the tragedy of the Holocaust. However, they are often used as a popular "political instrument" to mobilise constituencies and create a collective sense of belonging. The co-optation of climate change into various conspiracy theories takes many (often mutually exclusive) forms. In these theories, climate science usually plays the role of a corrupt servant of politics, designed to scare the population into submission.

Conspiracy theories claim that international organisations such as the UN, the World Economic Forum (WEF) and many others are trying to impose global governance. According to the theory, these organisations are influenced by even more sinister groups (Satanists, Globalists, Communists, Illuminati, Jews, or even Reptilians – alien shape-shifters from Alpha Draconis<sup>94</sup> who can take human form and live among humans).<sup>95</sup> Even today, you can find statements that climate change is a "hoax". Most popular worldwide is the QAnon conspiracy theory, which claims that the world is controlled by a Satanic-paedophile cabal that Donald Trump has come to overthrow. Part of the QAnon theory is the claim that a period of mass executions of political opponents will follow the victory of the pro-Trump forces (an event mythologically referred to as "The Storm"). The conspiracy milieu is, to some extent, intertwined with religious fundamentalist communities, which see the curbing of emissions as an attempt to interfere with God's plan or the activities of Satan himself.<sup>96</sup>

The rise in the popularity of fabricated conspiracy theories is global and also manifests itself in the Czech Republic,<sup>97</sup> although its growing popularity is primarily linked to the activities of pro-Russian websites, projects and media. In the Russian political environment, conspiracy theories have always played a pivotal role. They gained extraordinary popularity in the post-Soviet period because they could explain the sudden collapse of the USSR and the subsequent economic decline in the 1990s.<sup>98</sup> The collapse of the USSR is explained as a Western-led conspiracy to dominate Russia, and climate policy is said to have been instrumental in this since Russia's prosperity has long been linked to fossil fuel exports (revenues from fossil fuel

---

<sup>92</sup> Lukáš Hrábek, "Lukáš Hrábek: Falešné profily a nenávislné komentáře. Uhlobaron Tykač manipuluje propagandou," *Deník Referendum*, April 27<sup>th</sup>, 2017, <https://denikreferendum.cz/clanek/25143-falesne-profil-y-a-nenavistne-komentare-uhlobaron-tykac-manipuluje-propagandou>.

<sup>93</sup> Kim-Pong Tam and Hoi-Wing Chan, "Conspiracy Theories and Climate Change: A Systematic Review," *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 91 (November 2023): 102129, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2023.102129>.

<sup>94</sup> Joy Pan, "The World Is Controlled by a Group of Elite Reptiles," *The Psychology of Extraordinary Beliefs – The Ohio State University*, 2018, <https://u.osu.edu/vanzandt/2018/04/18/the-world-is-controlled-by-a-group-of-elite-reptiles/comment-page-1/>.

<sup>95</sup> Ekberg et al., *Climate Obstruction*.

<sup>96</sup> Aaron Ricker, "Crisis, Conspiracy, and Community in Evangelical Climate Denial," *Journal of the Council for Research on Religion* 2, č. 1 (December 30<sup>th</sup>, 2020): 72–91, <https://doi.org/10.26443/jcreor.v2i1.39>.

<sup>97</sup> Patrik Urban, "Dezinformacím se v Česku daří. Proruské internetové zpravodajství ovládá pár hráčů, dohromady se vyrovnají největším serverům v zemi," *Hospodářské noviny (HN.cz)*, February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2019, <https://domaci.hn.cz/c7-66477660-pi409-650e11328b39901>.

<sup>98</sup> Ilya Yablokov, *Fortress Russia: conspiracy theories in post-Soviet Russia* (Cambridge, UK ; Medford, MA: Polity, 2018).



exports have accounted for around one-fifth of one per cent of GDP and almost half of state budget revenues over the long term).

Indeed, with Vladimir Putin's rise to power, Russia has become much more proactive in projecting its international image. These efforts were significantly intensified following the pro-Western "colour revolutions" in the post-Soviet space, the massive protests by the Russian (mainly liberal) public between 2011 and 2013 against the curtailment of civil rights and suspicions of electoral fraud in Vladimir Putin's re-election as president. At the time, the Russian establishment was experiencing a significant loss of ideological support for its power interests in neighbouring states and among its own population.<sup>99</sup> Conspiracy theories were, therefore, used primarily as a political power strategy in domestic and foreign policy struggles. They serve to maintain support for the ruling elites, explain Russian society's problems, and discredit political opponents.<sup>100</sup>

The need to actively shape Russia's image abroad was mentioned by Vladimir Putin soon after he became president. Gradually, many organisations - from think tanks<sup>101</sup> to media projects - have emerged, forming a vast network of entities that influence the public in line with Russian interests.<sup>102</sup> In 2005, Russia Today (later RT) was created to steer the flow of information in Russia's favour. Aimed primarily at foreign audiences, RT has built its brand on reporting what the Western media 'cannot' talk about. However, its efforts have also systematically disseminated fabricated conspiracy theories.<sup>103</sup> After 2010, Russian activity in the international information space continued to grow, and its imprint began to appear in the Czech Republic. Virtually all media and political entities that have supported Russia's positions over the years have, to some extent, denied the gravity of climate change.

Although Russia economically depends on fossil fuel exports,<sup>104</sup> it also uses them as a geopolitical tool to maintain its international influence. At the same time, the country still has no credible plan to decarbonise its economy, its dependence on fossil fuels has increased significantly over time, and it sees the world's transition to low-carbon energy as an imminent threat.<sup>105</sup> Russia's catastrophic decline in the 1990s, coupled with the low price of fossil fuels on world markets, is still vividly remembered. In terms of fossil fuel infrastructure, decarbonisation by 2050, which the EU and many countries have committed to, is very close.<sup>106</sup>

In addition, some of the Russian public and experts have been convinced that Russia, in particular, will benefit from warming in ways that others will not (by reducing heating needs, extending the growing season, opening the Arctic sea route). Although more recent studies have shown that the risks of climate change to Russia

---

<sup>99</sup> Tynkkynen and Tynkkynen, "Climate Denial Revisited".

<sup>100</sup> Ilya Yablokov, "Conspiracy Theories as a Russian Public Diplomacy Tool: The Case of Russia Today (RT)", *Politics* 35, No. 3-4 (November 2015): 301-15, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9256.12097>.

<sup>101</sup> Dmitry Efremenko, Anastasia Ponamareva, and Yury Nikulichev, "Russia's Semi-Soft Power", *World Affairs: The Journal of International Issues* 25, No. 1 (2021): 100-121.

<sup>102</sup> Marlene Laruelle and Kevin Limonier, "Beyond 'Hybrid Warfare': A Digital Exploration of Russia's Entrepreneurs of Influence", *Post-Soviet Affairs* 37, No. 4 (July 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021): 318-35, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2021.1936409>.

<sup>103</sup> Yablokov, "Conspiracy Theories as a Russian Public Diplomacy Tool," Ilya Yablokov and Precious N. Chatterje-Doodly, *Russia Today and Conspiracy Theories: People, Power and Politics on RT, Conspiracy Theories* (London: Routledge, 2022).

<sup>104</sup> Sergei Ermolaev, "The Formation and Evolution of the Soviet Union's Oil and Gas Dependence," Carnegie Endowment for International PeaceT, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2017/03/29/formation-and-evolution-of-soviet-union-s-oil-and-gas-dependence-pub-68443>.

<sup>105</sup> Jils van den Beukel and Lucia van Geuns, "Russia's Unsustainable Business Model: Going All In on Oil and Gas," The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, 2021, <https://hcss.nl/report/russias-unsustainable-business-model/>.

<sup>106</sup> Rosemary Griffin, "30 Years on: How the Collapse of the Soviet Union Transformed Russia into a Global Oil and Gas Powerhouse," S&P Global, August 25<sup>th</sup>, 2021, <https://www.spglobal.com/commodityinsights/en/market-insights/blogs/oil/o82521-russia-oil-gas-infrastructure-30-years>.



are significant, there has historically been a low level of awareness in scientific circles of the urgency of tackling climate change.<sup>107</sup> All of these influences have combined to make denial of the seriousness of climate change a long-standing and entrenched practice in the Russian Federation.<sup>108</sup>

In the Czech Republic, the rise in popularity of unfounded conspiracy theories is linked to the takeover of *Parlamentní listy* by Michal Voráček (a media entrepreneur close to Miloš Zeman). As a result, *Parlamentní listy* was transformed into a scandal-mongering media outlet with minimal editorial costs. As part of its transformation, it also began to host most of the major conspiracy projects (*Protiproud/Countercurrent*, *Freeglobe*, *Eurabia*) on its website, often with anti-Semitic themes. Some of the authors involved in these sites (Adam B. Bartoš, Ladislav Zemánek or Vladimír Stwora) have been convicted of anti-Semitic propaganda or Holocaust denial. All these websites clearly show the imprint of Russian propaganda and significant overlap with entities on the far-right of the political spectrum, whose activities have long been supported by Russia across Europe to reinforce internal divisions.<sup>109</sup> The far-right has appropriated the issue of climate change denial over the past decade, especially given the growing popularity of conspiracy theories.

Václav Klaus and his entourage have also played a role in this movement. His close associate Petr Hájek started his conspiracy project *Countercurrent* (*Protiproud*) in *Parlamentní listy*, and the Institute of Václav Klaus was mentioned unusually often by *Parlamentní listy*.<sup>110</sup> It is also worth mentioning that Klaus's benefactor, Petr Kellner, was catapulted to the position of the world's business elite by his expansion into Russia and that Václav Klaus, like his successor Miloš Zeman, attended the Rhodes Forum organised by Vladimir Yakunin, a Russian oligarch and close associate of Vladimir Putin, a former KGB agent and head of the Department of State Politics at the Faculty of Political Science of the Lomonosov Moscow State University.<sup>111</sup> The Rhodes Forum appears to be instrumental in influencing selected figures in world politics and business in favour of Russia.<sup>112</sup> Klaus also became a member of the board of directors of Yakunin's think-tank, *Dialogue of Civilisations*,<sup>113</sup> and the Russian translation of his book *Blue Not Green Planet* was paid for by Russian fossil fuel giant Lukoil.<sup>114</sup>

In particular, Klaus and his associates have been instrumental in introducing conspiracy theories<sup>115</sup> into the Czech environment that are more characteristic of the

---

<sup>107</sup> Spencer R. Weart, "Interview of Mikhail Budyko by Spencer Weart," American Institute of Physics, January 9<sup>th</sup>, 2015, <https://www.aip.org/history-programs/niels-bohr-library/oral-histories/31675>; Katja Doose, "A Global Problem in a Divided World: Climate Change Research during the Late Cold War, 1972–1991," *Cold War History* 21, No. 4 (October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2021): 469–89, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14682745.2021.1885377>; Katja Doose, "Modelling the Future: Climate Change Research in Russia during the Late Cold War and beyond, 1970s–2000," *Climatic Change* 171, No. 1–2 (March 2022): 6, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-022-03315-0>.

<sup>108</sup> Teresa Ashe and Marianna Poberezhskaya, "Russian Climate Scepticism: An Understudied Case," *Climatic Change* 172, No. 3–4 (June 2022): 41, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-022-03390-3>.

<sup>109</sup> Beatrix Futák-Campbell, "Political Synergy: How the European Far-Right and Russia Have Joined Forces Against Brussels," *Atlantisch Perspectief* 44, No. 1 (2020): 30–35.

<sup>110</sup> Jiří Liebreich, "Institut Václava Klause těží z podpory PPF a Parlamentních listů," *E15*, June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2023, <https://www.e15.cz/domaci/institut-vaclava-klause-ziskal-vice-daru-tezi-z-podpory-ppf-a-zajmu-parlamentnich-listu-1399230>.

<sup>111</sup> "Yakunin Vladimir Ivanovich," Faculty of Political Science, Lomonosov Moscow State University, <https://polit.msu.ru/teachers/yakunin/>.

<sup>112</sup> Laruelle a Limonier, "Beyond "Hybrid Warfare"".

<sup>113</sup> "Princess Gloria von Thurn Und Taxis Joins DOC Research Institute Board," *Business Insider*, 2017, <https://markets.businessinsider.com/news/stocks/princess-gloria-von-thurn-und-taxis-joins-doc-research-institute-board-1002131141>.

<sup>114</sup> "Překlad Klausovy kontroverzní knihy zaplatil ruský ropný koncern," *iDNES.cz*, August 19<sup>th</sup>, 2008, [https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/preklad-klausovy-kontroverzni-knihy-zaplatil-rusky-ropny-koncern.Ao8o819\\_111325\\_domaci\\_ipl](https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/preklad-klausovy-kontroverzni-knihy-zaplatil-rusky-ropny-koncern.Ao8o819_111325_domaci_ipl).

<sup>115</sup> Štěpánka Saadouni, "Václav Klaus: Dělat kolem globálního oteplení hysterii je výhodný byznys," *Deník.cz*, November 9<sup>th</sup>, 2017, <https://www.denik.cz/regiony/vaclav-klaus-je-dulezite-mit-perspektivu-v-prostoru-a-case-20171109.html>.



far-right. Many of his associates have long been on the fringes of the far right. For example, his former press spokesman and associate, Petr Hájek, gradually became a prominent figure in the conspiracy scene, collaborating with and supporting anti-Semitic political entities.<sup>116</sup> As a result, he became more and more an actor in Russian propaganda. At the same time, on his server Countercurrent (Protiproud), Hájek has labelled Marxist projects such as the theory of evolution,<sup>117</sup> medical research proving the harmful effects of smoking<sup>118</sup> or vaccination, and regularly rails against the alleged satanic conspiracy of global elites, which is said to include deception about climate change. While Hájek's media projects have a broad reach, they have long been commercially unviable<sup>119</sup> – and apparently funded by Russia.<sup>120</sup>

The disinformation scene of pro-Russian servers in the Czech Republic includes dozens of media projects and together reaches several million people. Thus, it can easily compete with the largest mainstream news sites.<sup>121</sup>

## Conclusion

Currently, the information space on climate change is highly contested, and it is difficult to distinguish legitimate claims from manipulated or fraudulent sources. Interest groups seeking to slow down climate policy actively shape the information space. They systematically undermine public trust in climate science, its representatives and the scientific institutions themselves, using discrediting practices and information operations. As a result, we have witnessed many negative consequences, such as a reduction in the ability to obtain truthful climate information, polarisation of the public, the creation of fabricated conspiracy theories and cultural conflicts, a weakening of communication between the scientific community and the public, and a lack of reliable information.

These circumstances create an ambiguous environment for policy-makers, experts, professionals, and civil servants to determine what is and what is not relevant scientific evidence. The public is, therefore, unable to distinguish between genuine polemics in scientific discourse and fabricated proxy polemics, partly because it requires a certain level of expertise in the subject matter to discern the difference. At the same time, public institutions have failed to respond adequately to the mass of misleading information.

In turn, the incoherence of the climate debate has led to an inability to rely on relevant and robust sources of information, ultimately leading to an inability to plan for the long term and make informed strategic decisions. The result is ineffective policies, a suffering economy, misused resources, and a threat to political and economic stability. Our national security is also threatened in the medium term.

The climate debate is a challenging area of information to navigate because it is cluttered by various entities with a vested interest in obfuscating it. Currently, the

---

<sup>116</sup> “Bartoše a Zemánka odsoudil soud za antisemitské výroky u hrobu Anežky Hružové | Domov,” Lidovky.cz, March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2016, [https://www.lidovky.cz/domov/bartose-a-zemanka-odsoudil-soud-za-antisemitske-vyroky-u-hrobu-anezky-hruzove.A160316\\_165056\\_ln\\_domov\\_ELE](https://www.lidovky.cz/domov/bartose-a-zemanka-odsoudil-soud-za-antisemitske-vyroky-u-hrobu-anezky-hruzove.A160316_165056_ln_domov_ELE).

<sup>117</sup> Petr Hájek, “Opíčí proces naruby a po našem | Domov,” Lidovky.cz, May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2009, [https://www.lidovky.cz/domov/opici-proces-naruby-a-po-nasem.A090523\\_000101\\_ln\\_noviny\\_sko](https://www.lidovky.cz/domov/opici-proces-naruby-a-po-nasem.A090523_000101_ln_noviny_sko).

<sup>118</sup> Petr Hájek, “Boj proti kouření je boj proti svobodě,” iDNES.cz, February 12<sup>th</sup>, 2007, [https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/boj-proti-koureni-je-boj-proti-svobode.A070212\\_110926\\_nazory\\_rez](https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/boj-proti-koureni-je-boj-proti-svobode.A070212_110926_nazory_rez).

<sup>119</sup> Lukáš Valášek and Adéla Jelínková, „Hájek měl v účetnictví „chaos a bordel“. Dotovala ho firma s vazbami na putinovce”, Seznam Zprávy, May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2023, <https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/clanek/domaci-kauzy-exmluvci-klaus-e-siril-propagandu-za-penize-firmy-napojene-na-ruskou-banku-230329>.

<sup>120</sup> Lukáš Valášek and Adéla Jelínková, “Klausův exmluvčí šířil dezinformace na dluh. Investovala mladá Běloruska,” Aktuálně.cz, May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2022, <https://zpravy.aktualne.cz/domaci/klausuv-exmluvci-sireni-dezinformaci/r-5fbdadoeca2311ecabo10cc47ab5f122/>.

<sup>121</sup> Urban, “Dezinformacím se v Česku daří. Proruské internetové zpravodajství ovládá pár hráčů, dohromady se vyrovnají největším serverům v zemi”.



fossil fuel industry and its involvement in climate misinformation is already the subject of numerous lawsuits around the world.<sup>122</sup> Unfortunately, as the experience of the tobacco industry's disinformation practices shows, it can take decades for conclusive evidence to emerge.

Meanwhile, the amount of fossil fuel we can still afford to use to avoid reaching a state of dangerous climate destabilisation is diminishing, in terms of units of years.<sup>123</sup> This leaves the world in a position where we must either pursue increasingly costly and extreme solutions to reduce emissions or accept an increasingly dangerous and costly world of climate destabilisation.

In this context, it is particularly disheartening to realise that when climate negotiations began in the late 1980s, there was relatively ample time to find solutions. Sadly, that time has been wasted. Organised campaigns to deny climate science bear the lion's share of the blame.

---

<sup>122</sup> „Global Trends in Climate Change Litigation: 2023 Snapshot”, Grantham Research Institute on climate change and the environment, 2023, <https://www.lse.ac.uk/granthaminstitute/publication/global-trends-in-climate-change-litigation-2023-snapshot/>.

<sup>123</sup> Piers Forster et al., „Guest post: What the tiny remaining 1.5C carbon budget means for climate policy”, Carbon Brief, 11. listopad 2022, <https://www.carbonbrief.org/guest-post-what-the-tiny-remaining-1-5c-carbon-budget-means-for-climate-policy/>.



## Association for International Affairs (AMO)

AMO is a non-governmental not-for-profit Prague-based organization founded in 1997. Its main aim is to promote research and education in the field of international relations. AMO facilitates the expression and realization of ideas, thoughts, and projects in order to increase education, mutual understanding, and tolerance among people.



+420 224 813 460



[www.amo.cz](http://www.amo.cz)



[info@amo.cz](mailto:info@amo.cz)



Žitná 608/27, 110 00 Praha 1



[www.facebook.com/AMO.cz](https://www.facebook.com/AMO.cz)



[www.twitter.com/amo\\_cz](https://www.twitter.com/amo_cz)



[www.linkedin.com/company/amocz](https://www.linkedin.com/company/amocz)



[www.youtube.com/AMOCz](https://www.youtube.com/AMOCz)

---

## Vojtěch Pecka

Vojtěch Pecka is a climate analyst at AMO, focusing on the sociology of climate change denial. He holds a Master's degree in Theoretical Sociology from the Faculty of Social Sciences of Charles University in Prague. He has also worked as a columnist in the past, writing popularization texts on climate change and climate change denial for the A2alarm server. He is currently preparing a book on the climate-denial movement for publication. Outside of that, he also specializes in animation and data presentation and is an occasional editor and curator.



[vojtech.pecka@amo.cz](mailto:vojtech.pecka@amo.cz)

---

Peer-review: Vendula Kazlauskas