

# **Terrorist attack on Zámocká Street in Bratislava: Immediate and preventive activities aimed at illegal and harmful content**

Report on reactions  
of digital platforms  
to the attack and their  
part in radicalisation  
of the attacker

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In the evening of 12<sup>th</sup> October 2022, Zámocká Street in Bratislava witnessed the first terrorist attack on the territory of the Slovak Republic, claiming the lives of Matúš Horváth and Juraj Vankulič and leaving Radoslava Trokšiarová gravely injured. The attack was targeted at patrons of Tepláreň, a bar frequented predominantly by the LGBTI+ community. Several hours prior to the attack, the offender published a 65-pages-long document entitled “A Call to Arms” (hereinafter “manifesto”) on his Twitter profile, providing a detailed account of his racist, antisemitic and extremist motives underlying his actions.

Digital platforms played a significant role both before and after the attack. **The offender’s digital footprint clearly shows he had been radicalised via Internet.** He adopted and shared extremist ideology in anonymous discussion forums 4chan and 8chan, as well as on Twitter, Discord or Telegram. Immediately after the attack, digital platforms and hosting companies were faced with twin challenges: firstly, dealing with dissemination of terrorist content, and secondly, emerging hate speech and violent speech combined with posts and comments downplaying the gravity of the terrorist act. Immediately after the attack, based on its competences related to systematic oversight of dissemination of information online, the Council for Media Services (“CMS” or “regulator”) carried out a detailed mapping of information channels while promptly taking measures to reduce the negative impacts in the digital environment.

In relation to the brutal attack on Zámocká Street, the Council for Media Services identified **significant systematic gaps in content monitoring and moderation performed by digital platforms.** These gaps allow for dissemination of illegal and harmful content which poses **a grave threat to safety of individuals, groups and the national democratic governance in general.** An analysis of Twitter and 4chan showed that both platforms failed to moderate illegal content prior to the attack. Facebook and YouTube continue offering their users viral, but often potentially illegal and problematic content, in spite of the fact that CMS had repeatedly alerted them of this content. The platforms’ reactions to reporting of potentially illegal and harmful content is too slow, which proves to be a serious issue especially in emergencies. This also demonstrates the long-term inability of digital companies to implement their own community standards, particularly regarding hate speech and disinformation on the platforms.

Monitoring activities of the regulator detected 26 links enabling users to download the full manifesto or its selected sections. These links were found in ten content storage locations. CMS is awaiting statement in one case<sup>1</sup> while in another case the operator of the platform and the hosting service provider have both refused to remove the terrorist content. Consequently, CMS is currently discussing intervention options to prevent access to the content at issue with multiple partners. Although in many cases it has achieved the desired effect, due to the amount and nature of online content, it is currently impossible to monitor all digital platforms which might facilitate dissemination of potentially illegal content related to the attack on Zámocká Street in an efficient manner.

In the context of the findings, CMS sees systemic failures as the most serious problem of digital services providers. In this respect, the new European regulation – Digital Services Act (“DSA”), coming into effect on 17<sup>st</sup> February 2024, clearly states that in case of systematic or recurrent failures a fine may be imposed on a provider of intermediary services, amounting to up to six percent of its annual global turnover. **The Council for Media Services considers that technological companies should allocate adequate resources to enforcement of their own community standards for the Central and Eastern Europe regions as soon as possible, including both human resources and financial capital.** In the near future, digital platforms should tackle their low efficiency and slow pace of content moderation, as well as systematic barriers preventing them from reducing and removing illegal and harmful content in minority languages.

Simultaneously, digital companies should cooperate more closely to create common standards while considering opportunities for user and content migration between individual platforms. Furthermore, CMS considers systematic cross-sectoral interaction between digital service providers, regulators and law enforcement authorities to be of crucial importance. Slovakia should also make use of existing global and European mechanisms for tackling terrorist content online. An example worth mentioning is the so-called Crisis Response Protocol of the Christchurch Call initiative, signed, among others, by Slovakia, or issuing a removal order or disabling of access to the terrorist content by the service provider in all EU Member States under the Regulation (EU) 2021/784.

The terrorist act on Zámocká Street furthermore showed that **journalists often lack the knowledge and skills necessary to communicate terrorist acts to the general public in an ethically sound manner.** CMS therefore recommends Slovak media houses to strive to achieve a consensual formalisation of rules and standards of journalism in emergencies. For example, the journalist community could operate based on a self-regulatory mechanism implemented by means of a code governing behaviour in a specific area. Finally, prevention of further online radicalisation requires especially improvement of media literacy, digital skills and critical thinking, as well as a close cooperation between the governmental and non-profit sectors.

The Council for Media Services (before 1<sup>st</sup> August 2022: The Council for Broadcasting and Retransmission) is a Slovak national regulatory authority supervising compliance with legislation governing broadcasting, retransmission, provision of audio-visual on-demand services and content-sharing platforms. Its mission is to enforce the public interest and perform governmental regulation in selected areas, as well as to safeguard freedom of expression the right to information and the right of access to cultural values and education.<sup>2</sup>

Under the Act No. 264/2022 Coll. on Media Services, the Council for Media Services is empowered to prevent dissemination of illegal content and to cooperate with digital platforms in applying their community rules and standards in an efficient, proportional and non-discriminatory manner. CMS has powers in relation to systematic supervision and evaluation of proportionality of measures aimed at protecting the public implemented by digital platforms active in Slovakia. According to §151 of the Act on Media Services, illegal content refers to content qualifying as child pornography or extremist content, inciting to or approving of an act qualifying as any of the crimes of terrorism or qualifying as criminal offence of denial and condoning of the Holocaust, crimes of political regimes and crimes against humanity, criminal offence of insult of the State, race and belief or criminal offence of incitement to national, racial or ethnic hatred.

If CMS concludes that a digital platform contains potentially illegal content, in addition to regular mechanisms for reporting illegal and problematic content directly to the platforms, it has at its disposal escalation channels enabling it to report harmful content. The regulator acts on its own initiative, following a notice issued by of the government authorities or on a complaint of a natural/legal person submitted in writing or electronically.

Following the terrorist attack, the regulator has exercised the new competences conferred on it in August 2022 accordingly. Immediately after the act, CMS has launched monitoring of Facebook, Twitter, Telegram, YouTube and selected web portals. The monitoring detected several posts and comments violating community standards of the digital platforms, as well as public documents storage platforms containing the manifesto published by the attacker from Zámocká Street. In order to reduce dissemination of terrorist content and hate speech, CMS took measures in relation to all findings in scope of its legal competence.

Based on its powers of systematic supervision of information dissemination online, CMS proceeded to map digital platforms before and after the attack. The aim of this report is to clarify measures taken by the regulator immediately after the attack to eliminate serious consequences in the digital environment, as well as to draw attention to the negative effects of the terror attack on the situation on the digital platforms. Furthermore, the report analyses the role of digital platforms both prior and following the attack, reactions of the government, institutions, media, hosting services, as well as global and European mechanisms and initiatives aiming to eliminate harm in case of similar events. The conclusion contains recommendations for reducing risk of such tragic events happening again and for reducing negative consequences online.

# Terror attack on Zámocká Street in Bratislava

On 12<sup>th</sup> October 2022, shortly after 19.00, a 19-year old man from Bratislava shot two people – Matúš Horváth and Juraj Vankulič. He also injured Radoslava Trokšiarová, a bartender working in the bar in front of which the attack took place. The terror attack was targeted at patrons of Tepláreň, a bar frequented predominantly by the LGBTI+ community. The offender had spent several minutes near the bar, waiting for his victims, even though he did not know them personally. Subsequently, the offender fled the crime scene and was found dead in the morning following the attack, the presumed cause of death being suicide.<sup>3</sup>

Based on the information from his personal Twitter account, it is presumed that the offender, active on the platform under the nickname NTMA0315, had been planning the attack and had not chosen the bar randomly. In August 2022, he took a selfie in front of Tepláreň and posted the photograph on Twitter with a sarcastic description. In the hours following the attack, he wrote on the platform: “I have made my decision” and “It will be done”. His profile contained conspiracy and antisemitic memes, as well as hateful posts against certain communities.<sup>4</sup>

Approximately five hours before the attack on Zámocká Street, the attacker posted a 65-pages-long manifesto full of neo-Nazi, extremist, antisemitic and homophobic ideas. The manifesto was based on the conspiracy theory about the Jewish global domination and alleged attempts to destroy and rule the white race. In the published document, the attacker calls for violence against the Jews, LGBTI+ community, politicians and their family members, judges, advocates, journalists and ideological enemies. He reiterates multiple times that his goal of “freeing the white race” can only be achieved by means of extreme violence against certain groups of people. As the attacker repeatedly glorifies crime, advocates it and incites other citizens to commit terrorist criminal offences in his manifesto, this document classifies as terrorist content. On 17<sup>th</sup> October 2022, the investigator of the National Criminal Agency (NAKA) re-classified the murder on Zámocká Street to a particularly serious crime of terror under §149 of the Criminal Code.

In his manifesto, the author refers to well-known neo-Nazi, extremist and far-right terrorists. The offender claimed to be inspired, for example, by the Australian man who shot 51 people in mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand in March 2019; the extremist who shot down a woman in a synagogue in California, USA in April 2019; or the terrorist who killed ten people in a supermarket in Buffalo, USA in a neighbourhood populated mostly by the African-American community in May 2022.

## Role of digital platforms in radicalisation of the attacker

The published manifesto and digital footprints provide important data allowing to draw conclusions about how the offender was radicalised. **The available materials show that the offender was radicalised on digital platforms.** In the “About me” section, he admits that from an early age, he has been spending a lot of free time in online and discussion forums. In 8chan online forum, associated with extremist users, he accessed a manifesto of one of the far-right terrorists. According to his own words, this manifesto completely changed his life and was a very valuable lesson.



### 4chan and 8chan

4chan and 8chan are “image board” discussion forums enabling users to post comments and share images and videos. These discussion platforms are anonymous, barely regulated or completely unregulated and promote extreme forms of free speech. 4chan was founded in 2003. 8chan, an even more extreme affiliated website, nowadays known as 8kun, has been operating since 2013. The platform users create various discussion sections which they moderate themselves. The most popular sections include /b/, referring to “random”, and particularly /pol/, meaning “politically incorrect”.<sup>5</sup> These threads represent a consistent stream of racist, antisemitic, hate and conspiracy content. The above-mentioned sections became crucial organisational platforms for extremist campaigns including the 2021 US Capitol attack. These discussion forums have also been repeatedly linked to nationalist terrorist acts, violence, dissemination of terrorist materials, promotion of racist conspiracy theories or sources of a popular conspiracy theory QAnon.<sup>6</sup>

In his manifesto, the attacker states he was inspired by other well-known far-right terrorists whose activities and works he learned about from anonymous discussion forums. Experts confirm in this context that widely publicized terrorist acts have a radicalising effect.<sup>7</sup> American attackers conducting attacks based on ideological or racial bias were often influenced by past perpetrators of mass violence or were interested in them. Several of them have explicitly referred to these individuals.<sup>8</sup> Some of them documented their admiration in their own manifestos or social media posts. The research of the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) has also shown that famous terror attacks play a significant role in radicalisation of other users.<sup>9</sup> They have clearly played a part in radicalisation of the attacker on Zámocká Street as well.

As the similarities between him and previous far-right extremists mentioned in the author's manifesto are strikingly evident. One of them is **radicalisation on digital platforms resulting from consumption of hate content and inciting other community members** to commit violence or publish manifestos. These documents aim to inspire others to similar acts, to demonstrate a clear intention and to publicize one's crime rather than attempt to hide it in any way.

The offender from Zámocká Street himself notes that he relates to the shooter from Buffalo, USA. This person was radicalised on 4chan discussion forum which he first accessed in the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020.<sup>10</sup> In his 180-pages-long manifesto, he repeats his racist, antisemitic, conspiracy and extremist beliefs adopted from other extremists and from the far-right portal 4chan. This document is complemented by racist and antisemitic memes originating from the same discussion forum.

An equally crucial part in radicalisation process is also played by digital platforms, anonymous discussion forums, online communities and access to hate content. The conclusions of the analysis of the British Ministry of Justice show that **while the importance of Internet for radicalisation of individuals is growing, the number of people impacted by radicalisation processes in the offline world is decreasing.**<sup>11</sup> These findings correspond with the general trend of extensive Internet uptake in the society.

A study of RAND Corporation confirms that the Internet facilitates and provides more possibilities for radicalisation, since it allows for connecting with like-minded people and access to extremist beliefs from all over the world. Also, the Internet works as an "echo chamber". This means that users regularly communicate their ideas to people with opinions that coincide with their own, so the correctness of their existing views is reinforced in the long term.<sup>12</sup>

Beliefs of the attacker from Zámocká Street relied on the conspiracy theory about the Jewish global domination and the resulting attempts to destroy and rule the white race. He mentioned the so-called "New World Order" – a conspiracy theory which states that the world is governed and manipulated by a small group of people. His beliefs were based on other conspiracy theories, such as the "Great Replacement" hypothesising that mainly the Jews orchestrate arrival of immigrants to Europe and USA who thus systematically replace the "white population". He also commented that it is necessary to destroy the "Zionist Occupation Government", which is one of the key terms of multiple conspiracy theories. In his manifesto, the attacker repeatedly refers to "Fourteen Words" – a popular neo-Nazi slogan concerning supremacy of the white race and the need to protect the future of the white people.

Environments such as 4chan have become a fertile breeding ground for these and associated conspiracy theories and neo-Nazi ideology. Although the basic claims do not rely on modern biology or sociology, in some threads of anonymous discussion forums they have become the main schools of thought. These debates are frequently fuelled by racist belief in white supremacy.<sup>13</sup> The attacker from Zámocká Street was a self-proclaimed supporter of accelerationism – a concept of white supremacism stating that acceleration of collapse of the modern society requires an aggressive action, i. e. extreme violence. Allegedly, it is the only way to achieve the goal of creating an ethnically homogeneous state consisting purely of white-race citizens.<sup>14</sup>

The fact that digital platforms were the responsible for radicalisation of the attacker is also demonstrated by frequent usage of derogatory terms, widely used especially in anonymous discussion forums. For example, the attacker mentions “shitskin”, a pejorative term for a person with dark skin, or “kike”, a derogatory term for a Jewish person. Another example of a right-wing expression is “red pill” or “redpilled”, referring to a piece of information allowing an individual to “wake up” to the “truth” in the context of far-right extremist ideology.<sup>15</sup>

Robert Evans, Bellingcat’s investigative journalist, described anonymous discussion forums such as 8chan and 4chan as a “24/7 clan or a convention of neo-Nazis”. According to him, these shooters cannot be treated as “lone wolves”. Rather, they are “a part of a supranational fascist movement radicalising people all over the world”. These people incite, inspire and influence each other, and **carry out their attacks in an attempt to motivate others to further violence.**<sup>16</sup>

The attacker was posting such posts full of hate speech for months prior to the act not only in anonymous discussion forums, but also on social media. In April 2021, the offender created a Twitter account where he posted racists, antisemitic and extremist content.<sup>17</sup> For the entire duration of his activity on the platform, he **posted 306 tweets, with many of them containing problematic content.** Racist posts are illustrated by a figure with text stating: “Burn niggers, rape all niggers. Total death to all niggers” or a map of Slovakia showing the proportion of Roma population in different regions, which the attacker commented on: “No place is completely safe. There is a lot to do...”.

A large part of posts also targeted the Jewish community. For example, the attacker posted a photograph of the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp with a heart-shaped filter and the description: “deep in your heart, you know they deserved it”. In another post, he wrote in relation to the Jewish community: “It’s very simple: in the depths of their soul, everyone instinctively knows that you Jews (referred to by derogatory term “kikes”) are the pest of the Earth. The majority of people may have lots these instincts due to the society being brainwashed and controlled by the Jews, but their remnants occasionally emerge on the surface”. He also posted photographs of racist far-right extremists such as Anders Breivik, who killed 77 people in a terror attack in Oslo and Utøya, Norway in 2011, and Adolf Eichmann, one of the leading figures of Nazi holocaust and concentration camps.<sup>18</sup> According to his own words, he considered them to be his role models and heroes.

In addition to supremacist posts and images **on Twitter, the offender repeatedly insinuated that he intended to carry out an act of violence.** For example, in September he published a series of tweets stating that people should not attempt at an “operation” of force unless they are prepared to take the life of another

person. However, according to the attacker, personal sacrifice is crucial for “ensuring the existence of our people and the future for white children”. In another post, he mentions “race war”. In his opinion, white people will win this war and the Jews will be killed. The attacker’s account was private and inaccessible to general public until after the attack when he made it publicly accessible.<sup>19</sup> In spite of the fact that the **attacker from Zámocká Street had been disseminating extremist content on Twitter for more than one year, the platform intervened against his account only after the terrorist act had been carried out.**

Gaps in regulation of digital platforms, which had enabled live streaming of acts of terrorism, contributed to the radicalisation of the attacker. In his manifesto, the perpetrator admits he was fascinated by the footage of the Australian terrorist shooting in a mosque in Christchurch, New Zealand in 2019. This attack was streamed live on Facebook and the platform was incapable of a prompt reaction to the event. He expressed similar enthusiasm in relation to the live stream of the American terrorist carrying out an attack in Buffalo, USA who, by the attacker’s own account, motivated him to act. In this context, research of ISD clearly shows that **terror attacks livestreamed on platforms play a particularly significant role in radicalisation of other users.**<sup>20</sup>

Finally, the attacker from Zámocká Street admitted that in addition to the anonymous discussion forums 4chan and 8chan, **his radical beliefs were inspired by sources from Telegram.** In the conclusion of his manifesto, he expressed his gratitude, among others, to a user nicknamed “Slovakbro” for his posts and comments the attacker came across on Telegram. In addition to hate speech, extremist and racist content and content glorifying terrorism, the 22-year-old neo-Nazi used this digital platform to post instructions

on handmade guns. The young man studying at a university in Brno was arrested in May 2022 by NAKA in cooperation with the US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and Europol.<sup>21</sup> In the beginning of November, he was found guilty of committing multiple criminal offences including some forms of participation on terrorism, resulting in a 6-year imprisonment sentence in a correctional facility of minimum security.<sup>22</sup>

Apart from this user, the murderer from Zámocká Street expressed his gratitude to the perpetrators of the above-mentioned terrorist attacks who inspired him to act, as well as to other users of digital platforms who share their ideas, texts and practical manuals with each other.



The communication application Telegram was launched in 2013 by the brothers Durov from Russia. Although the platform can be used for private conversations with one or more people, a more popular use involves large public groups of up to 200 000 participants, as well as channels without any limitation of number of users. As Telegram barely regulates the content and does not intervene against it, this communication application is popular amongst disinformation actors, conspiracy theorists and extremists.<sup>23</sup> The platform thus gave rise to a host of groups promoting extremist, racist, antisemitic and terrorist ideologies. Indeed, according to German authorities, Telegram has become a “*medium for radicalisation*”.<sup>24</sup> The American investigative journalist Ali Winston described Telegram and its Nazi radical acceleration channels called Terrorgram as an effective network of neo-Nazi propaganda which has the potential to generate terrorists.<sup>25</sup>

# Attacker's communication on digital platforms following the attack

Shortly after the attack, the attacker claimed responsibility for the act on digital platforms.<sup>26</sup> Then he spent several hours communicating with people via his Twitter and Discord accounts, as well as on 4chan discussion forum.

During the night, he sardonically responded to and mocked outraged people commenting on his posts. For example, when asked what happened, he replied: *"nothing much just some fun on zamocka"*.<sup>27</sup> When another Twitter user asked what he had accomplished with his act, he wrote: *"killed 2 fags, that's more than enough. if everyone sharing my opinions did the same the problem would be solved in 1 day"*. Another one of his Twitter posts said: *"I don't feel any regrets, isn't it funny?"*. Another post included hashtags such as #hatecrime or #gaybar.<sup>28</sup>

Late in the evening, after the attack, he posted photographs of night-time Bratislava as well as several selfies.<sup>29</sup> He stated on 4chan that he was only "doing the right thing" and admitted he only feels bad for his own family, not for those he had murdered.<sup>30</sup> He repeatedly referred to the victims by derogatory terms for their sexual orientation. In this anonymous discussion forum, he further admitted he had wanted to kill the Prime Minister as well but "didn't get lucky".

The attacker's posts disappeared from 4chan during the same night and his Twitter account was blocked in the morning following the attack. **However, other users of platforms and discussion forums continue sharing screenshots of posts published by the attacker in the days and months preceding his death.**

In addition to Twitter and 4chan, he also participated in discussions on Discord. It was via this platform that the psychologists from the online counselling service Ipčko.sk managed to contact the attacker at one point of the night. However, he refused any help. According to Marek Madro, psychologist and founder of Ipčko, such reaction could be expected. What was more shocking was the communication of Discord users with the 19-year-old terrorist. Instead of unequivocally condemning the act, the users proceeded to humiliate the attacker. They wrote him that he was incapable to complete his act properly and gave him tips to further locations where such attack would have been more efficient. These were mostly people communicating with him from abroad.<sup>31</sup>

Many Twitter users asked the attacker to launch live stream of his attack or upcoming attacks, mocked him, insulted him<sup>32,33</sup>, called him names and humiliated him. Comments of the platform users included: *"start live stream kid"*; *"turn on live stream, i want to see it you fucking pussy"* and *"you should have streamed it :(("*. Others called him a coward and a *"Brevik from Wish"* or called on him to kill himself.



Discord is a communication platform intended to facilitate connection between online gamers all over the world. This instant messaging application was developed in 2015.<sup>34</sup> There are currently more than 140 million active Discord users. The activities of the platform's users revolve around "servers" dedicated to a specific focus or topic. Servers with a hashtag (#) – so-called "text channels" – belong to the most popular ones. There are also voice channels marked with a speaker icon. The users can be invited to specific servers or can find access links online. The person who sets up the channel usually specifies who the channel is intended for and the rules of conduct on the channel.<sup>35</sup>

Discord proudly states how important privacy of its users is to the platform. The platform enables users to meet in closed groups which cannot be accessed without a direct link. As a result, it was impossible to closely monitor the situation on Discord in the aftermath of the attack on Zámocká Street.

Online communication with other users immediately after the attack, making his Twitter account public or publishing the manifesto show that the attacker from Zámocká Street strived for attention. Similarly to other far-right perpetrator attacks, the offender from Bratislava tried to make sure his legacy and beliefs reach as wide an audience as possible and possibly inspire other individuals to acts of violence.

## Dissemination of hate speech on digital platforms following the attack

After the attack on Zámocká Street, digital platforms and hosting companies were faced with twin issues: dealing with dissemination of terrorist content, and hate speech and violent speech combined with posts and comments downplaying the gravity of the terrorist act. These were the findings of CMS resulting from the monitoring of the online environment immediately after the attack.

The terrorist content in form of the manifesto was disseminated via links to social media and public document storage locations, such as DocDroid, MediaFire, Ulož.to and others. CMS detected 26 links enabling users to download the full manifesto or its selected sections in ten content storage locations. Dissemination of this extremist material is particularly dangerous as it may inspire other individuals, while aiming to promote and reinforce terrorist, extremist and violent ideologies.

Findings of the *Investigative Center of Ján Kuciak* have shown that users of extreme-right Telegram channels, the so-called Terrorgram, misused this situation for their own neo-Nazi propaganda. **Members of Terrorgram channels were enthusiastic about the attacker's actions** and concluded that they, too, **were directly responsible for his radicalisation. They were also sharing materials** related to the attack on Zámocká Street to be able to generate new propaganda and further disseminate extremist ideas. Users shared posters with the shooter's portrait and glorifying videos, and there were ambitions to translate the attacker's manifesto into Slovak or make it into an audiobook. These users considered the manifesto to be an extremely important document which could potentially radicalise more individuals. Prior to the attack, Terrorgram had been promoting release of a new terrorism film, which was eventually dedicated to the shooter from Zámocká Street. Such videos aim to inspire and motivate to acts of extremism.<sup>36</sup>

Apart from dissemination of the manifesto and extremist materials, the regulator detected posts violating community rules and standards of digital platforms. The Analytical Department of CMS Office primarily focused on Facebook – the most widely-used platform in Slovakia. The posts and comments at issue contained mostly hate speech against the LGBTI+ community or trivialised the terrorist act as such.

False information about the terrorist act and hate speech against the LGBTI+ community was also disseminated via profiles of Rádio Kompass on Facebook and YouTube. This content was also multiplied via Facebook and some Slovak media. In view of the new competences of CMS under the Act on Media Services providing for cooperation of CMS with digital platforms, CMS took adequate measures to prevent dissemination of the above-mentioned hate, trivialising and terrorist content. The following chapters contain a detailed account of its activities.

## Reaction of the Council for Media Services

In view of the risks resulting from dissemination of extremist content online, CMS **intervened against dissemination of radicalising and hate content on digital platforms and hosting services in the aftermath of the attack.** As a first step, the Analytical Department of CMS Office launched monitoring of platforms, focusing on the attack and using the technology of Gerulata Technologies. This technology allows for monitoring of developments on the platforms in relation to an event based on specific parameters (Facebook, Twitter, Telegram, YouTube and web portals). The regulator thus also has a comprehensive overview of actors who inform about this event and have the largest impact on the public debate.

Under the new Act on Media Services, CMS is empowered to carry out monitoring and follow-up cooperation with digital platforms in order to apply their community rules and standards in an efficient, proportional and non-discriminatory manner. In frame of these activities, CMS **launched monitoring of posts on Facebook – statistically the most widely-used digital platform – immediately after the attack.**<sup>37,38</sup> Monitoring of Facebook detected several posts violating its community rules. The posts at issue contained predominantly **hate speech against the LGBTI+ community or trivialised the actions of the attacker**, thus potentially violating §151 of the Act on Media Services, §424 of the Criminal Code and Article 1 and 3(1) of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. After the problematic content had been detected, CMS immediately informed Meta, both via mechanisms for report-

ing problematic content directly on Facebook and via dedicated escalation channel. The escalation channel of Facebook is intended for verified entities reporting harmful content, facilitating acceleration of its removal.

On 14<sup>th</sup> October 2022, in cooperation with Centre for Countering Hybrid Threats of the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic, the regulator intervened in relation to three public document storage locations and three channels on Telegram where the above-mentioned manifesto was disseminated. CMS contacted the operators of these websites/services (via direct contact/contact form for reporting harmful content), requesting that the extremist material be removed. **As of 1<sup>st</sup> November, it had been removed from all three of them (DocDroid, MediaFire, Anonfiles).**

CMS also contacted Twitter, used by the attacker to publish his plans and manifesto and to communicate his decision to commit the act. On Friday 14<sup>th</sup> October CMS held an online meeting with Twitter representatives who provided the regulator with information on options for requesting information about the platform's procedure and the content of the attacker's profile on this platform. CMS subsequently requested the platform to share this information via its own mechanisms. **On 24<sup>th</sup> November Twitter rejected this request.**

Between 15<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> October, monitoring activities of the regulator detected other storage locations of the manifesto at issue, specifically with hosting providers Ulož.to, MEGA.nz and pomf.lain.la. All of these links allowed for free public access to downloading the manifesto. CMS used the form for reporting harmful content to contact the service providers, requesting that the extremist material be removed. **Providers of all**

**above-mentioned hosting services complied with CMS's request and removed the manifesto on 17<sup>th</sup> October.** The service provider MEGA.nz also blocked the account of the user who uploaded the content on this platform and contacted relevant national authorities.

On 18<sup>th</sup> October, CMS's monitoring activities identified a video footage of Rádio Kompas on Facebook and YouTube. This broadcast disseminated claims inconsistent with facts established at that time and with preliminary findings of law enforcement authorities. This content spread at a fast pace especially on Facebook and websites of several Slovak media outlets. CMS notified Meta and YouTube of this video via dedicated escalation channels. On the same day, Facebook deleted the video at issue (approximately at 15:40). On 19<sup>th</sup> October CMS repeatedly notified YouTube that the video was available on the platform. On the same day YouTube responded that the video did not violate the community rules. On 21<sup>st</sup> October the regulator provided the operator with its analysis of the content at issue with detailed explanation of specific statements of the guests which, according to CMS, violated the community standards. These involved rules against violent criminal organisations and rules against hate speech. On 25<sup>th</sup> October the regulator received a notice from the platform, stating that having examined its analysis, the platform did not evaluate the video at issue as violating community standards. **Not only is this video publicly available until this day, but it was also uploaded to the YouTube channel of Rádio Kompas. As of 1<sup>st</sup> November, both videos had more than 86 000 views.**

On 22<sup>nd</sup> October CMS received a submission containing a link to the storage location corrupt.org, providing access to the manifesto of the attacker from Zámocká Street as well as other extremist materials. As the website did not contain any contact information, CMS found the hosting provider of the website (ait.com) and

contacted it by e-mail, requesting that the illegal content be removed. On 26<sup>th</sup> October the regulator became aware of the fact that the **hosting company had suspended the entire service of** corrupt.org. The storage location at issue also included other documents and audio documents related to neo-Nazism and materials of terrorist nature.

Between November and December 2022 the monitoring activities of the Analytical Department of CMS Office detected 18 links to the full manifesto or its selected sections, two download links to archived Twitter accounts of the attacker and 79 screenshots of his Twitter account. CMS detected this content on 7 platforms and immediately notified all providers of the services concerned of its existence, requesting that the content be removed immediately. As of today, CMS is still waiting for three providers to comply with its request.<sup>39</sup>

In an attempt to escalate the attacker's manifesto to the level of initiatives for tackling online terrorist content, such as Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT), Christchurch Call Initiative or Tech Against Terrorism, CMS contacted Facebook and Google directly. As a result, in cooperation with NAKA, **the file containing the manifest was included in the global database of terrorist content** of the GIFCT. When assigned to the database, such content should disappear from all available online servers and it should be impossible to disseminate it further on platforms participating in the above-mentioned initiatives.

## Hashing

Hashing is a collective term for the method of creating a short file identifier in the computer system, regardless of whether it's text, image, video, music or any other file type. Every identifier – or “hash” – is unique and cannot be additionally modified in any way.<sup>40</sup> To eliminate terrorist content disseminated on digital platforms, in 2017 GIFCT established a shared database of content created by individuals and entities on the sanction list of the United Nations Security Council in order to bring together governments and tech companies which often use different definitions of “terrorism” or “terrorist content”. Hash, or digital signature, enables GIFCT members to swiftly identify visually similar content which had already been removed by one of the members. In this way, they are able to examine whether such content is in violation of their requirement of non-dissemination of terrorist content. After the terror attack in Christchurch, New Zealand in 2019, which was streamed live, GIFCT extended its taxonomy to enable sharing hashes from such attacks, and thus have the opportunity to intervene against the creators and disseminators of terrorist content who are not on the list of terrorist organisations of the United Nations Security Council<sup>41</sup>.

Rapid development of digital platforms has fundamentally altered the social dynamics of radicalisation and terrorism. Social media, forums and storage locations enable individuals and groups to share content regardless of their geographical location and language which significantly influences the swiftness of dissemination of problematic content. It is therefore not surprising that platforms at issue played a key part in radicalisation of the attacker from Zámocká Street. Furthermore, research shows that internet and digital platforms became one of the main causes of radicalisation of individuals committing ideology-based terror attacks.<sup>42</sup>

In view of the nature of the attack on Zámocká Street, the following chapter focuses on analysis of policies for moderation of hate content and unsuitable content of different digital platforms immediately after the attack.

## Facebook (Meta)

Boasting more than 2.9 billion active users monthly, Facebook – the platform of Meta – is the largest one worldwide. It is the most widely-used platform in Slovakia.<sup>43</sup> Its popularity is largely determined by the scope of content available. However, this content is frequently illegal or harmful. Its moderation is governed primarily by Facebook Community Standards<sup>44</sup>, which must, how-

ever, be in line national and European legislation. Under the EU Directive on electronic commerce (Directive 2000/31/EC; so-called “e-Commerce Directive”), digital platforms are exempt from liability for content located on the platforms (Article 14).

In the wake of the attack CMS started to monitor discussions on Facebook. This activity detected a large amount of potentially illegal and problematic content which was subsequently reported via escalation channel set up by Meta. According to information known to CMS, the murderer did not use his Facebook account to communicate with public or to disseminate his manifesto.

## Hate speech

Monitoring of content shared on Facebook immediately after the attack showed that **42 % of the examined harmful content represented hate speech**. Facebook Community Standards explicitly prohibit publishing content which may incite to committing acts of violence offline.

Facebook defines hate speech as:

*“direct attack against people – rather than concepts or institutions – on the basis of protected characteristics: race, ethnicity, national origin, disability, religious affiliation, caste, sexual orientation, sex, gender identity and serious disease. We define attacks as violent or dehumanizing speech, harmful stereotypes, statements of inferiority, expressions of contempt, disgust or dismissal, cursing and calls for exclusion or segregation.”<sup>45</sup>*

In frame of its monitoring activities, CMS detected 46 cases of hate speech. These involved particularly statements calling for exclusion of certain minorities from the society (Figure No. 1 and 2).

Facebook Community Standards further prohibit publishing content attacking *“concepts, institutions, ideas, practices, or beliefs associated with protected characteristics, which are likely to contribute to imminent physical harm, intimidation or discrimination against the people associated with that protected characteristic”*.<sup>46</sup> The regulator detected posts which, combined with respective comments, meet the criteria of prohibited content (Figure No. 3). Should it prove impossible to frame the above-mentioned content in a broader context, Facebook reserves the right to request additional information. As of 1<sup>st</sup> November 2022, out of 109 reported posts Facebook intervened in 4 cases by removing the content at issue.

## Violence and incitement to violence

In frame of moderating potentially illegal content, Facebook also focuses on posts containing or promoting offline violence. According to Facebook, content is treated as violent when there is a genuine risk of physical harm or direct threats to public safety. Similarly to hate speech, Facebook’s monitoring activities detected posts which might result in physical harm or direct threats to minorities in Slovakia. In relation to violence and incitement to violence, CMS identified dozens of comments involving or directly supporting commitment of these offences, with the number of posts as such being marginal compared to the comments.

## Disinformation and misinformation

As a consequence of Meta’s past scandals related to disinformation and impact of misinformation on the democratic process, Facebook started to actively participate in countering these information disorders, for example by signing the reinforced Code of Practice on Disinformation. According to Facebook Community Standards, misinformation is divided into several categories. The nature of the attack on Zámocká Street suggests applicability of category No. 1 – physical harm or violence. In this category, Facebook removes misinformation or unverifiable rumours which are likely to promote offline violence. Facebook defines misinformation and unverifiable rumours as follows:

*“We define misinformation as content with a claim that is determined to be false by an authoritative third party. We define an unverifiable rumour as a claim whose source expert partners confirm is extremely hard or impossible to trace, for which authoritative sources are absent, where there is not enough specificity for the claim to be debunked, or where the claim is too incredulous or too irrational to be believed.”<sup>47</sup>*

Immediately after the attack, Facebook witnessed emergence of posts intended as alternative versions of the events of 12<sup>th</sup> October or directly accusing the current coalition government and the President of a conspiracy against opposing political forces (Figure No. 4). Even though the posts at issue may seem harmless, Facebook Transparency Center claims they might result in an increased risk of offline violence.

# Implementation of policies in relation to reported content

As of 1<sup>st</sup> November 2022, CMS reported a total of 109 posts, the majority of which (52) classified as false information. Another share of problematic content belonged in the hate speech category (46).



Out of 109 reported posts, 66 explicitly concerned the attack on Zámocká Street. The problematic content was predominantly classified as hate speech (37) followed by false information (20), with 5 posts inciting to violence and 4 posts showing the signs of inauthentic behaviour. Many of the remaining 43 posts referred to the attack on Zámocká Street and/or the LGBTI+ community in one way or another, rather than focus on the terrorist act itself.



**In spite of the emergency, Facebook was unable to swiftly remove almost any of the reported posts.** This problematic content was thus still publicly available and disseminated via various private Facebook groups, contributing to polarisation of the society and to hate speech online (see publicised attacks on the LGBTI+ community in Bratislava and Nitra).

**On the other hand, Facebook swiftly reacted and removed the above-mentioned footage of Rádio Kom-pas.** CMS notified Facebook of the video per e-mail and the platform swiftly reacted by removing the video within several hours. In comparison to YouTube, which did not evaluate the footage as violating community standards, this represents efficient implementation of harmful content moderation policy.

When removing content, Facebook can make the decision whether the potential infringement by the reported user meets the requirements for a so-called “strike”. This term refers to the platform’s policy against content violating Facebook Community Standards, under which multiple “strikes” result in the user’s exclusion from the platform.<sup>48</sup> Monitoring of reported content showed that users who disseminate hate speech and disinformation on regular basis are left unpunished even after having been reported multiple times (without any significant punishment such as prohibition of publishing posts or exclusion from the platform).

The 2016 Code of Conduct on Countering Illegal Hate Speech Online provides for the benchmark period for removal of hate content of 24 hours.<sup>49</sup> Facebook, as one of the signatories of the Code, states in its 2021 Monitoring Report that it is able to process reported content within 24 hours from its publishing in 81.5 % cases.<sup>50</sup> However, cases reported by CMS show that processing of a complaint (i. e. issuing notice of complaint receipt) **takes Facebook on average almost 32 days in cases of hate speech.**

In terms of its reactive period, Meta did not do any better in case of the terror attack in Slovakia, followed by a wave of hate speech targeting minorities and specific politic and public representatives.

## Twitter

In comparison to Facebook, Twitter has only a marginal share on the Slovak market in terms of active users (approximately 193 000).<sup>51</sup> On a global scale, however, it is one of the most widely-used digital platforms. It used to enjoy the support of members of various right-wing and conspirator groups<sup>52</sup> who, after the account of the former US President Donald Trump had been blocked, migrated onto less regulated platforms, such as Parler or Truth Social.

The attacker from Zámocká Street is known to have been actively using Twitter since April 2021 under the username NTMA0315.<sup>53</sup> His posts contained hate speech and conspiracy theories (Figure No. 5), as well as incitement to violence (Figure No. 6). On 15<sup>th</sup> August 2022 he even published a selfie from in front of Tepláreň (Figure No. 7). On the day prior to the attack, 11<sup>th</sup> October 2022, the attacker posted the following statements: *“I have made my decision”; “It will be done”; “Race First. Always.”* Several hours before the attack, the murderer posted a 65–pages-long manifesto containing hate speech against the LGBTI+ community and Jews, and describing these communities as suitable targets for extermination. Immediately after the attack, the attacker continued to communicate with different Twitter (Figure No. 8), 4chan or Discord users.

On 14<sup>th</sup> October 2022, CMS held an online meeting with Twitter representatives who informed the regulator that the attacker’s account had been blocked by the platform. Twitter further proceeded to block (“blacklist”) online archives which might have contained the attacker’s posts even after their initial removal. **CMS also submitted an official statutory request for details about the attacker’s account, which were to be subjected to further analysis. On 24<sup>th</sup> November Twitter rejected this request.**

## Accounts and posts of perpetrators of terrorist acts

Twitter has relatively detailed rules and guidelines for online content sharing. One of Twitter’s innovative policies for content moderation involves explicitly specified measures the platform takes against perpetrators of terrorist acts. After the offender’s identity had been established, the platform committed to remove his account and any posts sharing the attacker’s manifesto.

## Hate speech

Twitter prohibits publishing and subsequent sharing of content promoting violence or directly attacking people on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, caste, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, religious

affiliation, age, disability, or serious disease.<sup>54</sup> Twitter also classifies inciting fear of the above-mentioned protected attributes among hate speech. The escalation nature of this policy is particularly noteworthy. As opposed to Facebook, which has committed to directly remove problematic content, Twitter relies primarily on so-called “soft mechanisms”. In other words, Twitter endeavours to prevent dissemination of problematic content by so-called “downranking” (decreasing its priority) before it is forced to remove the content at issue completely.

## Threats of violence

Twitter rules prohibit its users to publish violent threats against individuals and groups. According to the community rules, Twitter removes only reported content which can be identified as involving an evident intent to inflict physical harm. Content not meeting this requirement (such as Figure No. 6) should be subject to a detailed examination.

## Glorification of violence

Twitter prohibits condoning, admiring and glorification of violence and acts of violence. According to the findings of the non-profit organisation Anti-Defamation League (ADL), the murderer from Zámocká Street repeatedly condoned and glorified terrorist acts committed in Buffalo, USA or Christchurch, New Zealand (Figure No. 9),<sup>55</sup> **even though Twitter commits in its community rules to remove posts containing such content in an efficient and swift manner.**

## Implementation of policies in relation to illegal and problematic content

As opposed to Facebook, Twitter was able to react promptly, which was positively reflected in preventing the dissemination of the attacker’s manifesto. Twitter disabled access to the attacker’s account immediately after his identity on the platform was established. The regulator’s analysis of the efficiency of removal of illegal content furthermore showed that Twitter was able to efficiently prevent dissemination of the attacker’s manifesto as well as his previous posts.<sup>56</sup>

In spite of Twitter’s swift reaction during this emergency, application of policies for pre-emptive content moderation to anonymous accounts with minor outreach is clearly insufficient. Posts in the final annex to this Report, almost all of which contain **hate speech, conspiracy theories or incitement to violence, remained on the platform from the time of their publishing until the execution of the terrorist act** (according to ADL, in many cases for more than one year).<sup>57</sup> These posts, which keep circulating in different Internet forums in form of screenshots, might serve as material to radicalise further potential attackers.

## 4chan

4chan is an anonymous discussion forum accessed by 22 million users on monthly basis.<sup>58</sup> 4chan has become a haven of far-right and radical groups which had been prohibited by other platforms (such as Reddit). Sharing content on 4chan's boards does not require registration **which makes it extremely difficult to monitor and detect dangerous content**. While the content of most of its sections is limited by legal frameworks of respective countries (usually by US legislation), the supervision of the */pol/* ("politically incorrect") section is practically non-existent. It is in this section */pol/* that the forum users can frequently come across hate speech or photographs of the scene of murder. 4chan's content moderation is performed by volunteers, so-called "janitors", who examine posts, remove content violating community rules, ban users from accessing different boards and remove threads.<sup>59</sup>

4chan has become particularly well-known in the wake of the attack in Buffalo, USA. Similarly to the Buffalo attacker, the murderer from Zámocká Street, according to his manifesto published on Twitter, radicalised on far-right forums such as 4chan (and/or 8chan/8kun). The wording of the published manifesto proves that the attacker from Zámocká Street was inspired largely by manifestos of previous attackers (such as the shooters from Buffalo or Christchurch), which are still publicly accessible on 4chan. The attacker was an active member of the */pol/* section before as well as after the attack, using it to communicate with other members of this section after having committed the criminal offence (Figure No. 10).

## Platform rules applicable to the attack on Zámocká Street

4chan prohibits its users to share content which might violate the US legislation. The only category of prohibited content explicitly applicable to the case of the murderer from Zámocká Street involves racism. 4chan's content moderation rules do not cover any other categories, such as hate speech, violence and its glorification, graphic content, disinformation etc.

The attacker from Zámocká Street communicated with other thread participants on 4chan for almost 30 minutes (from 23:24 to 23:52). During this period, he sent 16 replies to other participants. In his replies he mentioned his desire to murder the Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic (Figure No. 11), regrets about not having enough ammunition (Figure No. 12), as well as proofs of having fulfilled the tasks assigned to him by other participants of the communication thread (Figure No. 13).

# Implementation of policies in relation to illegal and problematic content

4chan **has practically no formal rules for online content moderation**. In addition, posts of “N/84kh31” (the attacker’s ID) are protected by the First Amendment of the US Constitution, and therefore cannot be considered illegal under the US legislation. Potentially illegal content examined by janitors closing respective communication threads on 4chan was thus never removed and is still publicly accessible via different archives of 4chan.

## YouTube (Google)

YouTube is one of the most popular digital platforms. It has almost 4 million users in Slovakia.<sup>60</sup> This platform belonging to Google has recently become well-known for its algorithmic recommender system which, according to research, noticeably promotes radicalising and far-right videos.<sup>61</sup> YouTube, like many other platforms, has taken measures against dissemination of explicitly illegal content, such as child pornography or terrorism. However, these measures – so-called **“community rules” – do not cover all areas of illegal and harmful content**, such as disinformation.

In case of the attack on Zámocká Street, YouTube was used to publish an interview entitled *“Orwell Studio – The tragic event which took place on 12<sup>th</sup> October 2022 in front of Tepláreň on Zámocká Street in Bratislava” (Štúdio Orwell – Tragická udalosť, ktorá sa udiala 12. októbra 2022 pred podnikom Tepláreň v Bratislave na Zámockej ul.)* of Rádio Kompas. Based on an analysis of the show’s content, CMS concluded that during the interview at issue, both the host and the guest made certain controversial claims about guilt and/or innocence of the shooter and about alleged involvement of unspecified intelligence services attempting to bring about changes on political level. The discussion also revolves around the view that media misleadingly link the shooter to extremist symbols while omitting the fact that prior to the attack, the shooter authored a 65-pages-long manifest containing extremist symbols and defining baselines and goals in which he called for elimination of LGBTI+ persons, the Jews or government representatives.

Due to the nature and circumstances of the show, YouTube was notified of the video’s existence. CMS believes that the broadcast of Rádio Kompas violates the following rules of YouTube:

- ☛ *“Violent criminal organizations policy” which prohibits publishing “content praising or memorialising prominent terrorist, extremist, or criminal figures in order to encourage others to carry out acts of violence”.*<sup>62</sup>
- ☛ *“Hate speech policy” which prohibits “content promoting violence or hatred against individuals or groups based on any of the following attributes: victims of a major violent event and their kin”.*<sup>63</sup>

## Implementation of policies in relation to illegal and problematic content

In its reply of 25<sup>th</sup> October, Google informed the regulator that having examined CMS's analysis, the company maintained its view that the video at issue did not violate any of the conditions of use of YouTube content service. Several days after publishing the original stream, Rádio Kompas re-uploaded this video on YouTube. As of 8<sup>st</sup> November, the videos at issue had more than 86 000 views.

## Evaluation of implementation of digital platform content moderation policies

In relation to the attack on Zámocká Street, **significant systematic gaps can be identified in content monitoring and moderation performed by digital platforms**. These gaps are reflected particularly in dissemination of illegal and harmful content which poses a grave threat for safety of individuals, groups and the national democratic governance.

**All analysed platforms**, in spite of cases repeatedly reported by CMS, **keep providing** their users with viral, but frequently **potential illegal and problematic content**. This behaviour violates basic community standards of individual platforms, i. e. their own content moderation policies. Taking into consideration the nature of the attack on Zámocká Street, CMS is concerned by the fact that digital platforms were unable to efficiently prevent dissemination of illegal and harmful content following the emergency, especially in view of the increasing commitment of digital platforms to counter illegal and harmful content.

The regulator's analysis identified the following issues related to online content moderation:

- ☛ For a long time, digital platforms have been unable to implement their own community rules, particularly regarding hate speech and disinformation on platforms. Their **inability to moderate online discussion has proven to frequently permeate the physical world**.
- ☛ Digital platform providers **react to complaints reporting potentially illegal or harmful content only slowly**, thus facilitating viral dissemination of this content.
- ☛ Digital platforms implement different online content moderation policies, as a result of which during emergencies, such as the attack on Zámocká Street, **it is not possible to remove all problematic content in an efficient and swift manner**.
- ☛ Monitoring of online content is particularly challenging in case of radical right-wing and other extremist groups. These groups **share harmful content privately in closed groups**, making it harder for the regulator and other authorities to use legally available tools for online content monitoring.

# Reactions of cloud services for storing and sharing content

In the wake of the terrorist act, cloud services for storing and sharing content have become a popular tool for sharing the manifesto. In relation to the attack on Zámocká Street, this was the case of Ulož.to or MEGA.nz. These hosting platforms provide **anonymous and easily accessible environment which is frequently used to disseminate not only illegal copies of works of art, but also terrorist content.**

The attacker from Zámocká Street shared his manifesto directly on Discord and Twitter. This manifesto, however, was downloaded and shared on by other users, among others on 4chan discussion forum or cloud services for storing and sharing content. In frame of monitoring of digital platforms, CMS furthermore detected this illegal content on several other commercial (e. g. Ulož.to and MEGA.nz) as well as pirate (e. g. pomf.lain.la and corrupt.org) storage locations.

Both above-mentioned services are governed by their own terms and conditions. Nevertheless, they prohibit storing illegal content and simultaneously reserve the right to remove content violating the laws of the country where the service in question is provided. The provider of digital storage is responsible for the content on its platform only if it is alerted of its illegal nature by a third party.<sup>64</sup> After such alert, the storage provider is obliged to take urgent action and

remove the content at issue. However, **none of the above-mentioned services actively analyses or moderates content uploaded by users** which, especially in case of the manifesto with a publicly known title, could have contributed to early detection of terrorist content. **As for pirate storage locations, there are no publicly available rules and conditions of sharing content.** However, in case of these storage services it is possible to contact their webhosting service whose terms and conditions prohibit using its services for dissemination of illegal content. In case of breach of these terms and conditions, the webhosting service reserves the right to suspend service provision, freeze data and alert relevant public authorities of dissemination of illegal content.

As of 1<sup>st</sup> July 2022, the entry into force of the Regulation (EU) 2021/784 on addressing the dissemination of terrorist content online, **webhosting services in the EU are obliged to remove or disable access to reported terrorist content within one hour of receipt of the removal order from the relevant public authority.** In Slovakia, this belongs to the competence of NAKA. Under Article 5 of the Regulation (EU) 2021/784, providers of such services are also required to include in their terms and conditions **specific measures storage providers take to remove terrorist content.** The provider of such online services exposed to terrorist content must also take **specific measures to protect its services against the dissemination to the public of terrorist content** (e. g. technical means to expeditiously identify terrorist content). Supervision of these measures of hosting service providers in Slovakia is carried out by CMS.

# Implementation of policies in relation to illegal and problematic content

Monitoring activities of CMS detected 26 links enabling users to download the full manifesto or its selected sections in 10 content storage locations. CMS notified all providers of the services concerned of this terrorist content, requesting that it be removed immediately. In two cases, due to lack of contact information and an uncooperative operator, CMS reached out to the hosting service provider with the same request. **In one case, the webhosting provider complied with the request of CMS; in the other case, the operator rejected the request, referring to freedom of speech.** Consequently, CMS is currently discussing intervention options to prevent access to the content at issue with multiple partners. According to information available, the mechanism for issuing removal orders under the Regulation on addressing the dissemination of terrorist content online was not implemented in frame of the attack in Bratislava.

**Due to the amount and nature of online content, it is currently impossible to monitor all platforms which might facilitate potential dissemination of illegal content related to the attack on Zámocká Street in an efficient manner.** CMS therefore contacted Google and Meta who then arranged contacting GIFCT. **CMS thus officially established contact with GIFCT and formally applied for membership of the Christchurch Call initiative.**

## Terrorism and Slovakia

On 17<sup>th</sup> October 2022, the investigator of NAKA in cooperation with the Specialized Attorney General reclassified the murder on Zámocká Street as a particularly serious crime of terror attack.<sup>65</sup> The attack of 12<sup>th</sup> October 2022 can thus be considered the first terror attack on the territory of the Slovak Republic in history. According to the murderer's manifesto, the primary motivation of the attack was slaughter of the "enemies of the white race". The attacker believed these to be especially the Jews who allegedly created the LGBTI+ community.

Under the National Action Plan to Combat Terrorism 2019 – 2022 drawn up by the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic, counter-terrorism in Slovakia is structured around four main areas: prevention, protection, preparedness and coordination. This conceptual document of the Ministry of Interior focuses primarily on the issues of radicalisation and terrorism of religiously motivated extremist groups from Middle East, such as militant terrorist organisation Daesh – the so-called Islamic State. This ministerial document does not contain any reference to extremism, radicalisation and terrorism in relation to the violent far-right.

In terms of prevention of radicalisation and terrorism, the National Action Plan to Combat Terrorism focuses on monitoring of individuals and groups potentially susceptible to radicalisation due to their societal status, as well as monitoring of the online environment.<sup>66</sup> Under Task 1.5 of the Action Plan, systematic enhancement of

capabilities for early identification of radicalisation of individuals is one of the responsibilities of the Slovak Information Service (SIS) (so-called “lone actors”). This prevention-oriented task is closely linked to Task 2.2 of the Action Plan which requires SIS, the Ministry of Defence of the Slovak Republic and the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic to analyse and evaluate the security landscape in the area of terrorism including trends in terror attacks. In terms of counter-terrorism readiness, the government committed in the Action Plan to ensure technical conditions necessary for systematic online monitoring for the purposes of early detection of manifestations and activities indicating security threats for the Slovak Republic.

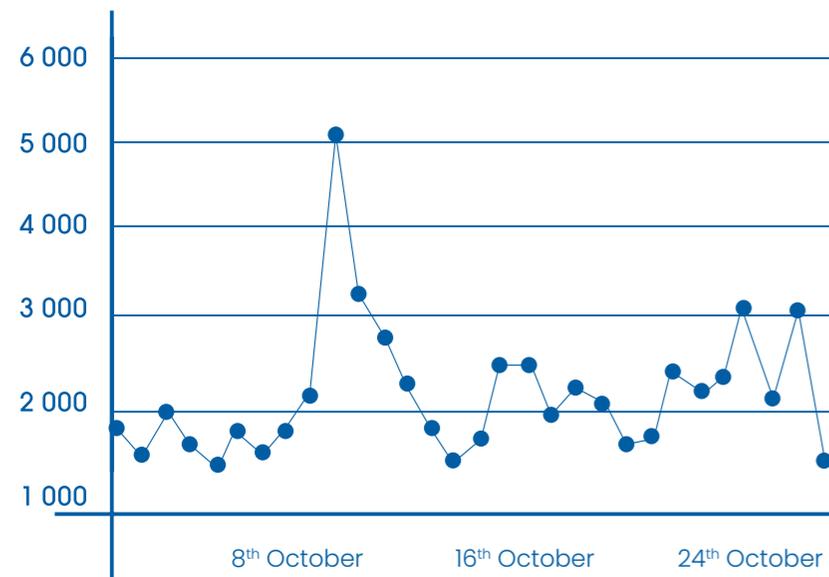
According to the 2019 Global Terrorism Index, the number of far-right terror attacks in Western Europe and North America has increased since 2014 by 320 %.<sup>67</sup> The 2022 Europol Report indicated a significant increase of the number of arrests due to suspected participation in or planning of a radical right-wing terror attack.<sup>68</sup> This Europol Report furthermore underlines prevalence of terror attacks carried out in EU by lone actors.<sup>69</sup> In view of these trends, it is necessary to pay more attention to risks resulting from right-wing extremism and online environment, which has proven to serve as a fertile breeding ground for radicalisation of youth almost since its very beginnings. **In this context, CMS represents a cooperating entity with relevant powers and relationships with platforms, especially in terms of the important role played by the Internet and digital platforms in online radicalisation of far-right-wing attackers.**<sup>70</sup>

## Media coverage of the terror attack in Slovakia

Media outlets play an important role in informing the public on terror attacks. However, they may often contribute to deterioration of the emergency situation – for example, by attempts at sensationalism, dissemination of potentially illegal content or unprofessional approach which may cause further harm to victims and their family members. In relation to current trends in terror attacks, such as live streams of a terrorist act or active communication with other users on digital platforms, the recent attacks may be considered **“theatre of terror”**.<sup>71</sup> Rather than physical harm caused to individual victims, perpetrators of terror attacks focus on the psychological impact of the attack on the public via media activity. The actions and manifesto of the attacker from Zámocká Street allow for the conclusion that **the primary goal of the attack was to shock the public and inspire other individuals to carry out similar extremist acts.**

According to Europe Media Monitor (EMM), the EU Joint Research Centre monitoring platform, **within 24 hours following the attack on Zámocká Street** Slovak media published **more than 5 000 articles related to the attack**.<sup>72</sup> On the following days, the number of such articles reached almost around 3 000. By comparison, in the days preceding the attack the total number of articles published per day on all topics equalled around 2 000.

## Daily number of articles in this category



In spite of the efforts of current high-quality media which form the public opinion to comply with the principles of ethical journalism in relation to acts of extremism and terrorism, media landscape in Slovakia is clearly largely influenced by pressure generated by less respectable media outlets. It was journalists and editors of

such media outlets who, in the wake of the attack, published transcripts of the manifesto and the farewell letter (Figure No. 14), the attacker's username (Figure No. 15) or instructions for accessing the murderer's discussion on 4chan.

**In terms of its content, the perpetrator's letter represents another declaration of opinion baselines and amplified ideas published in the manifesto, which are ultimately supposed to excuse and justify the attack on Zámocká Street.** The letter contains opinions meeting the criteria of terrorist content, indicating that Topky.sk, the portal which published photographs of this letter, thereby violated the law.<sup>73</sup> Consequently, CMS initiated administrative proceedings in relation to prevention of dissemination of illegal content as specified in the Act on Media Services.<sup>74</sup>

The media reaction to the terrorist act in Bratislava demonstrated that some journalists **lack the knowledge and skills necessary to communicate such type of attack and its background to the general public**, while making it clear that there are no consensual standard procedures in place for cases such as this one.

# Global and EU mechanisms for tackling terrorist content online

Almost all digital platforms covered in this report have established systems and processes for detecting threats such as illegal content which violate their own community rules or applicable legislation. Due to interconnectedness of individual digital services in the context of dissemination of problematic content online, CMS considers systematic cross-sectoral interaction between digital service providers, regulators and law enforcement authorities to be of crucial importance.

## Christchurch Call

Christchurch Call was launched following the terror attack in Christchurch, New Zealand which resulted in death or injury of over one hundred people. The entire terror attack was streamed live and the footage reached over 4 000 views in 17 minutes. The signatories of this call (governments and digital service providers), initiated by the New Zealand Prime Minister and the President of France, committed to comply with mechanisms aimed at prevention and elimination of terrorist and violent extremist online content.

Content sharing service providers pledged to take transparent and specific measures to prevent initial uploading of terrorist and violent content to publicly accessible platforms. Providers of these services furthermore committed to immediately and permanently remove extremist, violent and terrorist content.<sup>75</sup> A significant component of the Christchurch Call is a special focus on cooperation between individual platforms, including joint technological development, using shared hash and URL databases or efficient and coherent procedures for removing terrorist content. The collective obligations of governments and content sharing service providers include international cooperation of law enforcement authorities with digital platforms for the purposes of a swift and efficient investigation of online extremist activities potentially linked to a terror attack.<sup>76</sup>

By means of the Christchurch Call Crisis Response Protocol<sup>77</sup>, the signatories of the Call agreed on specific definitions and measures individual sectors shall take in case of a security crisis, which the situation following the attack on Zámocká Street undoubtedly was. The primary purpose of this Crisis Response Protocol is to prevent dissemination of online terrorist and extremist content, and thus efficiently eliminate the impact of the perpetrator of the terrorist act in the media environment. This is what radical right-wing terrorists rely on when disseminating potentially illegal content online after having carried out their attack (manifestos, live streaming etc.).

Slovakia has been one of the signatories of this Call since 2021.<sup>78</sup> Following the attack on Zámocká Street, NAKA notified GIFCT of the terrorist content being disseminated online. In view of its new competences, CMS came forward to actively participate in this initiative.

## European Union Internet Forum (EUIF)

The EUIF initiative was launched by the European Commission in December 2015. EUIF deals with exploitation of the Internet for terrorist purposes by reducing the accessibility of terrorist content on the Internet and increasing the volume of alternative narratives in the online environment. In 2019 EUIF's scope of activity was extended to enhancing capabilities in combating sexual abuse of children.

The main goal of this initiative is to prepare grounds for discussion and cooperation in the issue of harmful and illegal online content for EU governments, online sector and other partners. One of the main responsibilities of the forum is to examine possible reactions to counter exploitation of digital platforms by terrorists and other extremist actors. EUIF contributed to several achievements in this area. For example, it participated in the establishment of Europol's Internet Referral Unit which flags terrorist content and alerts digital platforms. EUIF also approved of creation of the European Crisis Response Protocol to react to dissemination of terrorist and violent content online.

Active members of this initiative include EU Member States, Member States of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), European institutions and agencies, as well as companies such as Meta, Google, Discord, Microsoft, Twitter, Telegram, TikTok and many others.<sup>79</sup>

## Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT)

Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT) is a non-governmental organisation bringing together tech industry, governments, civil society and academics. Its ambition is to strengthen cooperation and exchanges related to countering terrorist and violent extremist online activities.<sup>80</sup>

This forum was founded in 2017 by Facebook (nowadays Meta), Microsoft, Twitter and YouTube and has been operating as a non-governmental organisation since 2019.<sup>81</sup> GIFCT was originally established as a reaction to exploitation of digital platforms by the militant terrorist organisation ISIS (so-called "Daesh" or "Islamic State") and was intended to address exclusively the issue of terrorism. Its scope of activity was extended in the wake of the Christchurch attack in 2019.<sup>82</sup> It was in this year that more than 50 tech companies and governments from all around the world, including Slovakia, signed the Christchurch Call, committing to "*eliminate terrorist and violent extremist content online*". In addition to Christchurch Call Crisis Response Protocol, GIFCT belongs to key tools for delivering on this commitment. Since then GIFCT has been operating with its own specialist technology, counter-terrorist and operational teams, as well as working groups and independent advisors.<sup>83</sup>

# Tech Against Terrorism

Tech Against Terrorism is an initiative launched by the UN Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (UN CTED) in cooperation with the global tech industry. It helps establish partnerships among the public and private sectors, i. e. between tech companies, governments and UNCTED. This project aims to tackle terrorist exploitation of the Internet by means of enhanced awareness of this issue, knowledge exchange and practical support.<sup>84</sup>

In November 2020 Tech Against Terrorism launched a database of verified terrorist content entitled “Terrorist Content Analytics Platform” (TCAP).<sup>85</sup> This database alerts companies of terrorist content present on their platforms by flagging URL addresses. Such alerts are intended for both large and small companies which do not have their own monitoring capabilities. These can subsequently decide whether this content is or is not of terrorist nature, with TCAP continuously monitoring whether and when this content is removed.<sup>86</sup>

## Digital Services Act (DSA)

The new EU regulation Digital Services Act (DSA) imposes obligations on digital service providers such as social media or online marketplaces, taking effect on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2024. The Digital Services Act provides for the principle that what is illegal offline must also be illegal online.<sup>87</sup> DSA focuses particularly on tackling dissemination of illegal content, online discrimination and other threats to the society. The level of liability of digital platforms is directly proportionate to their size. This means that very large online platforms (VLOPs) will be subject to stricter requirements.

In the context of the terror attack on Zámocká Street, DSA governs the following frameworks of operation of VLOPs:

- **Illegal content** – DSA clearly specifies the scope of liability of digital service providers for content on respective platforms. Furthermore, DSA introduces mechanisms for implementation of measures (Article 16) against illegal content, facilitating the reporting process. Under DSA, digital service providers alerted of existence of illegal content should take measures necessary for removing the content at issue without undue delay.
- **Transparency** (Articles 15, 24 and 42) – DSA requires digital service providers to report on content moderation they have been engaging in during a certain period. Additional provisions will apply for VLOPs. These will concern human resources

allocated to content moderation by the provider, information on average monthly number of service recipients per every member state and results of risk assessment and risk mitigation plans.

- ☛ Coordination – the aim of DSA is to harmonise rules for digital service providers throughout the EU, as well as to improve coordination and cooperation among different regulatory authorities.
- ☛ Penalties – for the purposes of enforcement of the Regulation in case of its violation, DSA provides for penalties for digital service providers amounting to up to 6 % of their global turnover.

In terms of CMS's position in relation to systematic supervision of digital platforms active in Slovakia, enhanced competence of CMS is foreseen as a result of implementation of European policies. **If CMS becomes a Digital Services Coordinator under the Regulation on Digital Services (DSA), it will be able to intervene against illegal or harmful online content more efficiently in the future.**

## Conclusions and recommendations

The purpose of this report is to present specific measures taken by the Council for Media Services following the attack on Zámocká Street in order to eliminate the impact of dissemination of terrorist and illegal content and hate speech in the online environment. Furthermore, this report aims to analyse the reaction of the government, media, and digital platforms and hosting services in particular in order to identify gaps which need to be addressed in the future. A detailed analysis of the digital environment, potentially illegal content and counter-terrorism mechanisms in the wake of the attack on Zámocká Street primarily show that there are no effectively enforceable legal frameworks and efficient mechanisms which might prevent dissemination of illegal and harmful content.

### Insufficient content control and moderation on digital platforms

CMS's analysis shows that digital platforms played a significant part in dissemination of extremist content and hate speech both before and after the attack on Zámocká Street in Bratislava, as well as in radicalisation of the perpetrator. The information available clearly shows that the shooter radicalised in unregulated extremist forums and via chat services, such as private Telegram groups.<sup>88</sup> The providers of these services were unable to detect and remove illegal content published by the attacker prior to the attack in a timely manner.

Platforms which became important debate facilitators following the attack were incapable of removing harmful content reported by the Council for Media Services swiftly and efficiently enough, considering potential harm such as radicalisation of individuals or further violence. Due to this failure, posts and comments containing hate speech, disinformation and elements glorifying violence are still publicly accessible. It is this **long-term inefficiency of platforms in implementing their own community standards which the regulator believes to be one of the biggest issues**. Other issues include low efficiency and swiftness of content moderation, as well as systematic barriers in reporting potentially illegal or harmful content, e. g. inadequate size of fact-checking teams for small and medium-sized countries and minority languages, or inaccurate algorithm for recognition of reported content. Taking into consideration opportunities for migration between individual platforms, CMS recommends platforms to cooperate more closely and to develop common standards to efficiently eliminate this phenomenon.

Regulation of digital platforms in Central and Eastern Europe has proven to be insufficient in the long term, with moderation of content in minority languages being particularly problematic. Tech companies should

therefore allocate more adequate resources for the Central and Eastern Europe regions, including both human resources and financial capital. Indeed, **the content currently available on platforms violates primarily the service providers' own rules**. The new European regulation – Digital Services Act (“DSA”), coming into effect on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2024, provides that in case of systematic or recurrent failure to comply with its obligations, a fine may be imposed on a provider amounting to up to six percent of its annual global turnover. It is these systematic failures which nowadays seem to be the biggest challenge for digital service providers.

## Efficient and timely application of existing global and European mechanisms for tackling terrorist content online

Since the Christchurch attack in 2019, multiple mechanisms facilitating cross-sectoral interaction between digital service providers, regulators and law enforcement authorities were established. **In spite of the fact that Slovakia is one of the signatories of Christchurch Call, CMS's interview with representatives of this initiative showed that the Christchurch Call Crisis Response Protocol was not initiated after the attack on Zámocká Street.** Another example of a mechanism that should be exploited is removal order issued to service providers, requesting removal of terrorist content or disabling access to terrorist content in all EU Member States under the Regulation (EU) 2021/784 via relevant national bodies. In this case, hosting service providers must act within one hour of receipt of the removal order.<sup>89</sup> CMS believes it is necessary to accelerate preparations for timely and full exploitation of these mechanisms, intended for prevention of dissemination of terrorist and violent extremist content in the online environment. **In this context, the Slovak national regulator is prepared to participate in Christchurch Call initiative activities and other key initiatives, including in cooperation with other relevant Slovak national bodies.**

## Developing principles and standards of journalism in relation to communicating this type of acts

The media reaction to the terrorist act in Bratislava demonstrated that some journalists lack the knowledge and skills necessary to communicate such type of attack and its background to the general public, while making it clear that there are no standard procedures in place for cases such as this one. Attempting at easily generated sensationalism, some media outlets communicated the event to the public in an unprofessional manner or were disseminating potentially illegal content outright. CMS therefore believes **it is important for the Slovak media houses to achieve a consensual formalisation of rules and standards of journalism in emergencies** (e. g. during a terror attack). For example, the journalist community could operate based on a self-regulatory mechanism. This could be implemented by means of a code governing behaviour in a specific area.

# Media literacy, critical thinking and digital skills

The terror attack on Zámocká Street has demonstrated that youth radicalisation on digital platforms is an issue Slovakia must urgently address. Evaluation of shared online content in the long term is not one of Slovakia's strengths. At the end of August 2022, Centre for Bioethics of the University of Sts. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, Slovakia in cooperation with Focus agency conducted research of the so-called "conspiracy index" in Slovakia. A survey of a representative sample of citizens resulted in a value of 30.27, which is one of the highest values of all countries participating in a survey carried out based on the same methodology.<sup>90</sup> A lower index was achieved in countries such as Turkey, Nigeria, Mexico, Egypt or Saudi Arabia. This research also showed that 45 % of Slovak nationals are convinced that global developments are secretly controlled and governed by a small group of people. This shows that Slovakia needs to enhance activities focusing on media literacy, digital skills and critical thinking, as well as increasing awareness of online threats related to youth radicalisation. In this context, CMS recommends the public sector to cooperate with the non-profit sector which has, thanks to years of practice, acquired necessary country-specific knowledge, and is aware of the most efficient approaches to improving media literacy, digital skills and critical thinking.



## Round Table on the occasion of European Media Literacy Week

In view of its new competences in the area of media literacy, particularly the opportunity to initiate and carry out activities supporting media literacy, on 24<sup>th</sup> October 2022 CMS organised the first of a series of round table discussions focusing on this topic with the participation of representatives of 15 institutions from the public and non-profit sectors. In addition to presentation of scope of activity of individual organisations by their representatives, the aim of this meeting was to identify the biggest challenges related to development of media literacy in Slovakia. Participants in this discussion included representatives of projects, initiatives and institutions such as Zmudri.sk, DigiQ, Víčatá, Gerulata Technologies, Zvolsti.info, Faculty of Mass Media Communication at the University of Sts. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, Faculty of Communication and Media Studies of Prešov University, Department of Journalism of the Catholic University in Ružomberok, Kooperativa Foundation, National Institute for Education and Youth (NIVAM), National Coordination Centre for Resolving the Issues of Violence against Children (NKS), European Commission's Representation in Slovakia, Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic and Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic.

This initiative aims to provide a forum for sharing best practices and ideas among organisations and institutions researching and implementing activities related to development of media literacy in Slovakia. In the upcoming weeks, CMS is planning the next meeting of this group in the interest of enhancing cooperation.

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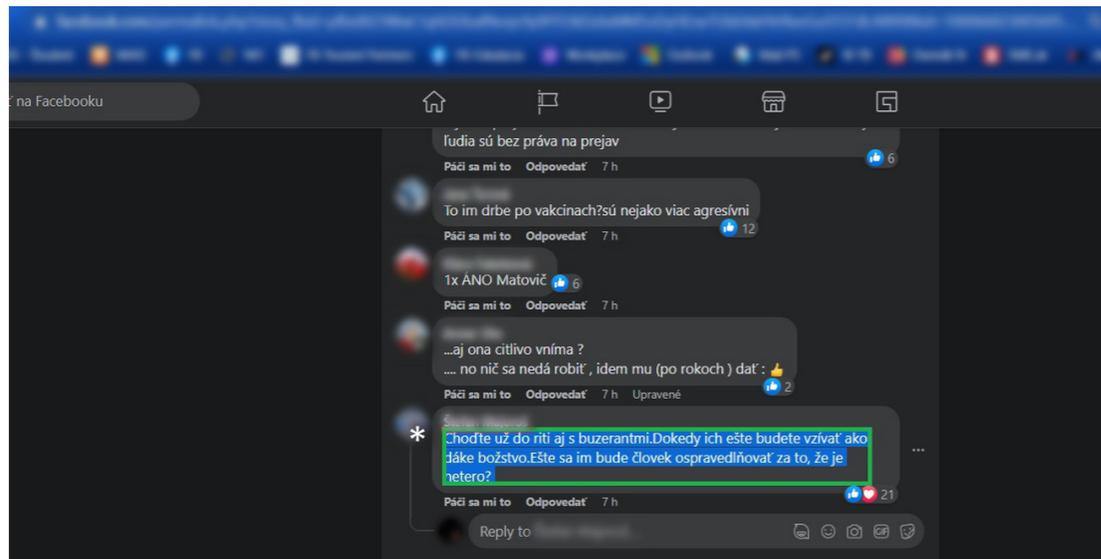
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Figure No. 1



\* Fuck off with your fags. How much longer are you gonna worship them as if they were gods? Should we be apologizing to them for being straight?

Figure No. 2



\* If someone is a so-called queer, I wish they didn't brag about it and bother others. These lgbt parades are nothing short of a provocation in my opinion and I believe what they do there is a gross indecency. This doesn't mean I approve of what's happened though.

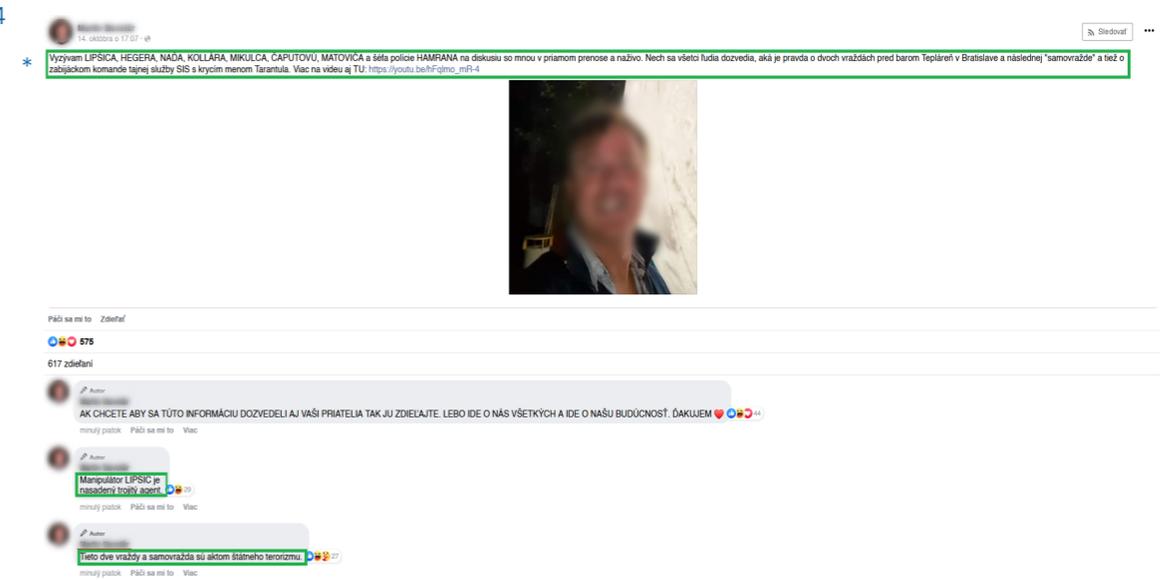
Such people shouldn't be out in the street but in therapy.

Figure No. 3



\* No terrorism. Just stupid jealousy.

Figure No. 4



\* I'm challenging LIPŠIC, HEGER, NAĐ, KOLLÁR, MIKULEC, ČAPUTOVÁ, MATOVIČ and the president of the police force HARMAN to participate in a live debate with me. Let everyone learn the truth about two murders in front of Tepláreň in Bratislava and the subsequent "suicide", and on killer SIS commando of code-named Tarantula. More details in the following video:

LIPŠIC the manipulator is a deployed triple agent.

These two murders and the suicide are an act of national terrorism.

Figure No. 5



Figure No. 6

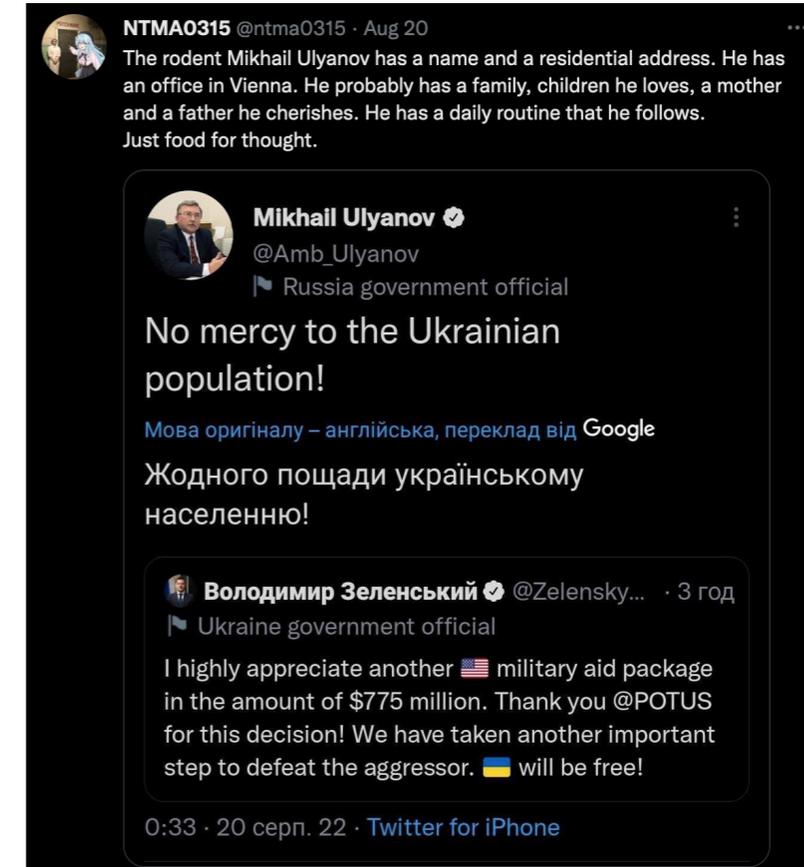


Figure No. 7



Figure No. 8



\* Bro you couldn't do it coz you're a moron can tell by your looks you couldn't handle a gun. But you've got your 15 glorious comments so have fun when the cops enter you'll be shitting stock cubes

Figure No. 9



Figure No. 10

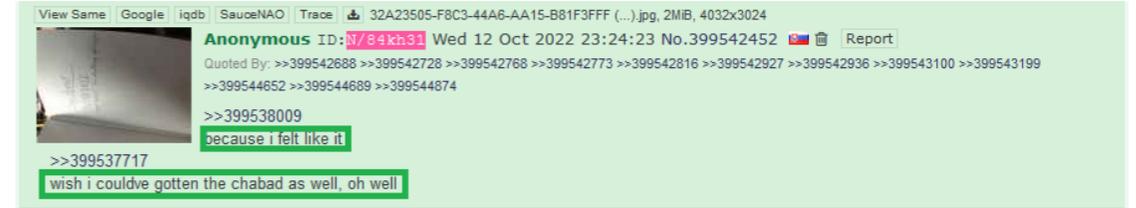


Figure No. 11

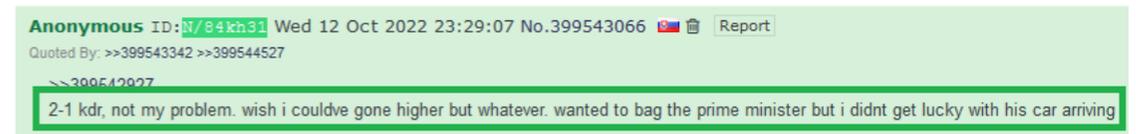


Figure No. 12

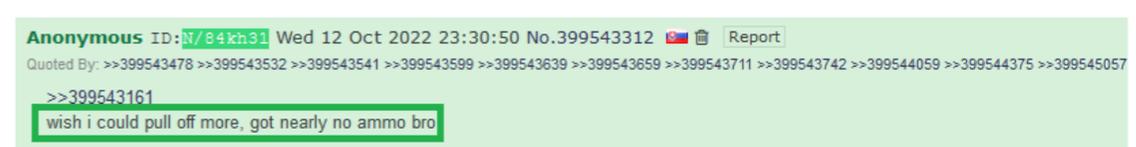


Figure No. 13

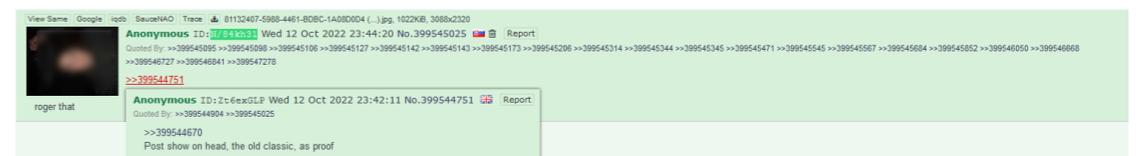
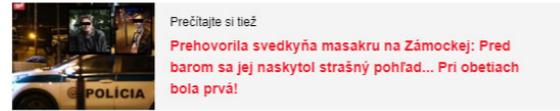


Figure No. 14

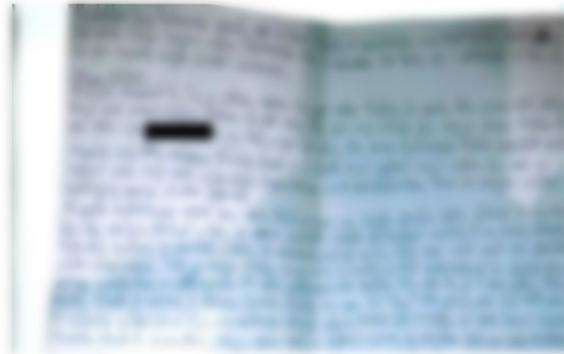


\* *An eyewitness of the massacre on Zámocká Street has spoken: What she saw in front of the bar was horrifying... She was the first one by the victims!*

*The letter shows Juraj was happy with what he had done, rather than having a bad conscience. He had only one regret: "I feel only two things. Being happy about having got this opportunity to attack this occupation Jewish system and being sad because I won't be alive to see the world after our enemy has been defeated," Juraj wrote.*

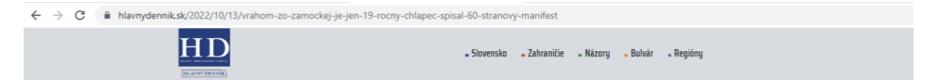
*Farewell letter left behind by the murderer Juraj. Source: Topky.sk.*

\* Z listu vyplýva, že Juraj nemal žiadne výčitky svedomia, ba dokonca, mal radosť z toho, čo vykonal. Trápilo ho len jedno. **"Sú vo mne len dve emócie. Radosť z toho, že sa mi naskytlá takáto príležitosť zaútočiť na tento okupačný židovský systém a smútok z toho, že nebudem nažive na to, aby som videl svet po porážke nášho nepriateľa,"** písal Juraj.



Líst na rozlúčku, ktorý zanechal vrah Juraj (†19)  
Zdroj: Topky.sk

Figure No. 15



\* *In his manifesto, he says he wants to focus on "highly valued targets". Several hours after his act, he wrote on 4chan that he intended to target Heger, but he had not been lucky. The manifesto itself, which was published several hours before the murder on Zámocká Street, was uploaded from Dúbravka neighbourhood. The offender thus may have been waiting for Heger for a longer time.*

*The cause of the youth's radicalisation is unclear. In his manifesto, he mentions mental issues and bullying. He described the attack of the extremist Brenton Tarrant in Christchurch, New Zealand in a mosque, causing death of 51 people, as a breaking point. This perpetrator streamed the entire massacre live on a social network. According to Juraj K, it was Tarrant who inspired him to carry out a similar attack.*

\* Aj vo svojom manifeste hovorí o tom, že sa chce zamerať na „vysoko hodnotené ciele“. Pár hodín po skutku napísal na diskusnom fóre 4chan, že cieľom jeho útoku mal byť Heger, ale nemal šťastie. Aj manifest, ktorý zverejnil niekoľko hodín pred vraždou na Zámockej ulici, pridal na internet z bratislavskej mestskej časti Dúbravka. Je teda možné, že na Hegera páchatel čakal dlhšie.



Zdroj:FB/Radovan bránik

Čo stálo za radikalizáciou mladíka. Je otázne, vo svojom manifeste spomína psychické problémy aj šikanu. Ako zlomový moment označil útok radikála Brentona Tarranta v novozélandskom meste Christchurch na mešitu, pri ktorej zahynulo 51 ľudí. Útočník celý priebeh masakru vysielal naživo na sociálnej sieti. Podľa Juraja K. ho práve toto video priviedlo k tomu, aby podobný útok zrealizoval aj on.

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