

# Deník Referendum



No oligarchs. No paywall.  
A story of readers-powered  
public interest journalism.



# Dear Friends

I was struck by the thought in a courtroom amid a protracted legal case of my news organization suing the Czech oligarch and Prime Minister Andrej Babiš for calling us “the worst lying cesspool that lies as it did before”. He originally uttered the insult during a parliamentary Q&A session when he was confronted with one of our hard-hitting investigations. In the courtroom, my colleagues Zuzana Vlasatá and Veronika Staňková were just giving brilliant testimony explaining how severe impacts such attacks have on journalists, news organizations and their work.

Even before the judge ruled in our favour, I realized it was perhaps fitting that the greatest challenge for my news organization has arrived in the year I believe we are best prepared to face it. For 2026 is the year the Czech Republic entered – at least on paper – with the worst government in the EU.

It is led by the infamous co-founder of the far-right European political party Patriots for Europe, the Czech super-oligarch Andrej Babiš, whose illicit behaviour we have spent a great deal of time exposing and confronting. After the elections in the fall of 2025, his populist party ANO returned to power, entering a coalition with two junior and arguably even more extreme far-right partners.

It did not take long for the new government to launch attacks on civil society, public broadcasting, and nature conservation, in a style reminiscent of Donald Trump. With the opposition fragmented, the left having wrecked itself and out of Parliament and the major opposition party represented by a conservative party, I think it is hardly possible to find a political landscape so heavily skewed to the right as the current Czech Republic.

We deeply regret that our journalism was unable to prevent this monumental deterioration of Czech democracy. However, it certainly was not for lack of trying. Today, our resolve is greater than ever to expose the corrupting nature of oligarchic rule that is permeating every aspect of Czech public life.

With one of the best teams of editorial teams, we are uniquely positioned to do this. Looking at the team of journalists and production staff at Deník Referendum, I know we have never been better prepared for a challenge of this magnitude.

We expect to be targeted for our journalism, just as we were during Andrej Babiš’s previous term. However, thanks to the community of supporters and the international networks of colleagues and friends we have nurtured over the years, we are well-positioned to withstand any pressure that comes our way.

We view our journalistic work as a part of the long and brilliant tradition of Czech democratic journalism. We also see ourselves as a part of the current international efforts of fearless public interest journalism to assist in preserving severely weakened democracies. Our experience has taught us that the fates of democracy and good journalism are inextricably linked.

We have reached the seventeenth year of our existence only through the support of a remarkable community—our readers, contributors, and international friends—who believe in the transformative power of good journalism as passionately as we do. I am proud I can share the story of Deník Referendum with you.

- Jakub Patočka  
*Founding publisher and editor-in-chief*  
March 2026

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# Our Mission

Deník Referendum is an independent online daily established in 2009 with the aim to serve public interests in preserving social cohesion, civil rights, thriving nature and living democracy – all essential priorities underrepresented in the mainstream media. Since then, Deník Referendum has evolved in a widely respected news organization. It has been playing a unique role as a platform of Czech civil society, giving voice to many who would not be heard otherwise.

Our aim is to provide honest comprehensive reporting and essential news with the best professional standards achievable. At the same time, we believe that good journalism has a transformative power and can make any society a better place not only through providing vital information, insights and contexts but also by asking the authorities fundamental questions on behalf of the public interest.

With strong bonds to the civil society and wide range of public figures aligned with us as authors or supporters, we see ourselves as “a discourse transformer”. We have proven many times that by strategically choosing our focus and priorities, we have the ability to beneficially alter the content of public conversation.

Though we are a small newsroom, our readership counts many prominent Czech opinion leaders. We have proven time and time again that by strategically

choosing our focus and priorities, we have the ability to shape public debate.

As we describe in greater depth below, in the past we have greatly influenced the debate on topics ranging from the housing crisis, to the political influence of oligarchs, and to the discrimination of the Roma community and the normalization of hate speech.

Most importantly we remain one of a few Czech media under no influence of oligarchs. We believe this is the only way to hold those in power accountable. Investigating Czech oligarchs and in general the corrosive influence of big money on society has always been one of the defining priorities of the organization.

We decided to keep our content available to the general public. We do not believe in paywall since we aim to remain a freely available alternative for readers who would have otherwise fallen for fake news websites or clickbait headlines fabricated by oligarchs.

Our mission is to nurture the website as a generally respected and accessible space for bold, transformative journalism on political, social and environmental issues. Our current major strategic effort is building on the success of our reporting unit to expand its scope of activities including international cooperation on investigating corporations and oligarchs who are undermining quality of life in the Czech Republic, and generally pose a threat to free societies.



# Who we are

The content of Deník Referendum is produced by three main units: Analytical news with three desks (home, world and climate), Opinions and Reporting. While the first two publish content on daily basis, the reporters' team enjoys the freedom to operate without constant pressure on "mass production" and publishes unique content based on long term analytical and investigative work, usually about five pieces a month: a ratio of a text per person per month. All the content is edited by a team of editors.

Our weekly newsletter has over 13 thousand subscribers. We also produce a weekly podcast that highlights the most important of our content. Social media presence is professionally managed, but it is not prioritized.

The reporting unit currently consists of five journalists, four of them women. The aspiration of the team is to excel with the quality and public interest value of the outcome. The reporting unit focuses

on issues that are neglected or directly repressed by the mainstream news outlets. In 2019, as the very first news organization in the Czech Republic we have created a special position of Climate reporter. The position is part of the news team producing well respected home and international analytical news – mostly features.

The opinion section is a truly unique feature of Deník Referendum. Our regular authors include a wide range of columnists and external authors, publicly active and widely respected personalities from all areas of public life, including representatives of the legendary dissident platform Charter 77, human rights activists, former and active politicians, diplomats, academics, former constitutional judges, ombudsman, civil society leaders and other important figures of public life in the Czech Republic.

Deník Referendum thus proudly considers itself a successor of the old fine tradition of Czech democratic journalism.



# People

## Publisher and Editor-in-Chief

- Jakub Patočka



Co-founder and first director of the Czech Friends of Earth (in 1989), became a full-time journalist in 1999 as the editor-in-chief of weekly *Literární noviny*, the journalistic heir of intellectual tradition of Prague Spring 1968.

## Vice Editor-in-Chief

- Zuzana Vlasatá



Award-winning reporter, since 2014, she manages the investigations & reporting unit. Vice-chair of the Czech Committee of International Press Institute.

## Executive Editor

- Jitka Komendová



Associate professor of Slavonic studies at University of Olomouc joined the editorial team shortly after the Russian invasion to Ukraine. Manages the daily editions.

## Reporters

- Petra Dvořáková



- Fatima Rahimi



- Anna Absolonová



- Daniel Kotecký



## News

### World news

- Petr Jedlička



### Home news

- Vojtěch Petrů



### Climate Reporter

- Matěj Moravanský



### Opinions editor

- Jakub Roubíček



## Associated editors

### Editor

- Ota Bureš



### Editor

- Michal Hořejší



### Office Manager

- Tereza Bartošíková



### Director

- Veronika Staňková



## Production

### Readers' engagement

- Ema Pospíšilová



### Fundraising

- Klotylda Marková



### Social Media

- Filip Valíček



### IT

- Vlado Čičmanec



# Basic facts about Deník Referendum

## Founder

Jakub Patočka

## Founded

November 2009

## Publisher

Vydavatelství Referendum s.r.o.,  
Pěstitelská 196/18,  
619 00 Brno - Dolní Heršpice

## Office

Cejl 29/76, Brno 602 00

## Content

Analytical news, Features, Opinions, Reporting, Investigations, Podcast.

## Organizational structure

- News (Home, World, Climate)
- Opinions
- Reporting
- Production

## Source of revenues

- Donations from readers
- Grant and project funding

## Legal status

The news organization Vydavatelství Referendum, s.r.o publishing Deník Referendum is private limited company owned by its founder Jakub Patočka. It is produced in partnership with an affiliated civil society organization Centre for media, ecology and democracy, which participates in creating content –

## Key genres

- News
- Commentaries
- Features
- Reporting
- Investigative journalism
- Solutions journalism
- Data journalism
- Podcast

## Current main topics

- Investigations of Czech oligarchs
- Investigations of the fossil-fuel industry
- Rise of authoritarianism
- Environmental crimes
- Poverty and failures of the welfare state
- Crisis of the education system
- Defence of independent media
- Women´s rights
- Discrimination of the Roma minority
- European politics

mainly the work of investigative reportages. The publishing is also supported by the Fund for Independence of Deník Referendum which collects recurring and one-time donations from the readers. The Fund has been the single most important source of income of Deník Referendum.

# Media situation in the Czech Republic

As the media in the Czech Republic are increasingly under the stranglehold of their oligarch owners, the space for independent democratic journalism is shrinking. One of the biggest publishing and radio houses, Mafra was acquired by the Prime Minister Andrej Babiš, after he entered politics. He also owns the giant agrochemical corporation Agrofert. Mafra was recently sold to another Czech oligarch, the coal-baron Pavel Tykač. Another large publishing house Czech Media Centre is owned by Daniel Křetínský, owner of yet another fossil-fuel corporation EPH. Many other essential Czech media are owned by other oligarchs and their financial groups.

Czech democracy is in urgent need of good quality journalism. In the mainstream media it has focused almost exclusively on corrupt politicians, using mainly information leaked by police prosecutors – often with their own side intentions.

Corporate power and its influence on politics have been largely overlooked. Therefore, we nowadays witness the Czech oligarchy both directly and indirectly – through their far-right proxy parties – taking over the state. The classic and internationally well-known example of this process is the Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babiš.

Furthermore, many pressing social issues have been neglected for years, feeding the distrust, frustration and apathy of large swaths of citizens. We witnessed this ourselves while exploring problems of neglected Czech peripheral towns or analysing the roots of the rise of far-right's exploitation of fear and hatred. With the current government consisting of three far right parties, the Czech Republic can serve as laboratory of what has gone wrong with democratic politics and representation of the interests of the public.

## Our stories

While Deník Referendum is generally respected for its analytical news and widely praised for the unique opinions section, the major achievements of the newspaper

came after the establishment of the reporting and investigations unit in 2014. Some of the best-known stories the team uncovered follow.



# 1 The Yellow Baron: Why the oligarch Andrej Babiš got into politics

In 2017, our authors Zuzana Vlasatá and Jakub Patočka finished first large investigative project of Deník Referendum exposing the real motives behind Andrej Babiš's entry into politics. Several series of articles resulted in publication of the book "The Yellow Baron". The book was the first time that journalists exposed the way Andrej Babiš abuses his economic, political and media power.

The authors managed to interview former business partners of Andrej Babiš, who never before dared to talk to media fearing revenge. Due to the unique witnesses and thorough analysis of legal and financial documents we were able to describe Babiš's business model based on hostile takeovers of smaller and medium-sized companies. We have exposed how he subsequently used similar techniques when taking over the institutions of the Czech state.





The investigation proved that the principal motivation for Andrej Babiš to enter politics was to secure his personal business interests and maximise the flow of public subsidies. His well-crafted propaganda machine, including a fast-growing media empire, served as a smokescreen for his true political aims.

- [The political economy of the rapeseed oil: Portrait of Andrej Babiš as Yellow Baron](#)
- [Babiš's concern destroyed the crop owned by his business rival causing damage of millions](#)
- [How the Ministry of Environment follows orders of Babiš](#)
- [Truth made by Babiš: How the Czech major newspapers work for their owner](#)
- [Andrej Babiš, the creator of jobs not for local communities but for Ukrainian mafia](#)

### Impact and recognition

The book "The Yellow Baron" became a national bestseller in 2017. To date, about 24 000 copies have been sold and about 15 000 copies of the e-book downloaded. An outstandingly successful documentary movie The Common Sense, with over a million views, has been co-produced by the public Czech TV based on the book. The subsequent civil society movement confronting Andrej Babiš's abuses of power was to a large extent based on the findings of the book. The findings of the authors were highlighted and quoted at the rallies regularly and around 12 000 new people have subscribed to the newsletter covering the journalistic work of Deník Referendum on Babiš and other Czech oligarchs. This cohort of subscribers is the biggest group of engaged readers in the Czech media landscape.

As a consequence of the work, Deník Referendum has also been targeted by Andrej Babiš, his corporation and his government. There have been several court cases, with criminal charges being dismissed by the courts and another case ending with a victory for Deník Referendum after several years of proceedings. There was also a smear campaign targeting the authors and the newspaper in the media owned by Andrej Babiš. He attacked sources of our financial income whilst some other potential funders expressed fear to support the work of Deník Referendum because of the potential reprisals of his government.



## 2 Poisoning of the Bečva river: environmental crime in a captured state



In September 2020 one of the most severe ecological disasters in the history of the Czech Republic occurred on the pristine Bečva river in the north east of the country. Over forty kilometers of the river stream were poisoned with a chemical substance, over 80 thousand fish including many protected species have died. While the general public immediately identified DEZA – the large chemical factory owned by the holding company of then-Prime Minister Andrej Babiš – as the main

suspect, the authorities were quick to point to another potential culprit further upstream.

Based on the previous work exposing the capture of state institutions by Andrej Babiš and his political and economic interests, especially in the environmental sector, the journalists of Deník Referendum Jakub Patočka and Zuzana Vlasatá were able to expose fundamental discrepancies in the official explanations of the disaster.

After the groundbreaking work with local fishermen, whistleblowers from the DEZA chemical facility approached us at Deník Referendum and shared evidence, including photographs, of an accident that occurred at the plant. We were able to verify their witness testimony with other evidence including aerial photos captured by a drone. When we published the groundbreaking story, for a few days it seemed like nobody in the country was speaking about anything else. It still remains the most read article on our website ever.

Unfortunately, so many state institutions including the police, state attorney, an expert witness, and environmental regulators had been already involved in the conspiracy to falsely accuse a surrogate suspect, that they put tremendous amount of energy in diverting the attention from the story of accident at the DEZA chemical plant.

At the end they managed to avoid any real investigations, blaming a wrongly accused facility further upstream instead with dubious circumstantial evidence. All this in spite of the fact that leading experts have demonstrated that the physical laws preclude the possibility that the chosen scapegoat was responsible. Almost six years after the tragedy, the legal proceedings have been downgraded from a criminal investigation to mere breaking of regulations. And they are still not over.

- [Did DEZA poison Bečva? Other explanations don't make sense. The authorities are Sweeping under the rug and lying](#)
- [Revealed: An accident occurred in Deza on the day of the Bečva poisoning. Why was it kept secret?](#)

- [Revealed: the accusation against Energoaqua for poisoning the Bečva River is based on fraud](#)
- [Anatomy of an Ecocide: The 'Czech Trump' and the Mysterious Poisoning of the Becva River](#)
- [DR findings: Deza is apparently connected to a suspicious outlet in Lhotka nad Bečvou](#)

### Impact and recognition

The work of Deník Referendum was recognized as a major factor in how the story evolved. A Parliamentary Commission was established as a consequence of the investigations published by Deník Referendum.

The report produced by the Commission confirmed many of the fundamental critical arguments first published by Deník Referendum. The investigations were quoted and referenced by all major media outlets in the Czech Republic. There was also a massive response by the readers. The monthly donations received from the supporters more than doubled in one month as a direct consequence of the investigations. Later, the authors were invited to speak in the Czech Parliament in a hearing.

While the case was never properly investigated, the overwhelming belief of the public is that the state institutions failed to perform their duties as exposed by the journalists at Deník Referendum. A theatre play was produced based on the investigations, partly as an homage to the journalism of Deník Referendum. The news organization receives part of the ticket sales revenues.



# 3 Exposing the fossil empire of Daniel Křetínský and his corporation EPH



The investigative team of Deník Referendum has always strived to highlight that Andrej Babiš is not “the only rotten apple”, as many public figures would argue, but that the Czech society has a systemic problem with the oligarchy as a power structure. We have produced multiple series on several prominent Czech oligarchs over the years, including a coal-baron and media-tycoon Zdeněk Bakala and another fossil fuel businessman Pavel Tykač.

And in 2020, the decision has been made to dedicate a long-term focus to the “brightest star” among Czech oligarchs, Daniel Křetínský.

Since then, the investigative work on the largest Czech transnational corporation EPH and the company’s owner Daniel Křetínský has been one of the cornerstones of Deník Referendum’s reporting for over five years.



A team coordinated by the reporter of Deník Referendum Daniel Kotecký has investigated the company from a wide range of perspectives, uncovering crucial information about Křetínský's ties to sanctioned Russian oligarchs, EPH's "creative" carbon accounting methods, the billions of Czech crowns (CZK) in decarbonisation subsidies that EPH receives for switching to fossil gas in Czechia, or the evasion of billions CZK in unpaid fees for storing hazardous and other waste by his waste management company.

- [How Křetínský siphoned revenues from transporting Russian gas to tax havens and used them to build up his empire](#)
- [Křetínský's secret meeting with Gazprom management in 2016, which was set up by already-then sanctioned Russian oligarch Babakov](#)
- [Data investigation of EPH's „creative“ carbon accounting](#)
- [How Křetínský became the largest coal producer in Europe](#)
- [Deep-dive into a local story on how a company co-owned by Křetínský had a long-term strategy of evading payments to municipalities for storing waste in their landfills. And how the locals have resisted them with a mixed success](#)
- [Data investigation into how Czechia mismanages the subsidies for decarbonisation from the EU Modernisation Fund, EPH being among the top 3 beneficiaries](#)

## Impact and recognition

When we started the project Daniel Křetínský was generally recognized as a decent businessman and a champion of liberal values. It is not so anymore. The work we have published has informed civil society campaigns focused on Křetínský and his empire.

This can be illustrated by our recent investigation, which exposed that a campaign in favour of expanding one of the largest Czech landfills co-owned by Daniel Křetínský was coordinated by his waste management company and political figures in the municipal government. The local civil society groups told us that our findings were instrumental in their campaign to inform the local public about the company's corrupt practices and halt the expansion in a local referendum.

Our work has also been translated to several languages and republished in collaboration with our partners in Voxeurop and VSquare. We have also presented the work at a roundtable in the European Parliament in 2023 and we've been repeatedly invited to prepare sessions for various workshops (e.g. European Climate Accountability Workshop or the BFF EPH Conference in Cottbus).

The work has also gained significant international attention as Deník Referendum has become the "go-to" address of international journalists seeking in-depth information about the Czech oligarch dubbed "Czech sphinx" by British journalists for his secretiveness. Among the media that have approached us were the likes of BBC, Financial Times, The Guardian, Le Monde, or Follow the Money.



# 4 Classrooms of anxiety: Deteriorating mental health of Czech pupils



According to comparative pan-European study Czech children have the highest level of mental health issues among all the children in the EU. Czech pupils are also the least likely to enjoy their school experience. Why is this so? Those are the questions the five-part series answered.

Deník Referendum has always taken pride in pioneering analytical work tackling essential social issues before

they enter the mainstream media and policy debate, setting the agenda and framing the issues. We have done this a decade ago with the housing crisis or with depicting the steady decline of the quality of life in the border regions, which fuelled the rise of the far-right politics. The project on mental health of Czech children is another perfect illustration of this.



The series were co-written by our reporter Fatima Rahimi, who has an extensive experience with the Czech education system as she came to the Czech Republic as a little refugee girl with her parents fleeing from Afghanistan. She was also trained as a therapist and regularly lectures in schools. She was joined by the head of the home desk at Deník Referendum Vojtěch Petrů for whom the education system remains one of the top priorities among policy issues we are covering.

- [“Young people sometimes feel bad here.” Czech children are more afraid of school than anywhere else in the EU](#)
- [School psychologists: a solution that is not available and is not a panacea](#)
- [School principals can address the youth mental health crisis. What’s stopping them?](#)
- [Let’s learn from the towns of Rumburk or Zruč nad Sázavou: school can be something to look forward to](#)

### Impact and recognition

Deník Referendum’s investigative series on the mental health of children and young people significantly contributed to broadening the public debate on the structural causes of psychological distress among adolescents in the Czech Republic. Combining data analysis, expert insight, and first-hand testimonies from students, teachers, school leaders and psychologists, the series reframed the issue from an individual problem to a systemic challenge rooted in the education system and wider social inequalities. The articles were widely shared in educational and expert communities.

The project also reached audiences beyond Deník Referendum’s core readership. Its findings were featured by Czech Radio’s station Radio Wave in a segment dedicated to highlighting the structural barriers that prevent equal access to inclusive environments and mental health care. This extended the impact of the series to a broader, younger audience and amplified its key messages within the national public broadcaster’s platform.

A significant acknowledgment of the project’s resonance was the invitation to participate in a public debate following the premiere of a theatre play *Sametový holub* (Velvet Pigeon) by Divadlo Feste theatre company in Brno. The director of the play drew on our journalistic work as one of the source materials for the production, which addresses the mental health of teenagers and young adults. By informing both media coverage and artistic creation, the project moved beyond journalism into the wider cultural sphere.



# 5 Sex work: voluntary or forced choice?

The covid era showed us that some professions are more vulnerable than others. Our reporter Petra Dvořáková spent the times of full lockdown interviewing women who were forced into prostitution by the economic

consequences of covid restrictions. The series of articles provides unique storytelling which is honest and at the same time sensitive to the respondents' personal circumstances.





Petra then produced a follow-up series examining the impact of sex work on women and men, often migrants, who provide the services in Berlin, Germany. For the first time ever the stories were told by a reporter who herself is coming from the less privileged parts of Europe.

- [They also take meal vouchers. It gets worse for women in prostitution with every crisis.](#)
- [Single mothers in prostitution: I'm a mom during the week, a dad on the weekend who supports the family](#)
- [Migrants in male prostitution: They dislike sex with men, but it helps them support their families](#)
- [Married sex business customers: We both make money on my flings](#)

### Impact and recognition

As a first deep look into prostitution in the Czech Republic the series has been hugely praised by civil society organizations and experts working on the issue. Petra Dvořáková's sensitive approach to the painful topic caught attention of the broad public, as the series ranked amongst the top articles on our website during the covid times.



# Journalism of Deník Referendum in theatre

While it was not our ambition to inspire theatre plays by our journalism, the fact is that this has happened on multiple occasions. Besides the successful play *Velvet Pigeon* by the FESTE Theatre inspired by the series on the mental health crisis among Czech pupils, there is another very successful play based on the investigations of the poisoning of the Bečva River.

The play *Bečva: True Crime* was written by the head of the Janáček Academy of Performing Arts (JAMU), one of the leading universities in the country for a Theatre *Kam Jdeš?* with three excellent actresses shining in the show written in the tradition of the theatre of the absurd.

And the critical essay-obituary written by the editor Jakub Patočka on the tragic death of the richest Czech oligarch Petr Kellner – in an accident while heli-skiing in Alaska during a covid lockdown – was quoted at length as a part of a play about the late oligarch staged by the National Theatre in Prague, the most prestigious stage in the Czech Republic.





# Covering Climate Now

Covering the climate crisis properly was one of the original motives for the founding of Deník Referendum. At that time, virtually all of the Czech media kept their readers uninformed or even worse, spread conspiracy theories that there is no such thing as a climate change. We on the contrary see ourselves as companions of the global movements for social and environmental justice. Thus, we have always strived to include environmental priorities in the coverage of our home and world news sections; and obviously, it has always been a robust part of the opinion section, too.

This aspiration has been fulfilled in 2019 by establishing a dedicated position of a climate reporter, first of its kind in the CEE countries. One of the first achievements was a series profiling the “coal baron” Pavel Tykač. We exposed him trying to corrupt towns surrounding his coal plants with the aim to ensure their political support for his reckless business plans.

In 2019, Deník Referendum was the only Czech founding partner of #CoveringClimateNow – the cooperation of world media striving to advance the reporting on the climate crisis. During the inaugural week of the effort, we published almost thirty pieces on the subject, both original and translations. For the first global Climate Coverage Day, the Opinions section was guest-edited by Fridays For Future Czech Republic.

Journalists working at the position of climate reporter were nominated for ecological prizes several times. Some of the alumni of the position later moved to establish a highly respected innovative think-tank combining social and ecological perspectives. Climate experts and activists have always been among our regular external contributors; the climate newsletter has over 1500 subscribers.



In recent years Deník Referendum has been developing a project that would bring together several like-minded news organizations from the CEE region with an aim to change the discourse in the eleven CEE EU countries to make tackling the climate crisis a top political priority. After a meeting was organized by Deník Referendum for the potential partners in February 2025 in Brno, we know there are six news organizations ready to take a part in the project. We are currently working to secure the funding which has been one of the priorities of the Deník Referendum production team since then.



# Respected institution of Czech journalism

While journalism of Deník Referendum is firmly based on a declared worldview of humanism, biophilia and compassion, and therefore it is often described as a green-left news outlet, it has won general respect of the Czech professional journalistic community; not only because of the quality of the work, but also because of the courage to defend it. Deník Referendum has been probably the most often slapped institution in the Czech journalism.

The SLAPPs (strategic litigation against public participation) are not used against the Czech journalists as often as it is the case in many other countries. We received half a dozen SLAPPs, which stands as the highest number among Czech media whose publishers very often fold under the legal threats. We have won all the cases but one that was settled. In Deník Referendum, we have been most often been sued by the Prime Minister Andrej Babiš and his associates.



Deník Referendum is blessed by a support of one of the leading law firms in the country which is representing the news organization pro bono. When Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babiš called our news organization during Q&A in the parliament “the worst lying cesspool” (in relation to the Bečva river investigations), we have even decided to turn the tables. After a group of leading Czech journalists asked Andrej Babiš to apologize to us and his refusal to do so, we have brought him to court suing for an apology and compensation. Five years on, the case has still not been closed.

After many twists in March 2026 the district court in Prague has ruled the government of the Czech Republic has to apologize to Deník Referendum for the conduct of its Prime Minister Andrej Babiš and it must pay the damage of 200,000 CZK (equivalent of 8000 €). The government is expected to appeal this ground-breaking ruling.

The most prominent journalists of Deník Referendum have been invited as founding members of the Czech National Committee of the International Press Institute. The head of the reporting unit and vice editor-in-chief Zuzana Vlasatá has been elected the vice-chair of the Czech IPI.

When Israel killed the Al-Jazeera team of Anas al-Sharif to cap off the single most lethal campaign against journalists ever, Deník Referendum – ashamed by the complicity of the Czech state that has been the staunchest supporter of Israel attacks on Gaza in the EU and by a very unsatisfactory response of the Czech media and

journalist organizations – has organized an open letter of Czech journalists to the Czech government and president. The letter was a Czech version of a document written and published short time before by international organizations of journalists.

Deník Referendum managed to collect signatures of 262 Czech journalists from 66 newsrooms including 23 editors-in-chief and some of the biggest names in Czech journalism. It has been perhaps the largest display of solidarity of Czech journalists with foreign colleagues ever – and it has led to a remarkable change in the way Israeli atrocities in Gaza have been covered by the Czech media.



# International cooperation and partnerships

Deník Referendum aspires to be viewed as a European news organization, written in Czech, published in Brno, Moravia. That is why we take a great pride in a broad portfolio of international cooperations we have been able to nurture throughout the years. For many projects and many leading institutions of European journalism, Deník Referendum has become the “go-to” address when they find themselves in a need of a reliable Czech partner.

We have had a long and successful cooperation with the Arena For Journalism. Gaby Khazalová, at that time a reporter of Deník Referendum, was a part of the team for the project Cities For Rent that won the European Press Prize, making Deník Referendum was the first Czech news organization to ever win the award.





Also, in the Arena For Journalism framework, we have become the members of the Reference Circle of the European Media. Members of the editorial team regularly participate as speakers at the Climate Arena conferences.

When the Cities For Rent project evolved into Urban Journalism Network managed by our colleague Gaby Khazalová who moved to work full-time in this new project, we have naturally become a founding member of the project. Deník Referendum also takes part in the European Data Journalism Network. The ongoing cooperation with the founders of EDJNet lead to Deník Referendum becoming a project partner for the PULSE project – an ongoing collaboration of over a dozen leading European news organizations: for details see next page. This has been one of the defining features of the international journalism of Deník Referendum.

The reporters of Deník Referendum have been invited as collaborators to some of the most remarkable pan-European journalism projects of recent times: like the Forever Pollution project.

More and more often, some of the international cross-border collaborations are led by journalists of Deník Referendum themselves: this has been the case of cross border investigations on the Polish open cast coal mine Turów, responses to floods in Poland and the Czech Republic, lithium mining and processing projects in Hungary, Portugal and Czech Republic, or misuse of the EU Modernisation Fund in the Czech Republic, Poland and Romania.

Deník Referendum has a successful publishing cooperation with Voxeurop, V-Square, Green European Journal, which are magazines most often publishing the content produced by journalists of Deník Referendum in English. Thanks to a partnership with Project Syndicate, we publish the columns of Yanis Varoufakis and Slavoj Žižek in Czech. We are also regularly granted rights to translate content from Middle East Eye and +972 Magazine. And we are the Czech publisher of the columns of George Monbiot, originally published in The Guardian.



# PULSE Europe: a brilliant platform for truly European journalism



Since 2024 Deník Referendum has been a partner in a project organized by Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso Transeuropa (OBCT) that brings together 10 prominent national media outlets. Unlike most of the projects that support only high-end investigative journalism this scheme supported by the European Commission actually allows for collaborative ongoing analytical news stories production.

## Participating media

- [Delfi – Lithuania](#)
- [Deník Referendum – Czech Republic](#)
- [Der Standard – Austria](#)
- [EFSYN – Greece](#)
- [El Confidencial – Spain](#)
- [Gazeta Wyborcza – Poland](#)
- [Hotnews – Romania](#)
- [HVG – Hungary](#)
- [Il Sole 24 Ore – Italy](#)
- [Mediapool – Bulgaria](#)



As a defining part of the project special attention is paid to underreported countries, regions and social groups, including rural areas and small-to-medium EU countries which is a perfect fit for the priorities of the international desk of Deník Referendum.

It has embraced the opportunity to furnish partner organizations with inputs to their content, to train aspiring junior journalists who are provided with this absolutely phenomenal opportunity to work with colleagues in other EU countries at an early stage of their careers, but especially it provides a platform to shine for two senior members of the international desk at Deník Referendum.

The head of the unit Petr Jedlička, who contributes with analytical stories and Petra Dvořáková who can now produce unique reports on essential European stories, many of them translated by the partners to other European languages.

Her stories for the PULSE include covering the migrant facilities in Albania, representation of ethnic minorities at the democracy protests in Serbia, pride march in Budapest, pro-choice women's movements in Poland or the rise of the far right in French regions, formerly heavily leaning to the left.



# Selected awards and fellowships



- Nov 2025: reporter Daniel Kotecký won **CEI SEEMO Award for Outstanding Merits in Investigative Journalism** in the category of Young professional journalists for his data-driven investigations into the EU Modernisation Fund and the climate impact of major energy companies. His findings on fund allocation and conflicts of interest have strengthened transparency and informed policy discussions at the European level.
- May 2025: reporter Zuzana Vlasatá won the 3rd award in the **BIRN Fellowship for Journalistic Excellence** with her story on the Bečva river poisoning.
- Oct 2023: **Czech-German Press Prize 2023** – finalist Petra Dvořáková (story about energy policy in the city of Freiburg) and shortlist Jan Šícha (essay about the Elbe river).
- Sept 2023: reporters Lucie Čejková & Daniel Kotecký were shortlisted for the **Ekopublika award 2022** for covering ecological issues for their work on green subsidies.
- Apr 2023: Gaby Khazalová was shortlisted for **Czech Press Prize 2022**, category Best Analytical-Investigative text for her investigation of the real estate empire of Pavel & Ivana Tykač.

- Between 2023 and 2025, the international team of Forever Pollution/Forever Lobbying project with the participation of Deník Referendum has been awarded and shortlisted for several prizes: winner Helen Derbyshire Award 2025, shortlist Daphne Caruana Galizia Prize for Journalism 2025, nomination IJ4EU Impact Award 2024, third finalist 2023 Daphne Caruana Galizia Prize for Journalism 2023, 2nd place Kevin Carmody Award for Outstanding Investigative Reporting 2023.
  - Oct 2022: Zuzana Vlasatá & Brit Jensen were shortlisted for Prix Europa Award 2022 for the true-crime investigative podcast Operation Oil.
  - Sept 2022: finalist Czech-German Press Prize 2022 for Petra Dvořáková (story about sex workers in Berlin).
  - Apr 2022: Deník Referendum won the European Press Prize 2022, category Innovation Award, as a member of Cities for Rent project coordinated by Arena for Journalism, becoming the first Czech media to receive the award.
  - Jun 2022: Zuzana Vlasatá & Brit Jensen won the Czech Press Prize 2021, category Best audio-visual analytical-investigative project, for the true-crime podcast series Operation Oil. The jury appreciated that “outstanding investigative work can be carried out even without the backing of large investigative newsrooms“.
  - May 2022 Zuzana Vlasatá was selected for the Reporting Complexity Study Tour organized by Romanian–US Fulbright Commission.
  - May 2022: reporter Gaby Khazalová received The Fellowship for Journalistic Excellence of the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network.
  - Jun 2021: Deník Referendum was shortlisted for the Czech Press Prize 2020, category Best analytical-investigative text for the article “Exposed: On the day of the Bečva River poisoning, Babiš’s Deza plant had an accident. Why did it remain a secret?”.
  - Sept 2019: Fatima Rahimi was shortlisted for Czech-German Press Prize 2019 (interview with a former neo-nazi)
  - Mar 2019: the editor-in-Chief, Jakub Patočka, was invited by OXFAM to participate in a journalists’ mission to the Gaza Strip, citing “his strong capacity to analyze complex situations.”
  - 2017: member of the editorial team and columnist Lukáš Senft, was awarded a prize for promising journalists under 33 year olds by the Czech Literary Fund Foundation.
- ### Significant events
- Oct 2024 and 2025: Deník Referendum co-organized with Project Syndicate the film festival on journalism Press Play Prague.
  - Nov 2023: Deník Referendum co-organized an event in the European Parliament under the title EPH: The hidden face of Daniel Kretinsky’s corporation.
  - Jun 2019: Deník Referendum organized a seminar in the Czech parliament introducing the outcomes of the project, Normalization of Hatred.
  - Nov 2018: Deník Referendum, in cooperation with Corporate Europe Observatory, organized a workshop in the European Parliament covering the conflict of interests of Andrej Babiš, as a politician and media mogul.

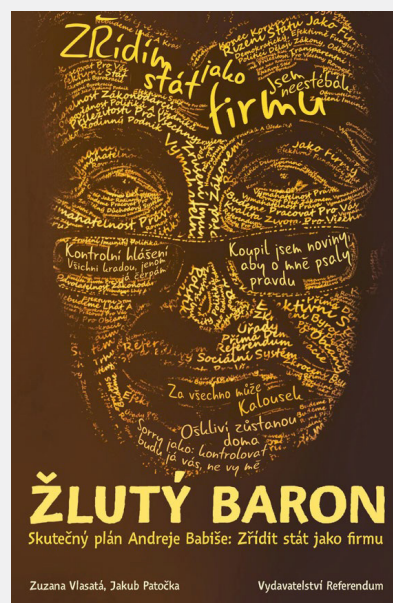
# Readership and communication

Deník Referendum sees its main value in its engaged communities of readers and contributors, who share our content and provide financial donations. Tens of authors have been regularly contributing to the content for free. Another engaged community consists of representatives of environmental movements and other civil society organizations, academicians and experts, who have gathered around our Climate section.

Over the years, the core of our sympathizers has been enriched by leaders of social movements and broader political and civic opposition to the government of Andrej Babiš, mainly due to the great attention acquired by the book *Yellow Baron*, and subsequently because of the coverage of the poisoning of Bečva river.

## Book tour

In 2017, Zuzana Vlasatá and Jakub Patočka toured almost 70 Czech towns to meet with our readers. Their main goal was to introduce our investigative work and discuss the threat to democracy imposed by Andrej Babiš. Also, the movie *Common Sense* was screened. Due to the great response to effort, we have a database of more than 15,000 supporters.



## Salons

Twice a year, Deník Referendum organizes a meeting with its authors and supporters. It has a rather unique format that creates an informal and friendly environment while serving as an opportunity for gathering intellectual, cultural and political thought-leaders. Each Salon features a special guest who gives a speech on the political situation. In the past, we were honoured to welcome distinguished dissidents, writers or politicians, including the then Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka.

## Social Media

Deník Referendum has a dedicated part-time member of the team taking care of the ever-changing social media. The organization has discontinued its presence on Twitter/X for ethical reasons. It has a steadily growing Facebook community, though Instagram has become the major social media platform recently. Deník Referendum is also keeping a decent presence on BlueSky and LinkedIn.

But the platforms in general are not considered priority channels of communication: we stand for strictly regulating and heavily taxing the business. There is a significant part of our readers who get information from our e-mail newsletters or regularly visit our website, not via social networks. We do everything to preserve as many readers coming directly to our website as possible.

## Website

In December 2019, the new website and rebranding of Deník Referendum was launched. Designed by a prominent Czech graphic designer, it found inspiration in Czechoslovak inter-war aesthetics. Martin Pecina captured the nature of new identity by his own words "no riddles, decorations, ornaments or tricks".

The website has recorded 70,000 unique visitors and 130,000 sessions on average per month.

## Podcasts

In 2025, we have launched a weekly podcast after making sure the quality would be on par with our written journalism. While written word remains the major asset of the organization, we are happy we could open this new channel and format to deliver the content to the readers. The podcast is produced weekly, it is managed by Fatima Rahimi who has experience from the Czech public radio and who is assisted by two other members of the team after they underwent a training with a well experienced radio journalism professional. The content of the podcast is so far more or less limited to interviews with members of the editorial team or key authors with the purpose to promote and expand the content produced by Deník Referendum.

## Newsletter

- Weekly newsletter covering the most important stories from our website (appr. 13,000 subscribers)
- Biweekly climate newsletter covering mainly work of our Climate Reporter (appr. 1,500 subscribers).



# Funding

Since its foundation, Deník Referendum has aspired to be funded mostly by its readers. Although our sustainability – especially the work of reporter's unit – is still dependent on project funding, we have managed to increase the number of the individual small donors almost every single year. Currently, around thirty percent of our income is provided by small donations from the readers. The rest is covered by grants. Unfortunately, no permanent core funding has been secured which we think is the reason for recurring financial struggles.

Deník Referendum has not received any major contributions from corporate donors, and as a matter of principle, the organization would never accept any money with strings attached, nor any money that could serve to wash the donor's profile.

## Donations from our readers

Currently, we receive around 6000 euros every month from our readers, just from recurring donations and varying amount of one-time donations. The numbers are steadily growing. *Deník Referendum* decided not to set up a paywall, but we have fee-based access to discussions on our website which serves also as a good filter for undesirable content.

## Project funding

The project funding is the key resource sustaining the reporting unit. The grants are usually accepted by the affiliated civil society organization Centre for Media, Ecology and Democracy. While Deník Referendum is a regular winner of support of the only Czech dedicated foundation supporting independent journalism, the international foundations are the major source of income from grants.

## Notable Funders

- Journalismfund Europe
- Czech Endowment for Independent Journalism
- Isvara Foundation
- Meliore Foundation
- European Climate Foundation
- European Commission
- Orlicky Family Fund
- Friedrich Ebert Stiftung

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**Introduction to Deník Referendum.  
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