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Schmid, Alex (ed.) *Handbook of Terrorism Prevention and Preparedness*, The Hague: ICCT, 2021.

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# Slovakia: Politics and Paramilitarism

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Russian influence on the far-right and right-wing extremists in Slovakia has to be conceptualised in a wider context of Russian-Slovak relations, history, and specifically, the perception of Russia and its footprint in Slovakia. These factors greatly influence the ability of Russian actors to leverage certain elements of the far-right milieu for its strategic goals.

Slovakia stands out as the most pro-Russian country in the region of Central and Eastern Europe.<sup>1</sup> The pro-Russian views of Slovaks are manifested in many ways – whether it is the low perception of Russia as a threat, significant support for strategic partnership with Russia, or the widely accepted notion of Slavic Unity. Perhaps the most telling illustration of the pro-Russian attitudes in Slovakia is manifested in assigning the responsibility for the current war in Ukraine. According to the latest polling, Slovaks are least inclined to put the blame for the war on Russia with mere 40 percent supporting such a notion, while in Hungary it is 54 percent, in the Czech Republic 71 percent, and in Poland 85 percent who see Russia being responsible for starting the war with Ukraine.<sup>2</sup>

Unlike in Poland, Czech Republic, or Hungary, the dominant narrative in the public discourse concerning Russia was until February 2022 a rather positive one. While the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine led initially to a radical change in the perception of Russia, the long-existing narratives and political discourse continue to cloud judgement and support pro-Russian attitudes even in the post-invasion reality. The main elements of that perception are centred on the idea of Slavic brotherhood (78 percent agree that Russia is our Slavic brother<sup>3</sup>), rejection of perceiving Russia as a security threat (only 20 percent perceived Russia as a threat in 2021;<sup>4</sup> currently it is just 54 percent<sup>5</sup>), and strong anti-Americanism (50

percent perceive the US to be a security threat in 2023<sup>6</sup>). Another important element is the appeal of a strong leader, personified by Vladimir Putin, who is still perceived positively by 27 percent in 2023.<sup>7</sup> There are several reasons enabling such a positive attitude towards Russia in Slovakia:

**1. Slavic Brotherhood.** The so-called Slavic brotherhood is a belief that all Slavic nations share not just language or some historic ancestry roots but are connected by a special bond existing until this very day. Sometimes this bond is even presented as a spiritual one by describing the history of Slavic nations through the prism of ethnicity and common ancestry.<sup>8</sup> Another important element of the Slavic brotherhood belief system is a special place of Russia in it, notwithstanding the fact that the Russian Federation is composed of many different nationalities, not just ethnic Russians, who compose approximately 80 percent of the whole population.<sup>9</sup> Russia is, supposedly, the protector of all Slavic nations and is the only bulwark against the “decadent West”. According to this narrative, made popular in particular by Alexander Dugin in his neo-Eurasianism doctrine, Russia is not just a country but represents a different form of civilisation, based on other principles than the Euro-Atlantic one.<sup>10</sup> Such a notion combines centuries-old schism between the Eastern Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Church dating back to 11<sup>th</sup> century<sup>11</sup> and also incorporates Russian geopolitical goals. While majority of Slovaks declare themselves as Catholics,<sup>12</sup> the notion of Russia being a protector of the so-called traditional values (rejection of LGBT rights, feminism, equality of men and women) plays very well into the pro-Russian attitudes. During the nation building period in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, founding fathers of the Slovak nation such as Ľudovít Štúr<sup>13</sup> or Ján Kollár<sup>14</sup> often espoused the romantic image of uniting all Slavic nations under the “mighty (Russian) oak”, where Slavic nations should seek their refuge from Hungarian or German oppression. The concept of Slavic brotherhood underpins the victimhood narrative that sees Russia as a mere victim of the West. As illustrated by the opinion poll results, this romantic perception of Russia, notwithstanding its real actions, is still very much present in the minds of many Slovaks.

**2. History and the Communist Past.** The legacy of communism and the liberation of Czecho-Slovakia by the Soviet Red Army at the end of World

War II (WWII) plays an important role in modern perception of Russia in Slovakia. The Soviet Red Army, which liberated Slovakia from the Nazi Germany in 1945, suffered heavy losses in the process and monuments commemorating their sacrifice are in almost every town or village.<sup>15</sup> The martyrdom of Red Army soldiers has been one of the main elements of communist ideology and is deeply ingrained in the national memory. The martyrdom and sacrifice which are at the centre of WWII commemoration events are often abused by modern pro-Russian proxy actors such as motorcycle group Night Wolves to push modern Kremlin narratives, using the banner of anti-fascism to further antagonise the population against the West, EU, and NATO.<sup>16</sup> Due to Night Wolves' activities against Ukraine, the whole organisation, including its Slovak branch leadership was placed on the EU sanctions list in 2022.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the legacy of communist past is interpreted differently in Slovakia than in the neighbouring countries. During communism, Slovakia witnessed massive industrialisation and economic development thus the attitude towards the communist era is more positive. Even the 1968 occupation of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw pact armies was not perceived in Slovakia as negatively as in the Czech Republic.<sup>18</sup> While the fall of communism is seen positively in most of the former socialist bloc countries, including the Czech Republic, this was not entirely the case in Slovakia.<sup>19</sup> After the initial support for democratic changes, the harsh impact of economic transformation in Slovakia led to resentment and even negative perception of the democratic transformation. Such post-communist nostalgia also contributes to the anti-Western attitudes, instrumentalised by Russia in the whole region of Central and Eastern Europe.

- 3. Energy Dependence and Economic Influence.** Slovakia was until last year largely dependent on Russian energy imports. Slovakia takes around 85 percent of its natural gas and 66 percent of its oil from Russia,<sup>20</sup> and only after the economic sanctions on Russian energy in 2022 did Slovak energy imports start to diversify.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, all the fuel for two Slovak nuclear power plants using Russian technology also comes from Russia, which created a heavy energy dependence. This legacy of decades-long Russia-oriented energy and raw material dependency manifested also in the coal or iron ore imports for heavy industry and resulted in a significant economic influence of Russia in Slovakia. In addition, Slovakia is also an

important corridor for Russian energy infrastructure – the transport fees from oil and gas pipelines transiting Slovakian routes to Western Europe were a significant source of income for the state budget.<sup>22</sup>

**4. Pro-Russian networks.** The above-mentioned affinity for Russia existing in a significant segment of the population has been used and further strengthened by numerous Russian actors and pro-Russian proxies operating in Slovakia. Slovakia had, until recently, a robust and effective network of pro-Russian actors comprising media outlets, businesses, cultural associations, and sports clubs, which facilitated Russian influence in the country on many different levels. The existence of such networking dates back to communist times and these networks were revived and further strengthened during Putin’s reign. Such networks exist in various areas:

- Fringe media outlets of all formats – internet radios, printed magazines, online TV projects, and publishing houses producing pro-Russian content with sometimes unclear and dubious sources of financing.<sup>23</sup>
- Martial arts clubs – Systema MMA clubs, host appearances of Russian martial arts instructors serving as a recruitment and indoctrination vehicle.
- Cultural and academic associations building on the vast network of such contacts from the communist era.
- Motorcycle clubs and subculture – using history and motorbikes to spread Russian influence.<sup>24</sup>
- Paramilitary groups – drawing from a lack of state-sponsored alternatives, these groups are often a gateway for young males into antidemocratic movements, tainted with anti-western attitudes and Russian propaganda.<sup>25</sup>
- Business entities with direct links to the Russian Federation, building upon the significant energy and heavy industry dependence of Slovakia.

### **Russian Influence on Slovak Far-Right and Right-Wing Extremist Scene**

The Slovak far-right and right-wing extremist scene has always been deeply anti-Western and embraced Russia as its natural ally in its antidemocratic struggle. While most actors in the Slovak far-right and right-wing extremist scene take their

inspiration from the neo-Nazi and fascist ideology or its modern offshoots, Russia has always been admired due to its position as a geopolitical and cultural counterweight to the US, NATO, and the EU.<sup>26</sup> The historic legacy of Russia (or the Soviet Union) as the power that defeated fascism might seem at odds with nativist, racist, xenophobic, and antidemocratic attitudes of the far-right, yet the “enemy of my enemy is my ally” principle allows Russia to exert certain influence on these actors in Slovakia.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, many of the groups belonging to the far-right spectrum try to whitewash their extremist views and/or background by embracing anti-Western or so-called anti-globalist attitudes, utilising the Russia-originated narratives, incorporating them into their own political agenda.

Such long-term affinity between Slovak far-right actors and Russia has been manifested on numerous occasions by prominent members of the Slovak far-right even without any visible tangible support or leads from Russia. The pro-Russian attitudes mostly manifested in anti-NATO and anti-US public actions, demonstrations, and slogans by prominent far-right actors, as well as voting of far-right MPs and Slovak MEPs. Cases of direct influence are quite rare due to the clandestine nature of Russian operations and the lack of clear attribution from open sources. Thus, the influence of Russia on the Slovak far-right is predominantly indirect. It uses the same tools that Russia utilises to project its image abroad and to strengthen support for its strategic goals such as information operations, providing political or organisational support, and creating networks of like-minded individuals via culture, sports, and ideology. Such assessment was confirmed also by experts interviewed for this analysis.<sup>28</sup> In the course of interviews, the experts pointed to publicly known cases of contacts and meetings between members of the far-right milieu and Russian representatives and the ideological alignment between far-right actors and Russia. However, due to the existence of extensive Russian and pro-Russian networks in Slovakia, it is quite likely that there have been cases of more direct influence (i.e. providing financial, logistical support), yet these are beyond the domain of open-source intelligence. Moreover, on several occasions, such contacts or influence did not involve directly far-right individuals and groups.

### ***Selection Criteria for the Two Cases***

The cases selected for this study represent relatively rare cases when the Russian influence was made visible, to a certain extent, by actions of the far-right actors or Russian actors themselves also in the open-source domain.

The first case concerns the far-right political party People's Party – Our Slovakia and its successor Republic Movement. It was selected as a typical example of right-wing-extremists-turned-politicians, embracing pro-Russian, anti-Western attitudes, and narratives, which are in line with Russian strategic goals. The Russian influence in this case was, as illustrated below, predominantly indirect. Yet one particular incident involving a Russian intelligence officer bribing a Slovak citizen might illustrate a broader trend of Russian support which remains hidden due to the clandestine nature of such activities.

The second case includes a paramilitary group Slovak Conscripts, which illustrates how Russia tried and to a certain extent failed in creating a puppet violent paramilitary organisation in the EU and NATO member state. While not being a typical far-right group, the case of Slovak Conscripts well illustrates the methods, approaches, and tools Russia applied in exerting its influence in the nationalist, paramilitary milieu. It also represents the closest example of a violent group, since the paramilitary group was clearly preparing for an armed conflict and its loyalty to official Slovak armed forces was highly dubious. This group also gained international attention due to an HBO documentary *When the War Comes* providing an insider perspective on the group's inner working and ideology.<sup>29</sup>

### **Case Study 1: The People's Party – Our Slovakia and the Republika Movement**

The People's Party – Our Slovakia of Marian Kotleba (LSNS further on) has been, until recently, the most important pro-Russian far-right political party in Slovak politics. Having received 8 percent of the votes in the 2016 elections and securing two MEPs (out of fourteen) in the 2019 European Parliament elections, LSNS for more than ten years dominated the far-right political spectrum and was seen as the most successful political project of this type. LSNS is described by political scientists as a (neo-) fascist party due to its clear inspiration and admiration of

Slovak wartime fascist state and its current nativist, xenophobic, and racist ideology.<sup>30</sup>

The history of LSNS dates back to 2009 when its leader Marian Kotleba rose to prominence by organising marches in Roma settlements, promising quick fixes to the people living in the neighbourhoods of these marginalised communities. His first attempt at creating a political party (a right-wing extremist one) in 2005 was unsuccessful since the Supreme Court disbanded it due to violation of the Slovak Constitution in 2006. The main reason for this decision was the political programme of the party, which suggested limiting the right to vote only to citizens organised in professional groups, in violation of the Constitution.<sup>31</sup> Yet, in 2013 Marian Kotleba won the seat of Banska Bystrica region governor in a surprising victory over a social democratic predecessor. He used this position to create a power base and get access to public funding and media attention, which he utilised to solidify support for his party.<sup>32</sup> The transformation of a former radical extremist movement into a political party decreased the potential for violence and open anti-system rhetoric in an attempt to gain voter support. Yet, many of their followers originate in the right-wing extremist subculture and manifest much more openly their proximity to extremist ideologies and violence.<sup>33</sup>

Marián Kotleba and his fellow party members have been expressing anti-EU, anti-NATO, and pro-Russian attitudes openly for years. However, these views at that time did not receive much attention due to the marginal position at the far end of the political spectrum. This has changed after he became the head of Banska Bystrica's self-governing region in 2013. During the tenure of Marian Kotleba as the regional governor, he refused EU funding<sup>34</sup> and even removed the EU flag from the Banská Bystrica regional self-governing region office.<sup>35</sup> A prime example of his pro-Russian attitudes is his open letter he issued at the height of the 2014 Maidan revolution, urging then-president of Ukraine Yanukovich not to resign, warning him of the EU and NATO membership:

As a member of the Slavic nation, I fully understand what is now being fought for in Ukraine. The European Union needs new markets and the NATO terrorist organization is trying to move closer to the border of the Russian Federation. As a citizen of an EU Member State I can responsibly tell you that the opening to the EU will not bring anything good to the Ukrainian people. Ukraine will become just another huge market where there is no place for the original Ukrainian goods. Production will be



replaced by imports and consumption, and hundreds of thousands of people will lose their jobs. At the end of this process there will be anything but totally enslaved Ukrainian people and the transfer of Ukrainian land into the hands of foreign investors.<sup>36</sup>

In 2016 LSNS entered the Slovak Parliament with 8 percent support, becoming the first far-right party to be represented in the national parliament since the fall of communism. Marian Kotleba and his party repeatedly manifested strong anti-EU and anti-NATO views in their party newsletters, programme manifesto, public meetings, and demonstrations.<sup>37</sup> These statements, however, were not driven predominantly by a strong pro-Russian attitude, but rather by a rejection of the liberal, democratic values that EU and NATO represent. The pro-Russian attitude of LSNS was also complicated by a strong neofascist elements in the party ideology and activities. These included rejection of the Slovak National Uprising at the end of WWII (armed uprising against the fascist regime in central Slovakia by the military and partisans, militarily defeated by combined forces of Nazi Germany and elements of the Slovak army, but very significant politically and present in modern Slovak identity),<sup>38</sup> commemoration of fascist Slovak wartime state and its president Josef Tiso or placing known neo-Nazis on the candidate list in the 2016 parliamentary elections.<sup>39</sup> Such open neofascist tendencies existing in the party also prevented closer links with Russia, at least public ones. Despite these conflicting views on history, Russian influence was present in the form of shaping LSNS attitudes towards the EU and NATO, war in Ukraine, annexation of Crimea, and sanctions against Russia. LSNS adopted a clear pro-Russian position, accusing the US, NATO, and the collective West of provoking Russia and labelling the Maidan Revolution as a coup orchestrated by foreign powers – fully in line with Russian strategic narratives.<sup>40</sup>

A notable case of an anti-US attitude which benefitted Russian interests was an attempted blockade of the 2015 *Dragoon Ride* of US military vehicles through Slovakia to Hungary. This ride originating in Germany and passing through Czech Republic was a demonstration of solidarity and ability of NATO allies to protect member states after the Russian annexation of Crimea and occupation of Donbas and Luhansk in 2014. In response to this show of NATO military capabilities, a number of LSNS members joined by other demonstrators attempted, unsuccessfully, to block the entry of the US military convoy into Slovakia, calling the ride a “US occupation”.<sup>41</sup> Such negative attitudes towards NATO and the US were vividly illustrated also in the 2016 election’s programme

manifesto of LSNS, which included a pledge to withdraw from NATO, calling it a “criminal organisation” and a tool “to advance the power interests of the USA”.<sup>42</sup>

In continuation of the same approach, inspired also by the 2016 Brexit referendum, LSNS initiated a referendum to leave the EU and NATO in 2016. It was an attempt to capitalise on the wave of anti-EU and anti-NATO sentiment, instigated to a certain extent by Russian proxies and pro-Russian networks. LSNS started to collect signatures for a petition to initiate a referendum to leave EU and NATO in July 2016.<sup>43</sup> The initiative was unsuccessful and failed to gather the required 350,000 signatures, yet it served as an important mobilisation tool for LSNS.

On other occasions, Mr Milan Uhrik, then-MP of Slovak Parliament urged the prime minister Pellegrini not to support extension of the sanction’s regime against Russia, using the same narratives as the Russian Federation, blaming the West for deterioration of relations with Russia and claiming the sanctions to be inefficient and harming only Europe. In particular, Kotleba accused the West and the US of aggressive and provocative policy towards Russia, echoing the Russian narratives.<sup>44</sup> Marian Kotleba, founder and leader of the party, also used the theme of Slavic Brotherhood, one of the most prevalent pro-Russian narratives in Slovakia, in his unsuccessful 2019 presidential campaign, even on his billboards.<sup>45</sup>

### ***The case of Bohuš Garbar – a smoking gun of a direct Russian influence?***

As noted previously, cases of direct Russian influence on the far-right are very rare. Yet, one such case, connected indirectly to LSNS appeared in March 2022 when a video of a meeting between a Russian GRU operative and Mr Bohuš Garbar (external contributor of an influential pro-Russian online news portal Hlavne Spravy) appeared online.<sup>46</sup>

In the video, recorded allegedly by the Slovak Military Intelligence<sup>47</sup> and leaked to the press in March 2022, the Russian operative was handing out €1,000 as a payment to Mr Garbar for collection of classified information and recruitment of others during their meeting in summer 2021. Garbar, who was convicted on these charges and sentenced in February 2023 to a paltry three-year suspended sentence and a fine of €15,000<sup>48</sup> was a donor to LSNS during the 2016 parliamentary

elections.<sup>49</sup> According to published information, he donated €10,000 to the LSNS party in 2015 and in 2016. He had been working at that time as a journalist and it is highly unlikely that he could have afforded such a donation from his income alone. LSNS at that time denied connection to Garbar and knowledge of his Russian contacts.

Allegations of LSNS being clandestinely funded by Russia have appeared also in connection to the 2016 arrest of Polish pro-Russian activist and alleged Russian spy Mariusz Piskorski, head of the pro-Russian Change party<sup>50</sup> or in connection to the so-called Usovski email leaks in 2017. The leaked emails included communication of Alexander Usovski, a Belarussian far-right activist who received payments from Russian oligarch Malofeev and organised series of anti-NATO, pro-Russian demonstrations in many Central European countries, including Slovakia.<sup>51</sup> However, Slovak police investigation launched into these allegations and did not find any proof of such illicit Russian funding.<sup>52</sup> Experts interviewed for the analyses concluded, however, that by using a chain of proxy actors, any Russia-originated funding could have been easily laundered and the true origin of money hidden even from the police. The gifts of 2015 and 2016 by Garbar to the LSNS party potentially but not unlikely raise a suspicion of being an example of such clandestine funding operations.

LSNS's demise into insignificance started with the split in the party in 2021, when the Republic Movement was established. The old-school, proto-fascist, far-right ideology could not compete with the slick, modern communication of its successor. The final nail in the coffin was conviction of the party leader Marián Kotleba for a public display of sympathies to fascism in the *1488 checks case*,<sup>53</sup> i.e. a situation in which he distributed charity money for a highly symbolic, and associated with the far-right, amount of money.<sup>54</sup> The election result in the 2023 parliamentary elections just confirmed this demise since the party received a mere 0.84 percent of votes.<sup>55</sup>

### ***Republic Movement – Successor to LSNS***

Another notable case of indirect Russian influence in the political domain and a prime example of spreading pro-Russian attitudes in Slovakia is the example of a former deputy chair of LSNS, current member of European Parliament, and leader of Republic Movement: Milan Uhrik.<sup>56</sup> The Republic Movement came to existence as a result of a split in the LSNS in 2021 and currently dominates the

far-right spectrum with up to 10 percent of popular support. Uhrík rose to prominence after the 2019 European Parliament elections due to his provocative videos on social media attacking the EU as being overrun by migrants and threatening the traditional values.<sup>57</sup> Since then he has been among the staunchest supporters of Russia in the European Parliament (EP) and even after February 2022 he continued to repeat Russian narratives blaming the West, US, and NATO for the war in Ukraine. He has created a large online following and was the most successful Slovak politician on Facebook with 5.4 million interactions – shares, likes, and comments – in 2022.<sup>58</sup>

Analysis of his voting record in the EP concerning Russia carried out by Political Capital Institute shows that Uhrík is among the seven most pro-Russian MEPs from the Visegrad four (Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia) plus Austria.<sup>59</sup> The voting record is also well illustrated by some of his public statements in the European Parliament, using Russian narratives and framing, especially when it comes to war in Ukraine, or sanctions. According to Uhrík, it was the “secret services and NGOs” funded from “Brussels, but mainly from Washington” which organised “first the Maidan and then the civil war” in order to weaken Russia’s position in Europe.<sup>60</sup>

His public statements from EP, expressing pro-Russian views and accusing MEPs of double standards, were sometimes even picked up and shared by Russian media. A prime example is his speech shortly after the Russian invasion in March 2022, where he used the whataboutism trope, accusing the EP of double standards when it comes to sanctions, comparing US invasion to Iraq or conflicts in Libya or Syria. Moreover, he used the same narrative as Kremlin, accusing Ukraine of war crimes in Donbas and Odessa. Footage of this speech was shown by the Russia 1 TV channel and shared by the Telegram platform of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Lugansk People’s Republic.<sup>61</sup>

Two weeks before the Russian invasion into Ukraine, Uhrík sent a letter to the Russian ambassador, asking him whether Slovakia would become a military target for Russia, as a result of signing Defence Cooperation agreement (DCA) with the US. The tone and content of the letter vividly illustrate anti-US and anti-NATO narratives, rejecting “the confrontational line of sanctions, geopolitical pressure, expansion and colonial tendencies towards the Russian Federation”.<sup>62</sup> Unlike the LSNS party, Republic Movement and its representatives are welcome at the Russian Embassy. On 30 August 2021 Miroslav Suja, MP of the Republic

Movement, met with Russian Ambassador and the chair of Russian Duma foreign affairs committee during his visit in Slovakia.<sup>63</sup>

The official website of the Republic Movement also republished in July 2022 a lengthy article of Russian MFA Sergej Lavrov, where he accused the West of being responsible for all the ills in the world – instigating war in Ukraine, not respecting agreements with Russia, faking chemical attacks in Syria and against Sergej Skripal, etc. The article is preceded by a question: truth or Russian propaganda? Such verbatim reproduction of all Russian strategic narratives, without any attempt at disputing some of the obvious lies and misconceptions in the Lavrov’s article clearly points to acceptance of Russian perspective by the Republic party.<sup>64</sup> Such Pro-Russian and anti-Western views are not only present in public speeches or posts of Republic members. They are reflected also in the 2023 parliamentary election’s programme manifesto of the Republic Movement. In a clear continuation of LSNS policies, the Republic Movement announced yet another referendum on exit from NATO. The programme manifesto called NATO “a relic of the Cold War and a source of military tension and conflict in the world” and announced that after restoration of Slovakia’s defence capacity, a referendum on NATO membership should be held.<sup>65</sup>

Alignment with Russian strategic narratives are clearly manifested also in the official position of the party regarding the war in Ukraine as outlined on their official website. According to Republic, the main cause of the conflict in Ukraine was not Russian aggression, but rather the “expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) towards the Russian Federation”, as well as “the Ukrainian Government’s long-standing aggression towards the Russian minority in the east”,<sup>66</sup> mirroring the Kremlin propaganda.

In conclusion, the Republic Movement and its representatives have clearly adopted the Russian perspective on international relations, EU, NATO, post–Cold War security architecture, and the war in Ukraine. They have, as illustrated in numerous examples, acted in line with Russian strategic interests – rejecting sanctions, blaming the West, using “whataboutism” to deflect criticism of Russian actions, and adopting and spreading Russian strategic narratives. Yet, despite several documented meetings between Republic and Russian representatives, there is no publicly available evidence of a direct, financial, or material support provided by Russian actors to representatives of this party. Nevertheless, it is clear

that Russia is well aware of a positive pro-Russian sentiment existing in the Republic Movement (or at least ideological alignment between the two) and might try to cultivate and further expand its influence beyond mere sympathies and rhetoric. Moreover, Republic managed to get rid of the extremist label by shying away from open manifestations of antisemitism, outright racism, or adoration of fascist Slovak wartime state characteristic to its mother-party LSNS. The modern far-right rhetoric and skilful use of social media rewarded Republic with significant public support at the expense of the LSNS, which saw its public support collapse. This has also led to official acceptance of the Republic Movement and its representatives by the Russian authorities, illustrated by official meetings of Uhrík at the Russian Embassy in Brussels<sup>67</sup> or his fellow MPs such, as Miroslav Suja at the Russian Embassy in Bratislava.<sup>68</sup> Despite narrowly missing the 5 percent threshold needed to enter the parliament in the general elections held on 30 September 2023 (Republic got 4.75 percent,<sup>69</sup> it remains the most powerful far-right political party with a significant presence on social media and a natural ally of Russian interests in Slovakia.

### **Case Study 2: Slovak paramilitary group Slovak Conscripts**

The second case involving violent far-right groups or individuals connected to Russia is quite difficult to establish in Slovakia. Far-right and right-wing extremist groups due to police pressure and transformation into political parties have largely rescinded violence and there are no publicly known cases of actual violence linked to Russian influence. While right wing extremists often have negative views of the EU and NATO and admire Russia, violent hate crimes committed by right-wing extremists are not directly linked to Russian influence. Therefore, the best example of a violent group connected to Russian influence is the case of Slovak paramilitary group Slovak Conscripts (SB). While not representing a typical far-right group, it belongs to the wider nativist, vigilante milieu and shares some common ideological features with far-right groups.

SB is perhaps the best known and the most important Slovak paramilitary group in modern history of Slovakia. It functioned for ten years (2012-2022) and at the peak of its popularity had some 150-200 active members in more than ten regional branches, organised regular weekly trainings and an annual weeklong summer military exercise.<sup>70</sup> In addition, special seminars involved active Slovak military personnel and even Russian instructors. Due to the young age of its founder, the

ideology of the group changed from a loose antiestablishment nationalist group with xenophobic undertones to a more polished image consisting of patriotic narratives and political aspirations, culminating in cooperation with well-known Russian proxies in Slovakia. Pro-Russian attitudes based in Slavic Brotherhood narratives and Russian ideological influence were defining features of this group throughout almost its entire existence despite the changes in membership and public image. The group also came under close scrutiny of the security agencies and was (indirectly) mentioned in annual reports of the Slovak Intelligence Service and Military Intelligence.<sup>71</sup> Slovak Conscripts officially announced the end of their activities in October 2022 without providing clear reasons for doing so. According to the experts interviewed for this study, the group went through a serious internal crisis after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which led to a decision of its leader to officially conclude its existence.<sup>72</sup> For almost a year, there was no clear successor to the group. Yet recently a potential substitute appeared, using the name Volunteer Corps<sup>73</sup> without any visible reference to its predecessor or its pro-Russian leaning. However, due to its short existence it is too early to assess its activities and orientation.

### *History and Origins*

SB originated in 2012 following a three week-long training of its two founding members – Peter Švrček (at that time only 17 years old) and Michal Feling in Russia.<sup>74</sup> The course was organised by Russian organisation Stjag with ex-Spetsnaz instructors. The participation of Švrček and Feling was facilitated by another Slovak, Marek Rusyniak, who studied in Russia and was well connected to Russian nationalist organisations such as Narodny Sobor.<sup>75</sup> Despite the harsh conditions experienced by Švrček and Feling in the summer camp in Russia, the model of Russian military-patriotic education was an inspiration to set up a similar structure in Slovakia. It quickly became an important paramilitary group with a patriotic and nationalist character serving also as indoctrination to the pro-Russian, anti-Western worldview for young people, often teenagers who were mostly attracted to its ranks.

From the very onset, the individuals directing the group expressed strong pro-Russian sentiments and shared many views typical for the far right (nativism, rejection of liberal democracy, anti-EU, anti-NATO). A typical example was Tomáš Bičkoš, then-member of Slovak Conscripts leadership, who openly called US a fascist country and expressed his support for pro-Russian separatists in

Donbas, or Martin Lipocky, another leading figure of the group who has also participated in some of the anti-NATO demonstrations organised by Usovski in Bratislava.<sup>76</sup> Yet, in contrast with far-right groups, they never openly manifested racism nor expressed adoration for the totalitarian war time fascist Slovak state or right-wing ideologies. On the contrary, they tried to build their image on anti-fascist struggle, Slovak National Uprising, and patriotism. One of a few exceptions confirming the hostility towards democratic values from the early stages of its existence was an article written by Tomáš Bičkoš, the commander of the second unit of SB at the Meapatria website, where he called NATO a “pro-terrorist aggressive organization under the imperial US influence”.<sup>77</sup>

### *Russian Influence*

The influence of Russia in this group manifested in several notable cases. One of its founding members, Martin Keprta, decided in 2014 to join pro-Russian separatists fighting in Donbas and he stayed there ever since. He was identified in a Russian TV interview from Donbas in 2014 and later confirmed that he joined the pro-Russian separatists. He stated in an interview with Slovak media the reasons why decided to join the war: “Our aim is building New Russia (Novorossiya) and the recognition of the Donetsk independent republic. I am a member of the official army. It means that if the peace will continue I will remain in the barracks waiting when my homeland will call me to service once again.”<sup>78</sup>

While the leadership of SB tried to distance itself from Keprta, stating that he left the group prior to his travel to Donbas, similar views on the 2014 war in Ukraine, or annexation of Crimea as being legitimate were present among the SB leadership.<sup>79</sup> Perhaps the most telling sign of indirect Russian influence is the attitude of Peter Švrček to NATO and his links to other pro-Russian actors in Slovakia. Peter Švrček, as the supreme commander of SB, attended several anti-NATO rallies, as did some of his fellow SB members, while publicly denouncing Slovak membership in NATO.<sup>80</sup> Interestingly enough, as the Usovski email leaks revealed, these demonstrations were organised and paid for by Konstantin Malofejev, one of the patrons of the Russian far-right and conservative cause, using Usovski and his network of actors.<sup>81</sup> Over time, Švrček started to be involved in activities of other pro-Russian groups and networks operating in Slovakia. Aside from his appearance at demonstrations, he was a speaker at the 2018 National Conference presenting his ideas on neutrality and defence policy alongside many pro-Russian actors,<sup>82</sup> where he also met with Štefan Harabin



(former minister of justice, Supreme Court judge-turned conspiracy theorist, and staunch Russia supporter).<sup>83</sup> Štefan Harabin was also a candidate in the 2019 presidential elections, yet he only received 14 percent of votes (some 307,000 in total) in the first round and did not make into the second round.<sup>84</sup> Later on, Švrček formalised ties with Tibor Eliot Rostas – editor of an influential disinformation-spreading monthly magazine *Zem a Vek* (Earth and Age), who was recorded asking for Russian financial support in a Moscow meeting in 2015.<sup>85</sup> *Zem a Vek* was one of the first disinformation media outlets in Slovakia and the only one that also produced a glossy-printed 100 page-thick monthly magazine. It frequently featured various conspiracy theories and was, due to its content, included also in the list of disinformation media by an independent panel of experts.<sup>86</sup>

Another important connection to Russia is SB's link to a notorious Night Wolves motorcycle group. Peter Švrček participated in several meetings with a Slovak branch of this well-known Russian motorcycle group linked to Kremlin. According to other SB members, SB created its own motorcycle club Patriot.<sup>87</sup> Aside from the Night Wolves, examples of direct meetings between Russian actors and SB in the public domain are relatively rare. Members of SB received training from several Russian instructors, including ex-Spetsnaz and ex-GRU specialists such as Igor Zorin.<sup>88</sup> The last element of Russian influence is clearly visible in the public communication of SB on their social media. Until the day of Russian invasion into Ukraine, it was staunchly pro-Russian and repeated many of the Russian narratives. These included participation of leading figures of the SB at meetings against NATO,<sup>89</sup> public communication on SB's official Facebook page, accusing the US and the West of provoking Russia and rejecting any involvement in a potential conflict with Russia,<sup>90</sup> and rejection of NATO membership.<sup>91</sup>

SB officially ended their existence in October 2022 by a public announcement on their Facebook page, without providing any explanation as to the reasons.<sup>92</sup> According to expert interviews one of the main reasons was a disillusionment after the 2022 Russian invasion and conflicts in the group regarding its stance towards Ukraine and Russia. There was no clear successor to the SB following its dissolution.

The story of ten years of SB clearly demonstrates several risks:

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- There is ample potential for existence of pro-Russian paramilitary groups in Slovakia.
- Currently, state authorities have very limited tools to counter such activities.
- The wider paramilitary milieu is largely anti-Western and shares many of the Kremlin narratives.
- Young people are especially vulnerable to the appeal, camaraderie, and excitement offered by such groups.
- Russian actors are aware of this situation and have been/are trying to cultivate links with these groups by means of martial arts experts, Russian martial arts clubs, and commemorative events.
- These groups by large do not pose a real security threat but are an important vehicle for spreading of Russian propaganda narratives and could serve as a recruitment tool for other pro-Russian groups.

### **Current Measures in Place**

Since various forms of Russian influence permeated Slovak society for a long time, measures to counter it were, until recently, rather symbolic. An important milestone was adoption of a national Strategy for Combating Hybrid Threats in the Slovak Republic in 2018 by the government, which for the first time mentioned subversive efforts by foreign actors as a serious threat.<sup>93</sup> Yet, due to political reasons and the composition of the government, practical measures limiting Russian influence were tokenistic. The coalition government in the 2016–2020 period was composed of three parties – a social democratic SMER, the nationalist Slovak National Party, and a Slovak-Hungarian centre-right Most-Híd. The Slovak National Party in particular has been consistently blocking any meaningful measures to counter Russian hybrid influence in Slovakia. Frequent visits of its leader, Andrej Danko, to Moscow and his meetings with the leader of the Russian Duma, Vyacheslav Lychachev, were emblematic.<sup>94</sup>

A more systemic approach to Russian influence from the state authorities started to emerge in 2021 as a result of the new approach to the issue of hybrid threats and disinformation by the new government. A practical outcome of this change of approach was the adoption of the new Security Strategy of the Slovak Republic by the Slovak government and the Parliament.<sup>95</sup> This strategy provided a framework for subsequent steps and, for the first time, called Russia “a major

challenge to the security of our Euro-Atlantic area.”<sup>96</sup> One of the practical results of the strategy was to develop a policy including a new set of measures for countering hybrid threats. Such policy was adopted in March 2022 and is called the Action Plan for the Coordinated Countering of Hybrid Threats.<sup>97</sup> The action includes a number of practical taskings with a direct impact on limiting Russian influence efforts in Slovakia, such as increasing personal and technical capacities dedicated to this issue, public awareness campaigns or specific legislative changes. The action plan was supported by the implementation of an EU-funded national project involving the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Office of the Government with the main aim of increasing the resilience of Slovak public administration to hybrid threats. Although Russia is not mentioned specifically in the national project, its impact would limit Russian influence as well, since the Russian Federation is the main hybrid actor in Slovakia.

Despite having a relatively well-developed policy framework and even dedicating significant resources, there are still large gaps in countermeasures limiting Russian hostile influence, including the influence on the far right. One of the major issues, confirmed also by the expert interviews is a lack of coordination of active countermeasures. The system in place allows for collection of information across different ministries and agencies (via the National Security Analytical Centre based at Slovak Intelligence Service), yet the flow of information is often one-directional. Moreover, the coordination of countermeasures even in some of the most high-profile cases involving Russian influence was not adequate and suffered from lack of clear mandate and fractured responsibilities.

One particular area, which was mentioned also in the expert interviews, was insufficient financial investigation of foreign (Russian) funding for various entities. While Slovakia formally forbids any foreign funding for political parties and election campaigns, as the case of Garbar proves, it is rather easy to circumvent the barrier by simply transferring the money to a Slovak citizen or entity. The same applies for transparency of funding for various media enterprises. The existence of such a dense network of pro-Russian media in Slovakia at times when traditional media struggle to survive economically raises serious doubts as to the sources of their funding – even more so when in the past, attempts to get Russian funding for such media operations were exposed. Another set of countermeasures concerns the spreading of Kremlin propaganda, including

justification of war and denial of Russian war crimes on the internet and social media. Shortly after the Russian invasion started, a hastily adopted amendment to the law on cybernetic security allowed the National Security Authority to temporarily block websites if they were spreading “serious disinformation”.<sup>98</sup> As a result, NSA blocked four websites notorious for publishing Russian propaganda, allegedly also on the grounds they have been receiving Russian financial support.<sup>99</sup> Yet, this measure was only temporary and the blockade expired on 30 September 2022. New legislation, which should have replaced the hastily adopted one, did not pass the parliament due to political bickering.

The public and political debate of Russian influence in Slovakia intensified especially after February 2022, however, it remains polarised along the political preferences. While the government and its ministers of defence, foreign affairs, or even prime minister clearly stated that Russian influence and activities present a danger for Slovakia, such notions were rejected by the opposition, which criticised the alleged double standards and demanded normalisation of relations with Russia and an end to sanctions.<sup>100</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Russian influence on far-right groups is part of a larger effort employing both the existing vulnerabilities and a network of influence Kremlin has developed over the years. Information operations facilitated by a well-connected network of online and offline sources, recruitment, and indoctrination using sports (martial arts clubs) and culture serve as main elements of these efforts. Targets of such influence are predominantly segments of the society displeased with the current situation and their socioeconomic status – young people with strong patriotic or nationalist sentiment. Due to the high level of sympathies towards Russia and the corresponding anti-Americanism, such activities have a fertile ground to take root and expand. While at the beginning of the Russian invasion to Ukraine, Russian proxies and pro-Russian actors were in a state of shock since autumn 2022 they have regained their strength and are currently as strong as they were before the invasion. While in the months following the February 2022 invasion, voices blaming the war on the West, or even Ukraine, were marginal, currently such views are held by large segments of the population.<sup>101</sup> The outcome of the 30 September parliamentary elections is also a confirmation that the Russian influence in Slovakia and pro-Russian attitudes are not waning, but quite the

contrary. Political parties that openly criticised sanctions against Russia, blaming the West for provoking the war, succeeded in forming the new government.

## **Recommendations**

**Political campaigns financing.** Adopt more detailed legislation on the financing of political parties, movements, and electoral campaigns in order to increase the transparency of funding and expose illicit foreign funding. Sources of domestic funding for political parties and campaigns above a certain threshold must be traceable to their origin (final beneficiary), similarly to the case of public procurement.

**Media transparency.** Increase transparency of media ownership for all media formats, including online portals. Media should be required to disclose annually their financial data and sources of funding.

**Blocking of foreign sponsored disinformation.** Adopt an amendment to Cybersecurity Act that would allow blockade of websites spreading serious, foreign-funded disinformation or engaging in Foreign Information Manipulation and Influence (FIMI).

**Investigate cases of hybrid threats.** Adopt legislative changes allowing police to investigate cases of hybrid threats involving foreign entities and streamline exchange of information of such cases between intelligence services and law enforcement. Increase capacities dedicated to financial investigation of illicit foreign funding of hybrid actors – personal, technological, and institutional.

**Better coordination of efforts.** Create a central coordination mechanism or platform for practical and operational coordination of ministries and institutions involved in combatting hybrid threats. Amend the competencies of individual ministries to designate the entity primarily responsible for coordinating the fight against hybrid threats and disinformation.

**State alternative to paramilitary organisations.** Create a state-accredited and regulated alternative to paramilitary organisations, led by instructors from the ranks of current or former members of the armed forces or security forces. Such programme should be easily accessible, attractive, involving Slovak army veterans, and if possible, also western (American) guest lecturers as a counterbalance to pro-Russian paramilitary groups.

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**National strategic narrative.** Develop central strategic narrative, building upon positive historical moments and personalities as a tool to prevent polarisation and fragmentation. Launch public campaigns spreading positive national narratives highlighting Euro-Atlantic ties and benefits of EU and NATO membership in real life.

**Stop abuse of diplomatic status.** Introduce more effective control mechanisms to prevent abuse of diplomatic status by incoming personnel of foreign embassies and foreign missions. Decrease the number of Russian operatives in Slovakia by introducing parity of Russian diplomatic mission personnel in Slovakia with Slovak diplomatic mission in Moscow.

<sup>1</sup> Milo Daniel. “Russia: mighty Slavic brother or hungry bear next-door. The image of Russia in Central & Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans”, *GLOBSEC*, 2021. [https://www.academia.edu/46931984/Russia\\_mighty\\_Slavic\\_brother\\_or\\_hungry\\_bear\\_next\\_door\\_The\\_image\\_of\\_Russia\\_in\\_Central\\_and\\_Eastern\\_Europe\\_and\\_the\\_Western\\_Balkans](https://www.academia.edu/46931984/Russia_mighty_Slavic_brother_or_hungry_bear_next_door_The_image_of_Russia_in_Central_and_Eastern_Europe_and_the_Western_Balkans).

<sup>2</sup> Hajdu Dominika et al. “Globsec Trends 2023”, *GLOBSEC*, 2023. <https://www.globsec.org/sites/default/files/2023-05/GLOBSEC%20Trends%202023.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Milo Daniel. “Russia: mighty Slavic brother or hungry bear next-door. The image of Russia in Central & Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans”, *GLOBSEC*, 2021.

[https://www.academia.edu/46931984/Russia\\_mighty\\_Slavic\\_brother\\_or\\_hungry\\_bear\\_next\\_door\\_The\\_image\\_of\\_Russia\\_in\\_Central\\_and\\_Eastern\\_Europe\\_and\\_the\\_Western\\_Balkans](https://www.academia.edu/46931984/Russia_mighty_Slavic_brother_or_hungry_bear_next_door_The_image_of_Russia_in_Central_and_Eastern_Europe_and_the_Western_Balkans)

<sup>5</sup> Globsec Trends 2023.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Štúr Ľudovít. “Slovanstvo a svet budúcnosti” “[Slavic nations and the future world]”, 1867. [https://zlatyfond.sme.sk/dielo/359/Stur\\_Slovanstvo-a-svet-buducnosti/1](https://zlatyfond.sme.sk/dielo/359/Stur_Slovanstvo-a-svet-buducnosti/1).

<sup>9</sup> According to the CIA World Factbook, the ethnic composition of the Russian Federation is as follows: Russian 77.7 percent, Tatar 3.7 percent, Ukrainian 1.4 percent, Bashkir 1.1 percent, Chuvash 1 percent, Chechen 1 percent, other 10.2 percent, unspecified 3.9 percent (2010 est.) CIA, The World factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/russia/summaries/#people-and-society>

<sup>10</sup> Shekhovtsov Anton. “Is Aleksandr Dugin a Traditionalist? ‘Neo-Eurasianism’ and Perennial Philosophy.” *The Russian Review*, 2009, n. pag. Print. [https://www.academia.edu/76722529/Is\\_Aleksandr\\_Dugin\\_a\\_Traditionalist\\_Neo\\_Eurasianism\\_and\\_Perennial\\_Philosophy](https://www.academia.edu/76722529/Is_Aleksandr_Dugin_a_Traditionalist_Neo_Eurasianism_and_Perennial_Philosophy).

<sup>11</sup> See for example schism in Encyclopaedia Britannica <https://www.britannica.com/topic/schism>.

<sup>12</sup> According to the results of the Census of Population, Houses, and Apartments of the Slovak Republic as of January 1, 2021, more than half of the population of Slovakia (55.8 percent) subscribed to the Roman Catholic religion, which represents more than 3.04 million inhabitants. Source: Statistical office of the Slovak republic [www.scitanie.sk](http://www.scitanie.sk).

<sup>13</sup> One of the most important figures of Slovak nation building period, founder of modern Slovak language Ľudovít Štúr, described these ideas in detail in his book “Slovanstvo a svet budúcnosti” “[Slavic nations and the future world]” in 1867.

<sup>14</sup> Kollar, Ján; “Sláva bohyně a původ gména Slawůw čili Slawjanůw. S přídawky srownalost indického a slawského žiwota, řeči a bágeslowj ukazugjcjmi”, [The glory of the goddess and the origin of the name Slavs or Slavs. With additions to the similarity of Indian and Slavic life, speech and language], 1839.

<sup>15</sup> Perhaps the best-known monument of this kind is the Slavin overlooking the heart of Slovakia’s capitol Bratislava, commemorating the almost 7000 Red Army soldiers who died while liberating Bratislava. See more at: <https://www.visitbratislava.com/sk/miesta/slavin/>.

<sup>16</sup> Kysel’ Tomáš. “Noční vlci nikam neodišli, iba sa prezliekli. Oslavovali vo Volgograde, teraz prídu na Slavín”, “[The night wolves didn't go anywhere, they just changed clothes. They celebrated in Volgograd, now they will come to Slavín]“, *Aktuality.sk* May 5, 2023 <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/RZn9th3/nocni-vlci-nikam-neodisli-iba-sa-prezliekli-oslavovali-vo-volgograde-teraz-pridu-na-slavin/>.

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<sup>17</sup> Council of the EU, “Russia’s aggression against Ukraine: the EU targets additional 54 individuals and 10 entities”, July 2022 <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/07/22/ru>.

<sup>18</sup> Hajdu Dominik., “Prieskum GLOBSECu ukázal, že každý tretí Slovák do 35 rokov nemá názor na okupáciu Československa v auguste 1968”, “[A GLOBSEC survey showed that every third Slovak under the age of 35 has no opinion on the occupation of Czechoslovakia in August 1968]”. <https://www.globsec.org/what-we-do/press-releases/prieskum-globsecu-ukazal-ze-kazdy-treti-slovak-do-35-rokov-nema-nazor-na>.

<sup>19</sup> “Poll: People are nostalgic about communism”, *Slovak Spectator*, June 26, 2021.

<https://spectator.sme.sk/c/20858226/poll-people-are-nostalgic-about-communism.html>.

<sup>20</sup> “Slovakia yet to plan solution to lower dependency on Russian energy”, *Euractiv*, March 23, 2023. Available at: [https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short\\_news/slovakia-yet-to-plan-solution-to-lower-dependency-on-russian-energy/](https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/slovakia-yet-to-plan-solution-to-lower-dependency-on-russian-energy/).

<sup>21</sup> Since summer 2022, the share of imports of natural gas from Russia fell from 85 percent to currently about 50 percent, European Commission, 2023 Country Report - Slovakia Accompanying the document Recommendation for a COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION on the 2023 National Reform Programme of Slovakia and delivering a Council opinion on the 2023 Stability Programme of Slovakia. [https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-05/SK\\_SWD\\_2023\\_625\\_en.pdf](https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-05/SK_SWD_2023_625_en.pdf).

<sup>22</sup> According to the official figures Eustream company, which is a state-controlled company operating the gas pipelines transiting Slovakia used to have roughly €280 million in profits from the gas transit until the Ukraine war. After the sanctions, the profit turned into a loss of some €12 million. <https://finstat.sk/35910712>.

<sup>23</sup> Examples of these fringe media include online radio Infovojna.bz, monthly magazine Zem a Vek or webpage Hlavne spravy. The connection of such media to Russia is quite difficult to establish, yet there were some cases proving at least attempts to acquire such support. One such case is a meeting of chief editor of Zem a Vek magazine in Moscow in 2015 (see details here: <https://dennikn.sk/blog/378330/ako-je-to-s-udajnou-nezavislostou-tibora-rostasa/>) or frequent visits of one of Hlave spravy contributors at Sputnik agency headquarters (see details here: <https://dennikn.sk/1288348/propagandu-pre-hlavne-spravy-pise-rus-ktory-sa-chodi-radit-do-agentury-kremla-odomknute/>). A more comprehensive overview of the murky funding of disinformation spreading fringe media is available here: <https://www.icjk.sk/259/Ako-zarabaju-dezinformacne-weby-Ziju-z-reklamy-aj-z-darov-fanusikov-a-utajenych-sponzorov>.

<sup>24</sup> In particular, Night Wolves is currently on EU sanctions list, but also its offshoot Brat za Brata (Brother for Brother).

<sup>25</sup> Until October 2022 the best example of such group was Slovak Recruits paramilitary group with open pro-Russian attitudes. Yet after the war in Ukraine its leadership split and the group was officially disbanded.

<sup>26</sup> Shekovtsov Anton. “Russia and the Western Far Right. Tango Noir”, Routledge 2018.

<sup>27</sup> Krekó Peter, Marušiak Juraj, Milo Daniel et al. “Marching towards Eurasia”, *Political Capital Institute*, 2015.

[https://www.academia.edu/19730490/Marching\\_towards\\_Eurasia\\_The\\_Kremlin\\_connections\\_of\\_the\\_Slovak\\_far\\_right](https://www.academia.edu/19730490/Marching_towards_Eurasia_The_Kremlin_connections_of_the_Slovak_far_right).

<sup>28</sup> Three experts knowledgeable on the subject were interviewed for the analysis, representing academic sector, NGOs, and national security area. Due to the sensitive nature of the issue, none of them agreed to be mentioned by name in the analysis.



<sup>29</sup> The documentary is available at HBO:

<https://www.hbomax.com/sk/en/feature/urn:hbo:feature:GYWQD9AyQuyVcCgEAAAAE?countryRedirect=1>.

<sup>30</sup> Drábik Jakub. “LSNS je neonacistická strana, usvedčujú ju jej spojenci aj vlastné činy”, “[LSNS is a neo-Nazi party, it is convicted by its allies as well as by its own actions]”, *DennikN*, October 31, 2019, or Cirner Michal. “The Entry Of AAn Extreme Right Party into the Slovak Parliament after the 2016 and 2020 Elections: The Return of Fascists?” In: *Balkan Social Science Review*, Vol. 16, December 2020, 175–197.

[https://www.academia.edu/86170151/The\\_Entry\\_of\\_an\\_Extreme\\_Right\\_Party\\_Into\\_the\\_Slovak\\_Parliament\\_After\\_the\\_2016\\_and\\_2020\\_Elections\\_The\\_Return\\_of\\_Fascists](https://www.academia.edu/86170151/The_Entry_of_an_Extreme_Right_Party_Into_the_Slovak_Parliament_After_the_2016_and_2020_Elections_The_Return_of_Fascists).

<sup>31</sup> Ruling of Supreme Court of the Slovak republic no. 3 SŽ 79/2005-54 from 1 March 2006.

<https://www.docdroid.net/rpXz32K/060301-rozsudok-ns-sr-o-rozpusteni-sp-ns.pdf>.

<sup>32</sup> Vražda Daniel, “Kotleba. Odkiaľ prišiel a ako je možné, že sedí v parlamente” [Kotleba. Where did he come from and how is it possible that he is sitting in parliament], *N Press*, 2020. [https://obchod.dennikn.sk/show/228/kotleba-druhe-vydanie#e2\\_product\\_description](https://obchod.dennikn.sk/show/228/kotleba-druhe-vydanie#e2_product_description).

<sup>33</sup> Many such cases are demonstrated in blogs of activist turned MP Ján Benčík:

<https://dennikn.sk/autor/jan-bencik/>.

<sup>34</sup> Európske Noviny. “Banskobystrický kraj prichádza kvôli Kotlebovi o eurofondy, varuje Fico”, “[The Banská Bystrica Region is losing European funds because of Kotleba, warns Fico]” February 26, 2015. <https://europske.noviny.sk/2015/02/26/bankobystricky-kraj-prichadza-kvoli-kotlebovi-o-eurofondy-varuje-fico/>.

<sup>35</sup> Forgács Jozef. “Kotleba nazval vlajku EÚ modrou handrou a oznámil, že ju dal odstrániť z výzdoby na úrade!”, “[Kotleba called the EU flag a blue rag and announced that he had it removed from the decoration in the office]”, *Dnes24.sk*, March 2014.

<https://www1.pluska.sk/spravy/z-domova/vlajku-unie-odstavil-marian-kotleba-znova-prejavil-jasne-svoj-nazor>.

<sup>36</sup> Marušiak, Juraj et al. “Marching towards Eurasia. The Kremlin connections of the Slovak far-right”. *Political Capital*, 2015.

<sup>37</sup> Mareš Miroslav. “How Does Militant Democracy Function in Combating Right-Wing Extremism? A Case Study of Slovakian Militant Democracy and the Rise of Kotleba – People’s Party Our Slovakia” (2018). In: Ellian, Afshin, Rijpkema, Bastiaan, (eds) “Militant Democracy – Political Science”, Law and Philosophy. Philosophy and Politics - Critical Explorations, vol. 7. Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-97004-2\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-97004-2_4).

<sup>38</sup> Slovakia declared independence in March 1939 and became an ally of Nazi Germany with a fascist regime of its own. Slovak National Uprising was an armed rebellion in August 1944 against the Slovak fascist regime, which led to occupation of Slovakia by the Wehrmacht. While being militarily defeated, Slovak National Uprising is generally accepted as the most important historic legacy of Slovaks standing up to fascism and is considered to be the cornerstone of modern Slovak identity. LSNS called the Slovak National Uprising “a communist putsch” and rejected its legacy.

<sup>39</sup> Kysel’ Tomáš. “14 “náhod” v LSNS a kariére Mariana Kotlebu”, [14 “coincidences” in LSNS and the career of Marian Kotleba]” *Aktuality.sk*, June 8, 2020.

<https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/795726/14-nahod-v-kariere-mariana-kotlebu/>

<sup>40</sup> Struhár Pavol. “Postoj Slovenskej Krajnej Pravice Ku Kríze Na Ukrajine – Prípád Strany Kotleba – Ľudová Strana Naše Slovensko” [The Attitude of the Slovak Far Right Towards the Crisis in Ukraine – The Case of the Kotleba Party – Peoples Party Our Slovakia]” Alexander Dubcek University of Trencin.

[https://www.academia.edu/36156310/POSTOJ\\_SLOVENSKEJ\\_KRAJNEJ\\_PRAVICE\\_KU\\_](https://www.academia.edu/36156310/POSTOJ_SLOVENSKEJ_KRAJNEJ_PRAVICE_KU_)

KR%C3%8DZE\_NA\_UKRAJINE\_PR%C3%8DPAD\_STRANY\_KOTLEBA\_%C4%BDUD\_OV%C3%81\_STRANA\_NA%C5%A0E\_SLOVENSKO.

<sup>41</sup> Slobodný Vysielač. “V prvej línii 21.08.2015 Marián Kotleba”, “[On the front line 21/08/2015 Marián Kotleba]”, August 21, 2015.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5cVpgkiUPqI>.

<sup>42</sup> Point no. 8 of LSNS programme manifesto, included in LSNS party newspaper *Naše Slovensko, noviny politickej strany Mariána Kotlebu*, February 2016.

<sup>43</sup> TASR, “Kotlebovci začali zbierať podpisy za referendá o vystúpení z EU a NATO”, “[The people of Kotleba’s party began to collect signatures for referendums on leaving the EU and NATO]” July 1, 2016. <https://www.teraz.sk/slovensko/kotlebovci-podpisy-vystupenie-dve-refere/204692-clanok.html>.

<sup>44</sup> “The West, led by the United States of America, with its aggressive and provocative policy, is trying to bring Russia to its knees at any cost and thus move closer to world domination... In the People's Party Our Slovakia we are of the opinion that the Slovak Republic should conduct a balanced foreign policy and should not participate in the geopolitical games and provocations organised by Western countries against Russia” Official website of the LSNS party, “Vyzývame P. Pellegriniho, aby nepodporoval protiruské besnenie”, “[We call on Mr Pellegrini not to support anti-Russian rampage]”, December 11, 2018.

<sup>45</sup> Facebook profile of Marian Kotleba. Marian Kotleba - kandidát na prezidenta Slovenskej republiky, February 13, 2019.

<https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=2233263840326055&set=pcb.2233263873659385>.

<sup>46</sup> The video was recorded by Slovak military intelligence and leaked to Dennik N, creating a huge public outcry. The video is available online with English subtitles:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NrS98C796xA&ab\\_channel=Denn%C3%ADkN](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NrS98C796xA&ab_channel=Denn%C3%ADkN).

<sup>47</sup> “Ruský špión spoznal TREST za vyzvedačstvo pre vojnového agresora z Ruska: AHA, ako dopadol!”, “[Russian spy pleads guilty to spying for Russia's wartime aggressor: look how he turned out]”, Plus Jeden deň, February 28, 2023. <https://www1.pluska.sk/spravy/z-domova/rusky-spion-spoznal-trest-vyzvedacstvo-pre-vojnoveho-agresora-ruska-aha-ako-dopadol>.

<sup>48</sup> Zígová Iva. “Prispievateľ Hlavných správ Bohuš Garbár vyzvedal pre Rusko, súd ho odsúdil na podmienku”, “[Main News contributor Bohuš Garbár spied for Russia, court sentences him to probation]”, *Aktuality.sk*, February 28, 2023

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<sup>49</sup> Tódova, Monika. “Ako sa verbujú špióni na Slovensku: Povedal som v Moskve, že si dobrý chlapec”, “[How spies are recruited in Slovakia: I told Moscow you were a good boy]” *DennikN*, March 15, 2022.

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<sup>50</sup> Cuprik Roman. “Bezpečnostné orgány taja či vyšetrojú napojenie Kotlebu na Moskvu”, “[Security authorities are investigating Kotleba's links to Moscow]”, *Denník SME*, July 21, 2016. <https://domov.sme.sk/c/20221054/bezpecnostne-organy-taja-ci-vysetruju-napojenie-kotleba-na-moskvu.html>. On Zmiana, see the “Polish” chapter of this volume.

<sup>51</sup> Holcova Pavla. “The man who wanted more”, *VSQUARE*, October 14, 2017.

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<sup>52</sup> Kyseľ Tomáš. “NAKA preverovala Kotlebu kvôli peniazom z Ruska”, “[NAKA investigated Kotleba for money from Russia]”, *Aktuality.sk*, October 3, 2017.

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<sup>53</sup> Kováč Peter. “Extrémistické šeky nebola náhoda, píše Najvyšší súd v rozsudku. Žilinka zvažuje, čo s ĽSNS”, “[The extremist cheques were not an accident, the Supreme Court said in its judgment. Žilinka is considering what to do with ĽSNS ]”, *SME daily*, July 6, 2022. <https://domov.sme.sk/c/22955201/kotleba-lsns-najvyssi-sud-sek-1488-rozsudok.html>, Najvyšší súd píše, že Kotleba šekmi na 1488 eur narušil verejný poriadok. Žilinka zvažuje, - SME.

<sup>54</sup> See: <https://www.adl.org/resources/hate-symbol/1488>.

<sup>55</sup> Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, official results of the September 30, 2023, Parliamentary elections.

[https://volby.statistics.sk/nrsr/nrsr2023/sk/vysledky\\_hlasovania\\_strany.html](https://volby.statistics.sk/nrsr/nrsr2023/sk/vysledky_hlasovania_strany.html).

<sup>56</sup> Milan Uhrík was elected in the European Parliament in 2019.

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/sk/197763/MILAN\\_UHRIK/home](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/sk/197763/MILAN_UHRIK/home). His personal website: <https://www.milanhrik.sk/#o-mne>.

<sup>57</sup> Mrvová Iva. “Suverénne najdrahšia reklama eurovolieb? Uhríkovo video z Bruselu”, “[The most expensive advertisement of the European elections? Uhrík's video from Brussels]” *Aktuality.sk*, July 4, 2019. <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/706033/suverenne-najdrahsia-reklama-eurovolieb-uhrikovo-video-z-bruselu/>.

<sup>58</sup> Struhárik Filip. “Najpopulárnejší politici na Facebooku v roku 2022 boli Uhrík, Fico, Blaha, Taraba a Mazurek. Čaputová predbehla Pellegriniho”, „[The most popular politicians on Facebook in 2022 were Uhrík, Fico, Blaha, Taraba and Mazurek. Čaputová overtook Pellegrini]”, *DennikN*, January 3, 2023. <https://dennikn.sk/3178587/najpopularnejisi-politici-na-facebooku-v-roku-2022-boli-uhrik-fico-blaha-taraba-a-mazurek-caputova-predbehla-pellegriniho/>.

<sup>59</sup> Szicherle Patrik, Molnár Csaba and Krekó Peter. “European Parliament: the primary source of immunity to foreign authoritarian influence?”, *Political Capital Institute*, February 2020. [https://politicalcapital.hu/library.php?article\\_read=1&article\\_id=2496](https://politicalcapital.hu/library.php?article_read=1&article_id=2496).

<sup>60</sup> Húsková Eva. “Uhrík šíri v Európskom parlamente proruské dezinformácie”, “[Uhrík spreads pro-Russian disinformation in the European Parliament]” *Antipropaganda.sk*, October 17, 2019. <https://www.antipropaganda.sk/uhrik-siri-v-europskom-parlamente-proruske-dezinformacie/>.

<sup>61</sup> See VK post of Armed Forces of Novorussia with this video: [https://vk.com/wall-35660695\\_360210?lang=en](https://vk.com/wall-35660695_360210?lang=en). A fragment of Uhrík's speech was published by the Telegram channel of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Lugansk People's Republic (LPR) [https://t.me/mid\\_lnr/4424](https://t.me/mid_lnr/4424).

<sup>62</sup> Milan Uhrík (REPUBLIKA): List veľvyslancovi Ruskej federácie, “[Letter to the Ambassador of the Russian Federation]” *Republika Movement website*, January 10, 2022. <https://www.dennik-republika.sk/milan-uhrik-republika-list-velvyslancovi-ruskej-federacie/>.

<sup>63</sup> “Miroslav Suja (REPUBLIKA): S potešením sme prijali pozvanie od Veľvyslanectva Ruskej federácie!”, “[We were delighted to accept the invitation from the Embassy of the Russian Federation!]”, *Republika Movement website*, August 30, 2021. <https://www.dennik-republika.sk/miroslav-suja-republika-s-potesenim-sme-prijali-pozvanie-od-velvyslanectva-ruskej-federacie/>.

<sup>64</sup> “Pravda či ruská propaganda? Prinášame článok ministra zahraničných vecí Ruskej federácie S.V. Lavrova”, “[Truth or Russian propaganda? We present an article by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation S.V. Lavrov]”, *Republika Movement website*, July 21, 2022. <https://www.dennik-republika.sk/pravda-ci-ruska-propaganda-prinasame-clanok-ministra-zahranicnych-veci-ruskej-federacie-s-v-lavrova/>.

<sup>65</sup> English translation of Republika movement programme manifesto. “Program pre obranu a bezpečnosť”, „[Defence and security programme]” *www.hnutie-republika.sk*, <https://www.hnutie-republika.sk/obrana/>.

<sup>66</sup> English translation of text “For peace in Ukraine” published at Republika movement official website: <https://www.hnutie-republika.sk/nazory/#za-mier-na-ukrajine>.

<sup>67</sup> Madleňák Tomáš. “Ruský špión s diplomatickým krytím operuje v Bruseli, hoci ho chceli vyhostiť. Na recepcii u neho bol aj Uhrík”, “[A Russian spy with diplomatic cover is operating in Brussels, even though they wanted to expel him. Uhrík was also at the reception with him]”, October 24, 2023. <https://icjk.sk/278/Rusky-spion-s-diplomatickym-krytim-operuje-v-Bruseli-hoci-ho-chceli-vyhostit-Na-recepcii-u-neho-bol-aj-Uhrik>.

<sup>68</sup> Benčík Ján. “Ach tie náhody”, “[Oh the coincidences]”, *DennikN*, March 29, 2022. <https://dennikn.sk/blog/2787927/ach-tie-nahody/>.

<sup>69</sup> Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, official results of the September 30, 2023 Parliamentary elections. [https://volby.statistics.sk/nrsr/nrsr2023/sk/vysledky\\_hlasovania\\_strany.html](https://volby.statistics.sk/nrsr/nrsr2023/sk/vysledky_hlasovania_strany.html).

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<sup>71</sup> Slovenská informačná služba, Správa o činnosti SIS za rok 2017, 2018, “[SIS Activity Report 2017, 2018]”, <http://www.sis.gov.sk/pre-vas/sprava-o-cinnosti.html> and Vojenské spravodajstvo, Správa o činnosti Vojenského spravodajstva za rok 2015, 2016. “[Report on the activities of the Military Intelligence for 2015, 2016]”, <http://vs.mosr.sk/sprava-o-cinnosti-vs-2015/>.

<sup>72</sup> Debnár J. “Slovenskí Branci končia”, “[Slovak Conscripts are finished]”, *Aktuality.sk*, October 11, 2023. <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/WtKW6Yk/slovenski-branci-koncia/>.

<sup>73</sup> The group's public profile was created on October 6, 2023. <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61552130790052>.

<sup>74</sup> Benčík Ján. “Peter Švrček a začiatky Slovenských brancov”, “[Peter Švrček and the beginnings of the Slovak conscripts]”, *DennikN*, February 21, 2019. <https://dennikn.sk/blog/1387292/peter-svrcek-a-zaciatky-slovenskych-brancov/>.

<sup>75</sup> Bráni, Radovan and Mesežnikov Grigorij. “*Hatred, violence and comprehensive military training*”, *The violent radicalisation and Kremlin connections of Slovak paramilitary, extremist and neo-Nazi groups*, *Political Capital Institute*, 2017.

<sup>76</sup> Benčík Ján. “Peter Švrček, veliteľ Slovenských brancov”, “[Peter Švrček, commander of the Slovak conscripts]”, *Dennik N blog*, February 16, 2019. , <https://dennikn.sk/blog/1379854/peter-svrcek-velitel-slovenskych-brancov/>.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Lovaš Karol. “Spoved’ Slováka, Ktorý Bojuje Za Proruských Separatistov”, “[Confessions of a Slovak Fighting for Pro-Russian Separatists]”, *Aktuality.sk*, February 23, 2015. <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/271050/nevzali-ho-do-armady-siel-k-separatistom/>.

<sup>79</sup> Bráni Radovan and Mesežnikov Grigorij. “*Hatred, violence and comprehensive military training. The violent radicalisation and Kremlin connections of Slovak paramilitary, extremist and neo-Nazi groups*”, *Political Capital Institute*, 2017.

<sup>80</sup> Benčík Ján. “Kto protestuje proti základniám NATO?”,[ Who is protesting against NATO bases?], *DennikN*, March 16, 2015.

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<sup>81</sup> SITA, “Hackeri odhalili “otca” proruských akcií v krajinách V4, demonštrácie organizoval aj na Slovensku”, “[ Hackers uncovered the "father" of pro-Russian actions in the V4 countries, he also organised demonstrations in Slovakia]”, *SITA news agency*, March 14, 2017. <https://sita.sk/hackeri-odhalili-otca-proruskych-akcii-v-krajinach-v4-demonstracie-organizoval-aj-na-slovensku>.

<sup>82</sup> Zem a Vek, “Národná konferencia predstavila Manifest Slovenska a zvolila národného kandidáta na prezidenta”, “[ The National Conference presented the Manifesto of Slovakia and elected a national candidate for the presidency]”, *Zem a vek website*, June 25, 2018.

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<sup>83</sup> Facebook page of Peter Švrček, June 29, 2018.

<https://www.facebook.com/411650562234259/posts/1780817531984215/ň>.

<sup>84</sup> Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, Election of the President of the Slovak Republic results, <https://volby.statistics.sk/prez/prez2019/sk/data01.html>.

<sup>85</sup> Benčík Ján. “Ako je to s údajnou nezávislosťou Tibora Rostása”, “[ What about the alleged independence of Tibor Rostás]”, *DennikN*, February 22, 2016.

<https://dennikn.sk/blog/378330/ako-je-to-s-udajnou-nezavislostou-tibora-rostasa/>.

<sup>86</sup> The project *konspiratori.sk* is a public database of web pages with deceiving, false, conspiratorial or propaganda spreading content. Website *zemavek.sk* received a score of 9.5 (out of 10) in the database. <https://konspiratori.sk/zoznam-stranok>.

<sup>87</sup> Cuprik Roman. “Inštruktor brancov: Slovenské ozbrojené zložky sú slabé, chceme im pomôcť”, “[ Instructor of conscripts: the Slovak armed forces are weak, we want to help them]”, *SME*, February 25, 2018. <https://domov.sme.sk/c/20767605/instruktor-brancov-slovenske-ozbrojene-zlozky-su-slabe-chceme-im-pomoc.html>.

<sup>88</sup> Expert interviews and Bránik, Radovan, Mesežnikov, Grigorij, “Hatred, violence and comprehensive military training

The violent radicalisation and Kremlin connections of Slovak paramilitary, extremist and neo-Nazi groups”, *Political Capital Institute*, 2017.

<sup>89</sup> Benčík Ján. “Ján a Erik, členovia siete velenia Slovenských brancov”, “[ Jan and Erik, members of the Slovak conscripts command network]”, December 3, 2018.

<https://dennikn.sk/blog/1312954/jan-a-erik-cenovia-siete-velenia-slovenskych-brancov/> or “Peter Švrček, veliteľ Slovenských brancov”, “[Peter Švrček, commander of the Slovak conscripts]”, November 28, 2018. Blog N: Peter Švrček, veliteľ Slovenských brancov ([dennikn.sk](https://dennikn.sk)).

<sup>90</sup> There have been numerous examples from the very beginning of Slovak Conscripts existence. One notable example is a post from April 11, 2021, which states: *FOR PEACE! – LET’S STOP DEFENDING FOREIGN INTERESTS, OUR TRADE WAS NEVER WAR. Let’s not get involved in foreign geopolitical games that threaten our own future. We therefore call on our diplomacy, if we still have any, to make every effort to preserve peace and stability, because only peace is the path to prosperity, because only peace represents life. The newly launched cold war and hate campaign against everything Russian is not and must not be in our interest. So let’s stop this madness while there is still time.*

<https://www.facebook.com/slovenskibranci1/photos/pb.100067073857116.-2207520000/2841747149414558/?type=3>.

<sup>91</sup> Slovak Conscripts Facebook page, “18 years in NATO - there is nothing to celebrate. We have to ensure our defence ourselves”. December 11, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/slovenskibranci1/photos/pb.100067073857116.-2207520000/2754156024840338/?type=3>.

<sup>92</sup> Hutko Dominik. “Slovenskí branci končia. Minister Nad’ sa im vysmial: Rozobrali sme vás ako lego”, “[Slovak goalkeepers are finished. Minister Nad laughed at them: We dismantled you like a lego]”, *Pravda*, October 12, 2022. <https://spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/643351-slovenski-branci-koncia-minister-nad-sa-im-vysmial-rozobrali-sme-vas-ako-lego/>.

<sup>93</sup> Koncepcia pre boj Slovenskej republiky proti hybridným hrozbám, “[Strategy for Combating Hybrid Threats in the Slovak Republic]”, adopted by government decree no. 345/2018. <https://rokovania.gov.sk/RVL/Material/23100/1>.

<sup>94</sup> Aktuality.sk, “Danko sa v Rusku stretol so šéfom Dumy. Politika zo sankčného zoznamu by rád privítal v Bratislave”, “[Danko meets the head of the Duma in Russia. He would like to welcome a politician from the sanctions list to Bratislava]”, February 2, 2019. <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/667065/danko-sa-v-rusku-stretol-so-sefom-dumy-politika-zo-sankneho-zoznamu-by-rad-privital-v-bratislave/>.

<sup>95</sup> Bezpečnostná stratégia Slovenskej republiky, “[Security Strategy of the Slovak republic]”, as adopted on January 28, 2021 by the National Council of the Slovak republic. <https://www.nrsr.sk/web/Default.aspx?sid=zakony/cpt&ZakZborID=13&CisObdobia=8&ID=369>.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid

<sup>97</sup> Akčný plán koordinácie boja proti hybridným hrozbám, “[Action Plan for the Coordinated Countering of Hybrid Threats]”, adopted by the Slovak government decree no. 235 of March 30, 2022. <https://www.nbu.gov.sk/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/AKCNYPPLAN-KOORDINACIE-BOJA-PROTI-HYBRIDNYM-HROZBAM.pdf>.

<sup>98</sup> Kosno Lukáš. “Štát schválil blokovanie škodlivých aktivít na webe, opatrenie má limit”, “[State approves blocking harmful activities on the web, measure has a limit]”, *Žive.sk*, February 26, 2022. <https://zive.aktuality.sk/clanok/7kpbs0/stat-schvalil-blokovanie-skodlivych-aktivit-na-webe-opatrenie-ma-limit/>.

<sup>99</sup> Struhárik Filip. “Štát už mesiac tají konkrétne dôvody blokovania dezinformačných webov. V rozhodnutí argumentuje aj slovníkom slovenčiny”, “[For a month now, the state has been hiding the specific reasons for blocking disinformation websites. In the decision, it also argues the dictionary of the Slovak language]”, *DennikN*, March 21, 2022. <https://dennikn.sk/2791298/stat-uz-mesiac-taji-konkretne-dovody-blokovania-dezinformacnych-webov-v-rozhodnuti-argumentuje-aj-slovníkom-slovenčiny/>.

<sup>100</sup> Rejection of sanctions against Russia was present in the whole opposition. A typical example of rhetoric rejecting the EU sanctions against Russia as a consequence of its invasion was speech of then-MP Milan Mazurek on March 23, 2022. <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=326584839449151>.

<sup>101</sup> According to the GLOBSEC trends report of May 2023, the opinion that Russia is to blame for the war in Ukraine is believed by only 40 percent of the population. At the same time, the largest number of residents– (34 percent) believe that “the West, which provoked Russia” is responsible for the war, and 17 percent of respondents believe that Ukraine is responsible for the war. GLOBSEC Trends 2023. <https://www.globsec.org/sites/default/files/2023-05/GLOBSEC%20Trends%202023.pdf>.