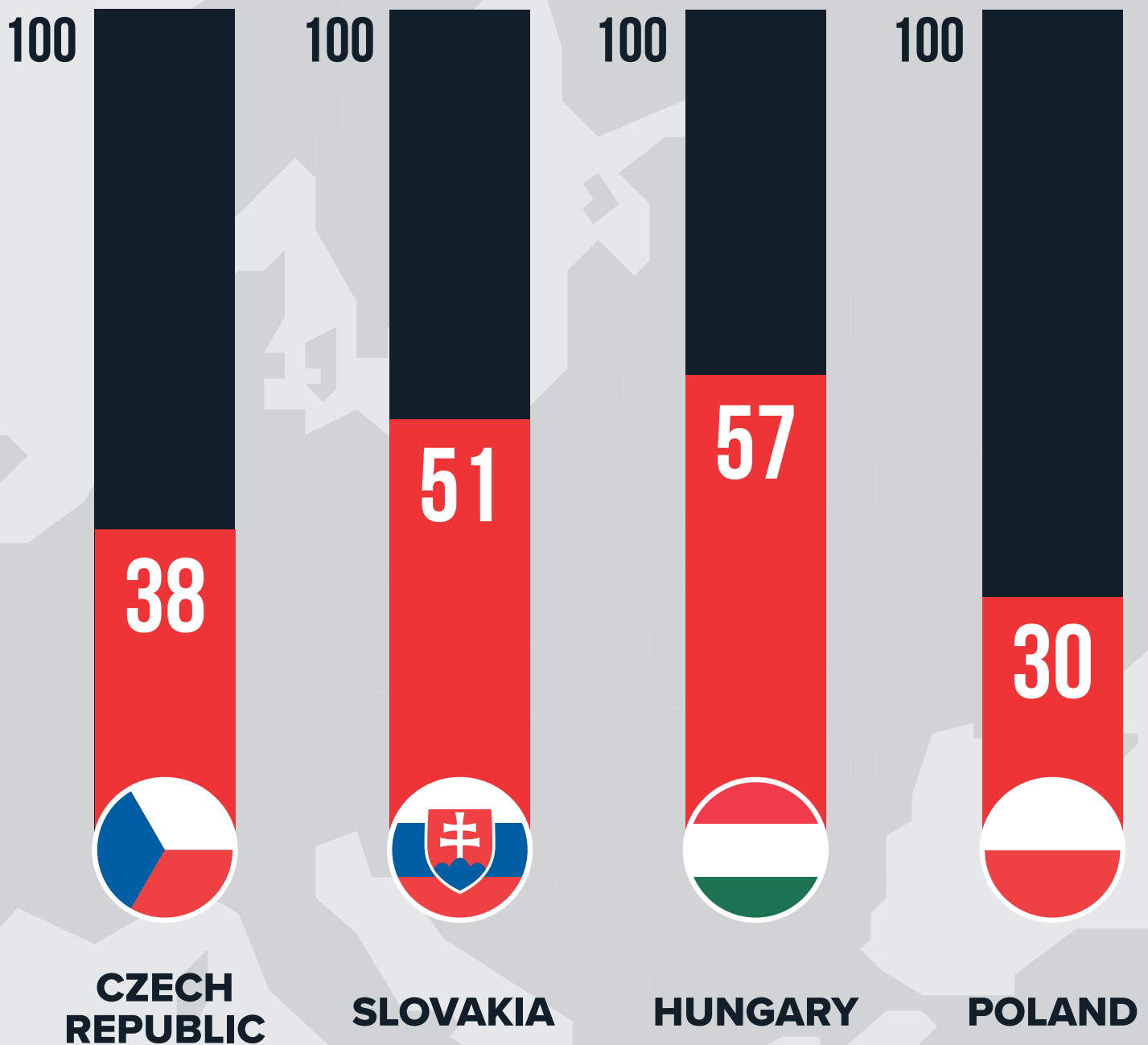


Vulnerability Index

SUBVERSIVE RUSSIAN INFLUENCE IN CENTRAL EUROPE



Credits

Globsec Policy Institute, Klariská 14, Bratislava, Slovakia
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GLOBSEC Policy Institute (formerly the Central European Policy Institute) carries out research, analytical and communication activities related to impact of strategic communication and propaganda aimed at changing the perception and attitudes of the general population in Central European countries.

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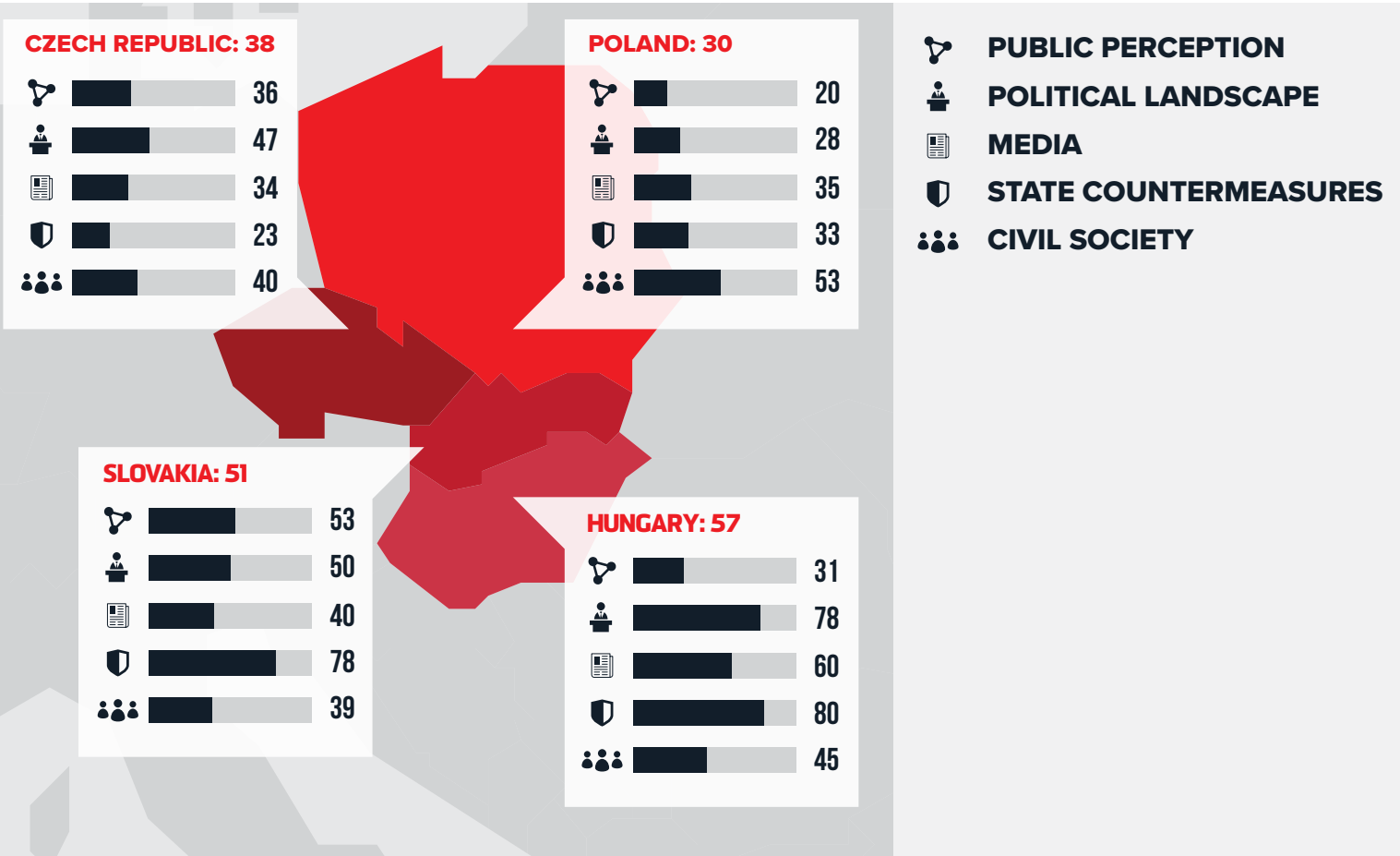


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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	4
Country Overview	7
Methodology	9
Thematic Overview	10
1. Public Perception	10
2. Political Landscape	15
3. Media	22
4. State Countermeasures	27
5. Civil Society	32
Best Practices	38

Executive Summary



The Visegrad group countries in Central Europe (Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic and Slovakia – V4) are often perceived as a regional bloc of nations sharing similar aspirations, aims and challenges. They share common history, communist past, Soviet occupation and all joined the EU and NATO to embed themselves in the western civilization and transform their post-communist societies. However, there are internal forces in each of the Visegrad group countries trying to subvert and undo this journey and change the cultural and geopolitical orientation of each country.

Such efforts are aided and strengthened also by foreign actors who use every opportunity to sow discontent, create divisions and provide alternative narrative for the whole region. Russia as the main regional actor operating outside of the EU-NATO framework is projecting its power in Central Europe region by means of diplomatic activities, energy and economic policy, information warfare and support to domestic political forces (both mainstream and fringe) sympathetic to the Russian narrative, with the overall aim of restoring its influence in the region and weakening the EU and NATO. Following the outcome of the U.S. presidential elections, the issue of Russian influence in Central Europe has become more important than ever.

How vulnerable are the Visegrad four societies to such subversive foreign influence?

Where are the weak spots to be remedied and what are the examples of best practices in addressing these threats?

Despite the wealth of available statistical data and existing research, no attempt was made, until now, to summarise these findings in a concise comparative analysis mapping the vulnerabilities of the V4 countries to such subversive foreign influences. In order to provide decision and opinion makers with an overview of such vulnerabilities, the GLOBSEC Policy Institute developed a methodology based on measurable set of societal and political indicators, analyses of opinion poll data, political landscape, structure of the media and the state of civil society. By pooling together data and insights from the Central European experts, we were able to rank the region's vulnerabilities.

As a result, a fact-based Vulnerability Index of Central European countries was developed to understand the on-going dynamics in Central Europe and attitudes towards the United States, Russia, the European Union and NATO, and to provide a comparative overview of what measures need to be implemented (and in which country) in order to make us more secure. The Vulnerability Index measures vulnerability of a given country on a scale of 0 to 100, where the higher score represents the higher vulnerability to subversive foreign influence.

*Our Vulnerability Index shows, that **Hungary is the most vulnerable country in the Visegrad group** to hostile foreign influence with an overall score of **57 out of 100**. This outcome confirms the growing rift between Hungary and Western Europe on many fundamental issues, which is largely a result of Hungary's sliding into illiberalism and the attraction of Hungarian political elites towards the Russian geopolitical orbit. However, this is in contrast with public opinion in Hungary, which, according to polls, clearly prefers a pro-western geopolitical orientation and shows a relatively stable support for NATO, the EU and the U.S.*

***Slovakia ranked as the second most vulnerable country**, with an overall score of **51 out of 100**. Transactional and opportunistic attitudes towards the EU and NATO, widely shared by the political elites and the public, persistent energy ties to Russia and political elites' naïve perceptions of the Kremlin's geopolitical goals in Central Europe put Slovakia in a very vulnerable position. A small push could change the course of the country in either direction.*

***The Czech Republic ranked the third among the Visegrad group** with an overall vulnerability index of **38 out of 100**. Czech society, despite being quite euro-sceptic, simultaneously rejects a pro-Russian orientation. One notable exception is Czech President Miloš Zeman, who is regarded by many as the most important and visible pro-Russian political actor in the region. At the same time, the current Czech government is leading the way in addressing subversive foreign efforts by setting up a dedicated anti-hybrid threats task force at the Ministry of Interior and is in close cooperation with a very active civil society.*

*According to Vulnerability Index, **Poland is the least vulnerable country in the region to subversive foreign influence with a score of 30 out of 100**. Due to the hard lessons learned by Poland in its turbulent history and the contemporary geopolitical situation, Polish society is the most stable ally of the West in the Visegrad Group. Yet, despite having one of the most pro-European populations in Europe, last year Polish voters elected a conservative Eurosceptic government, which shares some common tendencies with the Hungarian regime. Despite its alignment with the EU, Poland rejects any criticism of its governance by Brussels. It holds the United States as its primary and strategic ally.*

Recommendations:

- 1. Introduce measures to effectively counter subversive foreign influence, such as updating National Security Strategies and establishing dedicated STRATCOM units at respective ministries.**
- 2. Disclose publicly structures and mechanisms used for spreading of disinformation and projection of subversive foreign influence.**
- 3. Ensure independence and impartiality of private and public mainstream media.**
- 4. Strengthen cooperation between media outlets and civil society actors aimed at disseminating pro-democratic counter narratives to a wider audience.**
- 5. Increase support to research and advocacy activities improving the quality and impact of the STRATCOM efforts introduced by the government and civil society.**
- 6. Develop and further enhance civic education and media literacy skills in school curriculums.**

Country Overview

HUNGARY – Vulnerability Index 57

The Hungarian **political landscape** and **state countermeasures** make the country especially vulnerable to hostile foreign influence, with scores of **78 and 80, the highest of the V4**. Both desktop research and experts concluded that the government has a firmly pro-Russian view, which is now based on ideological and energy policy-related reasons. The most popular opposition party in Hungary is also pro-Russian, anti-EU and for a long period of time it supported the separatists in Ukraine – including some of its senior politicians observing the “referendum” in Crimea. The largest left-wing party is considered neutral, and only some minor parties are anti-Russian. Due to the firm pro-Kremlin stance of the leading political representatives, the government is quite reluctant to introduce measures that could counter Russian propaganda activities.

The media scene was assigned a vulnerability score of 60, the highest in the region. This is largely a result of the vast concentration of media ownership by the pro-government oligarchs and entrepreneurs, who are – according to experts interviewed for this study – completely biased in issues related to the EU, NATO and Russia. Complete governmental influence over the Public Broadcaster is also a factor that increased the media’s vulnerability score.

State countermeasures are either completely lacking or are not publicly accessible and therefore Hungary ranked as the **most vulnerable country** in this category as well.

SLOVAKIA - Vulnerability Index 51

Views and attitudes of the **Slovak public** (ranked **53** – the highest among the V4) differ to a certain extent from the rest of the V4 countries, reflecting different nation-building narratives, contemporary history and public perception of Russia and the West. Slovaks are still among the most EU-positive V4 nations, but at the same time are the least supportive of NATO and their level of anti-American sentiments is the highest in the region. Such attitudes create fertile ground for further erosion of the pro-western orientation of Slovakia and political forces trying to capitalize on such sentiments.

This is also reflected in the results from **the political landscape** category, where Slovakia ranked as **the second most vulnerable after Hungary** with an overall score of **50**. The position of the main ruling party (SMER-SD) towards the Russian Federation is referred to as “friendly pragmatic” and is characterised by pursuing economic interests and avoiding open criticism of Russian domestic and foreign policy. Slovakia’s high level of energy dependency on Russia and the and economic profitability of providing transit for Russian gas into Western Europe also play a role. The junior partner in the ruling coalition – the Slovak National Party - is known for its long-term sympathies towards Russia and open disdain for NATO and the United States, although this type of rhetoric changed recently with the change of the party leadership.

Slovakia also scored relatively high in the **media and state countermeasures** categories, (**40 and 78** respectively). The lack of effective state countermeasures to hostile foreign influence and the lack of public recognition thereof contribute significantly to Slovakia’s vulnerability.

CZECH REPUBLIC - Vulnerability Index 38

The Czech Republic ranked the third among the V4 countries with an overall vulnerability index of 38 out of 100. Public perception of the EU is rather negative; it is the lowest of the V4. The main proponents of the deep scepticism and disdain for European integration and the leading vocal supporters of the Russian narratives have been the President of the Czech Republic Miloš Zeman and his predecessor Václav Klaus. The declarations and actions of both of these Czech Presidents have translated into mainstream Euroscepticism on the part of Czech society. On the other hand, support of NATO is relatively high (44%) with vocal opposition to NATO membership being quite small (17%). However, more than half of the population perceive the role of the United States in Europe as negative (51%), while only 35% view it positively. The **vulnerability of the Czech public** was assigned a score of 36, the second highest in the region after Slovakia.

The Czech Republic is the least vulnerable of the V4 in the area of state countermeasures, due to its open acknowledgement of hostile foreign influence in 2016 public policies launched by the current government of PM Bohuslav Sobotka. Several analyses and reports were produced on the influence of foreign hostile actors on Czech society. As a result of government's "National Security Audit", a specialized "Centre against Terrorism and Hybrid Threats" was established within the Czech Ministry of Interior. The resilience of civil society is also quite developed in the Czech Republic and ranked as the second least vulnerable of the four countries.

POLAND - Vulnerability Index 30

Geographic proximity and the turbulent nature of relations between Poland and Russia in the past have made Poland more resilient and its society very cautious about Russia's intentions on the geopolitical scene. Since regaining their independence, Poles have been very reluctant towards having Russia as an ally. Moreover, Poland's membership in the European Union and NATO were seen as a step that would ensure the country's territorial integrity, enhance its security and lead to economic prosperity.

Poland scored as the least vulnerable in two categories - society and politics (20 and 28 respectively) and the **second least vulnerable in another two - media and state countermeasures** (35 and 33). This assessment has to be traced back to the following observations. First, for the last decade opinion polls have been showing that Poles have favourable views towards the United States. Secondly, Polish perception of Russia is much more complex and has deteriorated sharply recently. The Smolensk tragedy is having an especially damaging impact on Polish-Russian relations, since the wreckage from the plane crash is used by Russia as a ransom to apply leverage to Polish society. The resulting perception of Poland as a Russophobic country may even play into Russia's hands, since it diminishes the Polish voice in EU decision making processes.

Methodology

The methodology for the Vulnerability Index was developed jointly by the main project partners: GLOBSEC Policy Institute, Political Capital and European Values, with input from Visegrad Fund visiting research fellow Marta Churella from the U.S. State Department¹.

The index measures the vulnerability of Visegrad four societies to subversive foreign influence on a scale of 0-100, where the higher number represents higher vulnerability. The values of the index were determined through expert interviews. In the four Visegrád countries 38 experts were involved in the evaluation altogether, who filled-in a unified questionnaire of 40 questions developed by the project partners. In the questionnaire, we examined vulnerability in five areas:

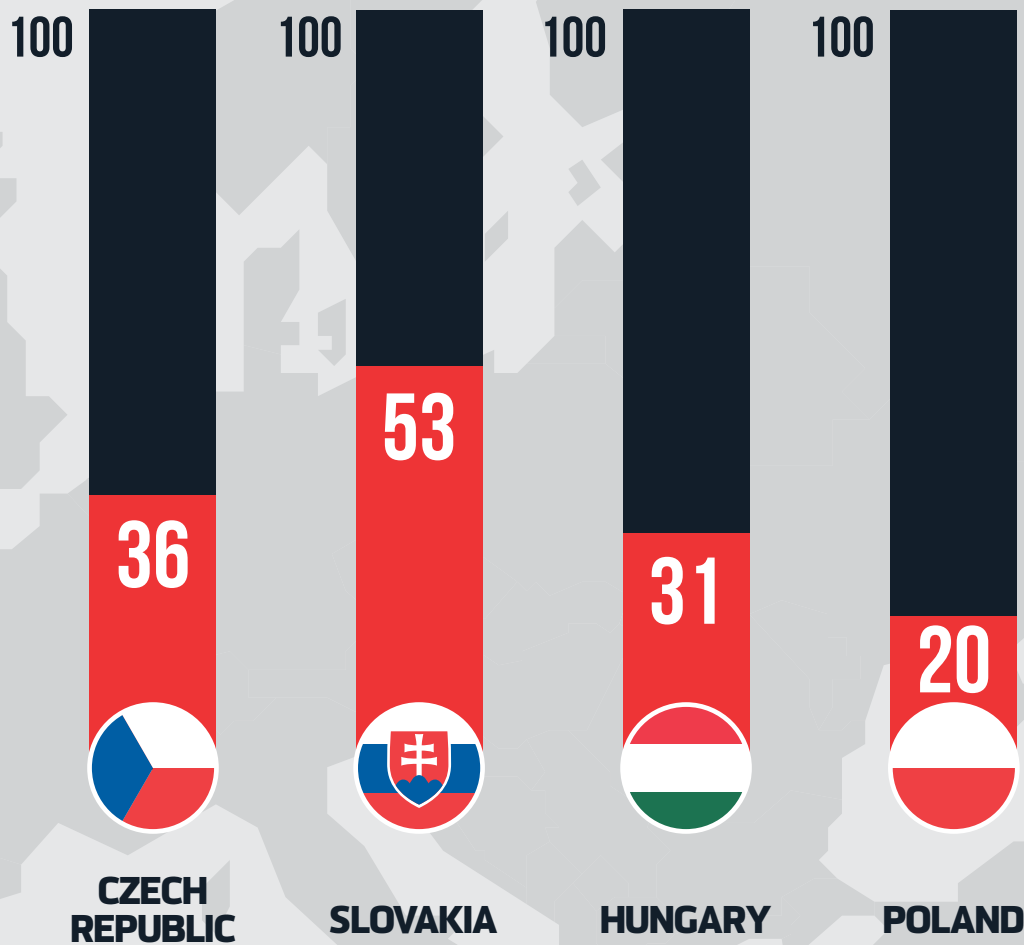
- 1. Societal attitudes** towards the European Union, NATO, Russia and the United States.
- 2. Political landscape:** position of the government and opposition parties towards the European Union, Russia and the United States.
- 3. Media landscape:** independence, transparency and accuracy of public and mainstream private media. Presence and impact of alternative/fringe media outlets, that have disinformation and conspiracy content, use questionable sources and have an openly pro-Russian, anti-EU, anti-NATO attitude.
- 4. Recognition and countermeasures** to foreign disinformation operations and influence activities from state authorities, with a special focus on Kremlin activities.
- 5. Civil society and uncivil society:** presence and impact of specific organisations that either address Russian propaganda, or promote it. Presence and impact of uncivil, extremist, paramilitary groups that promote the Russian narrative.

Our main goal was to make the values of the index comparable, both across individual fields within a single country and between the countries. To achieve this, we gave pointers to the experts, which served as a guideline to them on what we mean by the grades that could be given as answers to questions. Despite this, the answers received do contain some bias as they are expert opinions. This must be taken into account when we compare the data.

¹ Marta Churella has been involvement with this project in her personal capacity and views do not represent those of the United States Department of State.

Thematic Overview

1. Public Perception



SLOVAKIA

Slovakia is clearly the most vulnerable country in the region in terms of public opinion and perception of U.S., Russia, EU and NATO, with the score of 53. Perception of Russia, U.S., the Euro-Atlantic integration and its institutions (EU, NATO) in Slovakia has been conditioned by several conflicting factors. In Slovakia, we find a strong pro-Western and pro-Russian public attitude beside each other, and both have strong historical, political, and social sources. These attitudes manifest differently in different opinion polls, but one general conclusion is that half of Slovaks prefer the “in-between” geopolitical position somewhere between the West and the East.

Another conclusion is that **open pro-Eastern orientation is supported by a relatively small part of population** (only 12%), yet it is the strongest in the region. On the other hand, a **pro-Western orientation of Slovakia is supported by almost twice as many - 23%** subscribe to it. The westward

orientation is supported mainly by young people (18-35) and voters of liberal and centre-right parties - SaS, OĽaNO, Most-Híd parties, while the pro-eastern orientation is supported mainly by middle age and elderly people (45-55 and 65+) and voters of social democrats (SMER-SD), nationalists (SNS) and the far right (LSNS).

According to the latest polls, the **majority of Slovaks are still supportive of the EU** (52%)² despite the fact that this level has dropped significantly from 68% in 2010. Yet, Slovakia is still one of the most Euro-optimistic countries in the region. After the Brexit, the anti-EU sentiments seems to be increasing all over Europe and there are political actors in Slovakia trying to use this wave to initiate a referendum on Slovakia's membership in the EU. However, such sentiments have only marginal support, since according to poll results, in case of referendum, **68% would support the Remain camp and only 19% would vote for Slovexit.**

At the same time, there is a relatively **high level of popular sympathy towards Russia within Slovak society.** The idea of pan-Slavism, persisting from the late 19 century, however out-dated it may seem, is still influencing the hearts and minds of many Slovaks. Relations with Russia played an important role in the shaping of Slovak nationalism, which emerged as non-state nationalism. Another significant historical development which continues to influence Slovak-Russian relations to this day, is the liberation of Slovakia by the Red Army and the political and material support provided by the Soviet Union to the Slovak National Uprising in August 1944. This legacy is often used by domestic political actors to boost pro-Russian sentiments. **Almost a third of the population** (29%) supports the notion that Slovakia should have a **close relationship with Russia, while only 7%** of respondents support the same for a **close relationship with the U.S.**³ Negative perception of U.S. policies among the Slovak public is quite widespread, with 59% perceiving the U.S. role in world affairs as negative⁴. However, such sentiments do not apply to perceptions of former U.S. president Barack Obama, who is perceived positively by 50% of Slovaks. Compared with only 43% approval rating of Russia's president Vladimir Putin,⁵ it further complicates the interpretation of the views and attitudes of the Slovak population, where both pro-Russian and pro-western narratives exist side by side.

Whereas the importance of EU membership seems to be a matter of consensus, popular support for NATO membership was lower in 1990s and at the beginning of 2000s. Currently, **NATO is viewed positively by 36% of population and negatively by 18%.** In case of referendum, twice as many Slovaks say they would prefer to stay in NATO (54%) as would prefer to leave (27%). The sociodemographic pattern for NATO support is similar to that for EU membership.

CZECH REPUBLIC

The Czech Republic ranked as the second most vulnerable country of the V4 in terms of public attitudes, with a vulnerability score of 36.

The Czechs are rightly seen as the **most Eurosceptic nation of the V4.** The European Union is viewed positively by a mere 32% (lowest of the V4) and negatively by 24%, while 41 % said that their opinion is neither positive, nor negative⁶.

When asked about NATO membership in 2016, 44% of Czechs perceived it positively, opposed to 17% who perceive the membership negatively. It is again important to note that 30% of the respondents indicated that NATO membership is neither positive, nor negative⁷.

Another important area of public perception is the level of inclination towards the West and the East.

² GLOBSEC Trends, GPI September 2016

³ Public opinion poll by FOCUS, February 2016

⁴ Public opinion poll by FOCUS, February 2016

⁵ GLOBSEC Trends, GPI September 2016

⁶ Impact of disinformation operations in the Czech Republic. Available at: <http://www.europeanvalues.net/vyzkum/impact-of-disinformation-operations-in-the-czech-republic/>

⁷ Impact of disinformation operations in the Czech Republic. Available at: <http://www.europeanvalues.net/vyzkum/impact-of-disinformation-operations-in-the-czech-republic/>

While the pro-western orientation is relatively strong (30%) and the pro-Eastern orientation is marginal (5%), half of the population (48%) responded that the Czech Republic should be somewhere between the West and the East, which creates potential for further influence.

Views of the U.S. in the Czech Republic are quite positive. In 2013, almost 60 % of the Czech public expressed a favourable opinion of the United States. However, public opinion polls conducted in 2016 show that the half of the respondents (51%) think that the role of the United States in Europe is to some extent negative. It seems that one of the reasons might be that the United States is perceived as an arrogant actor that prefers to act unilaterally. That, at least, is implied by another poll according to which more than three quarters of Czech citizens agree with the statement that the United States prioritizes its own power and economic interests in its foreign policy and more than half of Czechs believe that the United States does not take world public opinion into consideration ⁸. Russia, on the other hand, seems to have quite a stable level of public support in the Czech Republic, with the proportion of respondents who perceive it to some extent favourably differing by no more than 5% over the years 2007, 2012 and 2013.

While perception of the European Union and Russia are the most negative, the tendency to have a negative opinion on Russia seems to stay more or less the same throughout the years, while the perception of the European Union worsened in the last decade.

HUNGARY

Hungary ranked third out of four in terms of vulnerability of the general public with a score of 31.

Russia's role in Hungarian history, especially its role in crushing the revolutions of 1848/49 and 1956, continue to shape the public perception of Russia in Hungary to this day. Hungarians were for a long period aware and suspicious of Russian ambitions to dominate the region. The Carpathian Basin is dominated by Slavic nations, and Russia was always seen as the supporter of the demands of Slavic nations surrounding Hungary, ⁹ a feeling that has largely disappeared after the integration of the region into Europe, which could have played a role in the public's perception of Russia.

In 1992, on a 100-point scale, the sympathy index for the U.S. stood at 73% and that of Russia at only 36%.¹⁰ Although the public's views on the U.S. have deteriorated since then – while Russia's improved -, a recent survey¹¹ found that 46% of Hungarians see the United States' role in the world positively, while only 39% have negative views on the issue. Pew Research Center found in spring 2016 ¹²that 62% of Hungarian have favourable views on the United States of America.

In terms of geopolitical orientation, the **majority (53%) of Hungarians believe the country should be somewhere between the East and the West and only 5% favoured a clear pro-Russian stance, a small number compared to the 39% who favour a clearly pro-West orientation.** ¹³ Based on GLOBSEC's survey, it is those living in smaller settlements and those with lower levels of education who are less Western-oriented. In addition, it can also be concluded that voters of Hungary's far - right Jobbik party have very negative views on the role of the U.S. in the world; 53% of their supporters see it negatively.¹⁴

According to the multipolarity index based on six NATO/Russia/U.S.-related questions from the 2016 GLOBSEC Trends survey, Hungarian public opinion is overwhelmingly supportive of the West.

⁸ Česká veřejnost o amerických prezidentských volbách a americké zahraniční politice - zřítí . (2016.) Available at: http://cvwm.soc.cas.cz/media/com_form2content/documents/c1/a7607/f3/pm161025.pdf.

⁹ Kucharczyk, J.; Meseznikov, G. (eds) (2015) Diverging Voices, Converging Policies: The Visegrad states' Reactions to the Russia-Ukraine Conflict. Heinrich Böll Stiftung

¹⁰ ibid

¹¹ GLOBSEC Trends (2016) Central Europe under the fire of propaganda: Public opinion poll analysis in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia. Available at: http://www.cepolicy.org/sites/cepolicy.org/files/attachments/glb_trends_en.pdf

¹² Pew Research Center (2016) America's international image. Available at: <http://www.pewglobal.org/2016/06/28/americas-international-image/>

¹³ GLOBSEC Trends (2016)

¹⁴ GLOBSEC Trends (2016)

However, the very high share of undecided respondents (36%) clearly shows that the situation is somewhat unstable. This large uncertain group in Hungary is a big vulnerability, since their attitudes can be easily shaped.

Hungarians approved NATO membership in a referendum in 1997, where 85% of votes cast was in favour of NATO membership.¹⁵ In July 2016 Pew Research Center conducted a poll¹⁶ on NATO's popularity among member states. In that poll, researchers found that **57% of Hungarians have favourable views on the alliance**, while **only 30% are against Hungarian membership**. In GLOBSEC's most recent survey, 81% of Hungarians said Hungary's NATO membership was important for the country's security, 68% agreed that the country should help defend an ally under attack, and in the 2016 GLOBSEC Trends survey the relative majority (48%) disagreed with that neutrality would provide more security for Hungary than membership. In GLOBSEC's 2017 public opinion poll, 76% of respondents stated they would vote for Hungary to remain NATO member, in a referendum, and only 11% would vote to leave. However, in the 2016 GLOBSEC survey, the relative majority also agreed that the U.S. controls member states through NATO (39%) and that the United States and NATO are responsible for the Ukrainian crisis (37%).

Hungarians have traditionally been **one of the most pro-EU populations**. In 2003, close to 84% of voters chose to join the European Union, although only 46% of the electorate turned up to vote. Before the Brexit vote, Pew Research Center Found that **61% of Hungarians had favourable views on the EU**. A more recent poll found that 54% of Hungarians believed EU membership was a good thing, while only 8% opposed the country's membership. GLOBSEC's most recent public opinion poll found that 79% of Hungarians would vote for Hungary maintaining its membership in the EU, in a referendum, and only 14% would favour leaving the bloc. Despite this, in November 2016, only 37% of Hungarians held a positive view of the EU, 45% had neutral view and 18% had a negative view.¹⁷ Jobbik supporters were the most significant critics, while the majority of other parliamentary parties' voters believe the country's EU membership is a good thing.¹⁸

The government's pro-Russian rhetoric seems to resonate well with Fidesz supporters. The deal on the recently approved, Russian-financed Paks project is considered positive by 60% of the governing party's followers, while support for it barely reaches 20% among opposition voters.¹⁹ According to the GLOBSEC Trends 2017 survey, 44% of Hungarians find Vladimir Putin favourable and 47% find him unfavourable. This is a considerably better result than Chancellor Angela Merkel's, who is seen unfavourably by 55% of respondents. U.S. President Donald Trump fared only slightly worse, 56% consider him unfavourable.

Altogether, Hungarians are generally in favour of the country's integration into the West, although the populations' views on the EU, NATO and the U.S. have deteriorated over the years. Due to the Fidesz government's political orientation, Hungarians have been subjected to strong rhetoric critical of the EU, especially since the beginning of the migration crisis, which could explain the significant drop in public trust of the EU. Nevertheless, this could not change Hungarians' general views on the country's EU membership.

All in all, Hungarian society is leaning more towards the West than towards Russia, and so far the government's rhetoric has had fairly little effect on the population's views in most issues, but Fidesz's anti-Merkel campaign presumably played a role in the population's negative assessment of the German chancellor. The fact that there is a large camp of people with no opinion on the country's geopolitical orientation is a large vulnerability that could be exploited in the future.

¹⁵ Hungarians approve NATO membership. (1997) Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/1997/11/17/world/hungarians-approve-nato-membership.html>

¹⁶ Pew Research Center (2016) Support for NATO is widespread among member states. Available at: <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/07/06/support-for-nato-is-widespread-among-member-nations/>

¹⁷ European Commission Standard Eurobarometer surveys. Available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/COMMFrontOffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Chart/getChart/chartType/lineChart/themeKy/19/groupKy/102/savFile/196>

¹⁸ Political Capital Institute's internal calculations, based on TNS Hoffmann's survey.

¹⁹ Publicus: Paksi atomerómú bővítéséről (2017.) Available at: http://www.publicus.hu/blog/paksi_atomeromu_boviteserol/

POLAND

Poland ranked as the least vulnerable country in terms of public attitudes towards the EU, NATO and perception of relations with the U.S. and Russia, with a score of 20.

Such a low vulnerability score is consistent with the available public opinion poll data.

Poland is one of the most Euro-optimistic countries in the region. For the last ten years, the Poles have stated they are in favour of EU membership. In GLOBSEC's most recent survey, 78% claim that the EU membership is a good thing²⁰. There is no desire in Poland to follow the British example of exiting EU. A mass of voters wants Poland to remain in the EU (81%) according to GLOBSEC's survey. Despite the high numbers in the polls, the consensus on membership alone is no longer of great significance. In the last two years, the Polish society shown that it is profoundly divided about the future of Poland in the EU²¹.

Polish society can be considered the most pro-U.S. and pro-NATO of the V4. A positive perception of the United States is the result of the U.S. involvement in the process of democratic transformation in the 1990s. According to the Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS) 43% of Poles had favourable and 42% neither favourable, nor negative, opinion about Polish-U.S. relations, as of November 2016. The most contesting issue for Poles is absence of a visa waiver program for Poland. This negative feeling is compensated by the presence of the American troops and military equipment on Polish soil. The positive attitude towards the U.S. is also manifested in strong support for NATO. Poland's bitter historical experiences, notably during World War Two, indicates that Warsaw would rather stay than leave NATO. GLOBSEC' survey shows that 80% of the Poles hold that the membership is positive.

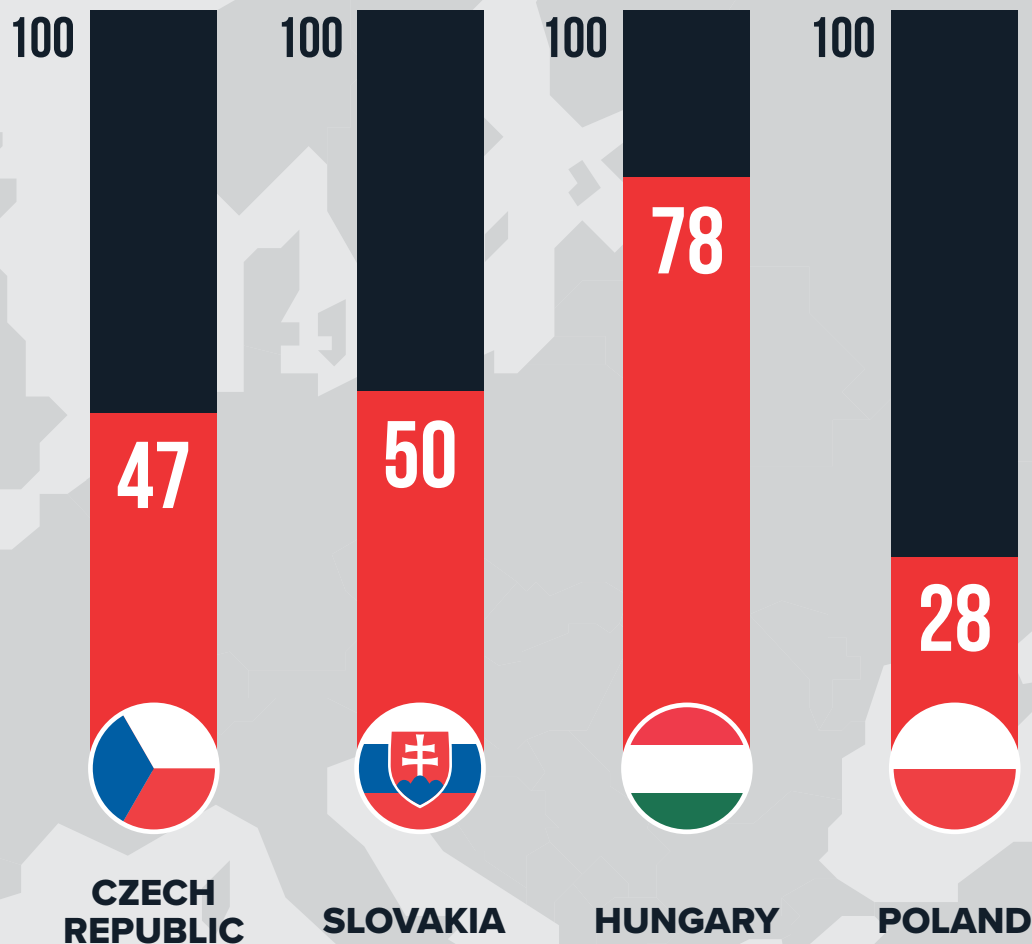
There is a **deep reluctance and mistrust towards Russia and Polish-Russian relations** among Polish society. Research conducted by the Institute of Public Affairs (IPA) in early 2015 shows that 78% of Poles think of Polish – Russian relations as bad. The same is true of their attitudes towards the Russian people. In February 2017, only 31% Poles said they liked the Russians and 38% declared that disliked them, following the CBOS. In the last seven years, the image of Russia has deteriorated significantly as a result of Russia's refusal to return the plane's wreckage that crashed near Smolensk in western Russia in 2010 and the country's foreign policy targeted at Ukraine, i.e. the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas²².

²⁰ GLOBSEC' survey (2017).

²¹ „Polish views of the EU: the illusion of consensus“ (2016), The Batory Foundation, Available at: http://www.batory.org.pl/upload/files/pdf/rap_otw_eu/Polish%20views%20of%20the%20EU.pdf

²² In the plane crash 96 people died, including the President, the First Lady, top politicians, army brass and the central bank governor [in:] „Poland plans to exhume plane-crash victims to prove a Russian conspiracy“ (2016), Available at <http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21709992-far-right-government-thinks-president-lech-kaczynskis-death-was-no-accident-poland-plans>

2. Political Landscape



HUNGARY

Hungary is the most vulnerable country of the region in terms of its political landscape, way ahead of the other countries with a score of 78.

The main driving force for such vulnerability is a **combination of two factors**. Firstly, the **government's orientation is quite pro-Russian**, which makes Hungary highly vulnerable to pro-Kremlin influence. Secondly, among the **two largest opposition parties, the socialist MSZP is considered neutral, while the far-right Jobbik is – like the government – pro-Russian**. This is compounded by the **strong economic ties between Hungary and Russia**, especially in the energy sector, and the fact that the Hungarian government is openly critical of EU sanctions on Russia. Furthermore, Hungary's geopolitical position and its proximity to Ukraine are also factors contributing to the country's vulnerability to pro-Kremlin influences. The public display of anti-U.S. attitudes by the Hungarian government only cements the overall vulnerability of Hungary.

Since 2002, Hungarian governments have always tried to maintain a pragmatic economic relationship with Russia, which was necessitated by the country's energy dependence on the Russian Federation. Before the Ukrainian crisis this had received little attention as Russia had mostly been a partner to the West during that period. Ex-Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány had close personal relations with President Putin. Mr. Gyurcsány was a proponent of the South Stream Gas Pipeline and he initiated preparations for the new nuclear reactors in Paks. In addition, the ex-prime minister and his foreign minister Kinga Gönzç refrained from criticising Russia during its war with Georgia in 2008²³, a reaction similar to that of the Orbán government in 2014.

Before 2009 Fidesz had been a fierce critic of Russia but the party's views changed after Viktor Orbán personally met Vladimir Putin in the same year.²⁴ His government loudly announced the **Eastern Opening policy**, which is essentially a turn toward economic cooperation with authoritarian regimes. The second and third Orbán government tended to assign **large public development projects to Russian companies**, e.g. the Paks project and the renovation of subway trains.²⁵ Moreover, the Hungarian government is a **fervent critic of sanctions imposed on Russia by the EU**, even though Hungarian representatives have voted for the extension of the sanctions every time, claiming they were unwilling to break up the unity of the EU.²⁶ In addition to economic relations, there is **ideological proximity** between the Hungarian and Russian leadership. The Orbán government regularly attacks its Western partners rhetorically, tries to please the Putin-regime with symbolic gestures (e.g. a Memorial for the Soviet Red Army erected in Esztergom) and endorses the official values of Putin's Russia (traditionalist, nativist, Christian, nationalist views). **The governing party also employs political methods that are well-known in Russia**, like restriction of a free press. In addition, the government centralises state structures and professional considerations play a small role in state organisation, offering a weak defence capability against foreign influence.²⁷

President **Putin's visit to Budapest** in February 2017 put the government's pro-Kremlin views on display. During the joint press conference, PM Orbán confirmed Vladimir Putin's stance on the Ukraine and minimized Russian aggression in the neighbouring country. Moreover, the Hungarian prime minister appealed against the sanctions. The Hungarian government seems to be **in line with the Kremlin's strategy to strengthen "internal opposition"** within the EU and weaken European integration.²⁸

Before the election of Donald Trump the Orbán government's long-standing opinion on U.S.-Hungarian relations had been that military and economic cooperation is working well, but politically the relationship between the sides is subpar²⁹. Since 2010, **Viktor Orbán's regime has been criticised on several occasions by the U.S. for the erosion of liberal democratic standards**, systemic corruption, and the government's steps making the country more dependent on Russia³⁰. Viktor Orbán also regularly talks about the failure of "democracy export" and the coming end of Western dominance in world affairs³¹ and criticises the U.S. for its role in the Middle East. The country's NATO membership has not been questioned by the Orbán government, which regularly participates in NATO initiatives. Orbán hopes that political ties between the sides will be normalised during the Trump presidency, due to their shared views on immigration and the rejection of liberal values.

²³ Kurharczyk, J.; Meseznikov, G. (eds) (2015) Diverging Voices, Converging Policies: The Visegrad states' Reactions to the Russia-Ukraine Conflict. Heinrich Böll Stiftung

²⁴ Orbán is a tool in Putin's information war against the West. (2017). http://index.hu/kulfold/2017/02/04/orban_is_a_tool_for_putin_in_his_information_war_against_the_west/

²⁵ Oroszok a spájzban: Kik kavarnak a metrófelújítás környékén? (2016). Available at <https://atlatso.hu/2016/02/10/oroszok-a-spajzban-kik-kavarnak-a-metrofelujitas-kornyeken/>

²⁶ Szijjártó: Sikertelenek voltak az orosz szankciók. (2017). Available online at <http://hirtv.hu/ahirtvhirei/szijjarto-sikertelenek-voltak-az-orosz-szankciok-1389507>

²⁷ How political will might affect professional considerations is well reflected in Viktor Orbán's statement in Autumn 2016, when he said that "in Hungary, we do not feel like Russia threatens our national security". Orbán: Oroszország nem fenyegeti a biztonságunkat. (2016) Available at: http://index.hu/belfold/2016/10/20/orban_oroszorszag_nem_fenyegeti_a_biztonsagunkat/

²⁸ Orbán continues to follow Putin's path (2017), Political Capital, http://politicalcapital.hu/news.php?article_read=1&article_id=399

²⁹ Orbán az útdíjról: most tiltakozzon mindenki. (2015). Available at: <http://www.atv.hu/belfold/20150109-utdij-orban-ar-ra-kert-mindenkit-hogy-meg-most-tiltakozzon>

³⁰ Soha ilyen durva kritikát nem kaptunk Amerikától. (2015). Available at: http://index.hu/kulfold/2015/10/28/sohailyen_durva_kritikat_nem_kaptunk_amerikatol/

³¹ Orbán titkos megállapodást sejt. (2015). Available at: <http://www.origo.hu/itthon/20151202-orban-europat-lerohantak.html>

In terms of the EU, the basis of the government's policy is that **Hungary's EU membership is "unquestionable", however, the European Union has been a focal point of the government's criticism.** The European Union has been blamed for the migrant crisis and, consequently, for Brexit³². Prime Minister Viktor Orbán also suggested that certain competences, such as migration and social issues, should be returned to member states³³, which would entail an amendment of the treaties, a task that seems almost impossible due to the divergence of opinion among member states. The European Union is expected to continue to be the main opponent of the government as evidenced by PM Orbán's speech on October 23, 2016 **warning against the Sovietisation of Brussels**³⁴.

With regards to the opposition, **Jobbik** previously considered the Ukrainian crisis the direct result of U.S. intervention and supported the Ukrainian separatists, to the extent that **its senior politicians observed the Crimean "referendum"**.³⁵ Recently, the party has been quite silent on the topic. There is a generational divide within the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) because older members tend to be more pro-Russian, while the younger generation of party official are predominantly pro-West in their orientation. MSZP considers pragmatic economic relations with Russia a benefit to Hungary, but insists that Russia must fulfil its international obligations first.

All in all, the **politics proves to be the highest risk factor in Hungary when it comes to vulnerability, as the governing party and the now-second most popular opposition party**³⁶, **Jobbik** are strongly **pro-Russian**, while only minor parties are firmly anti-Kremlin.

SLOVAKIA

Slovakia ranked second in this category with a Vulnerability Index of 50.

In terms of its relations with the Russian Federation Slovakia is considered a **"friendly pragmatist"** state; i.e. a country with good relations with the Russian Federation, interested in economic cooperation and avoiding open criticism of Russia's domestic and foreign policy. The reluctance of Slovakia's government to get involved in any confrontation between the EU and Russia reflects public opinion in the country.

Current **Slovak-Russian relations represent a multi-layer phenomenon**, which contains not only foreign policy, but also history, economics and security. Soon after the declaration of an independent Slovak state in 1992, then prime minister Vladimír Mečiar tried to develop his vision of Slovakia as a geopolitical bridge between the East and the West. Aside from his own ruling populist-nationalist Movement for Democratic Slovakia (HZDS), this vision was also shared by the nationalist Slovak National Party (SNS) and elements of the Christian Democratic Party (KDH).³⁷

However, this vision ended with the victory of a centre-right coalition (SDK) in 1998, when Slovakia embarked upon integration into NATO and the EU. Successful integration into both institutions did not mean a radical cut in economic and diplomatic ties with Russia. Relations remained good but pragmatic, focused mostly on economic relations, and continued in spite of Slovakia's active support of Ukraine's integration efforts into the EU and NATO. This pragmatic approach continued even after replacement of the centre-right wing coalition with centre-left SMER-SD led coalition, which continues to be the most popular and influential political party in Slovakia to this day.

³² Orbán: azok után, hogy az EU nem képes megállítani a migrációs válságot, nincs mit csodálkozni Nagy-Britannia Kilépésén. (2016) Available at: <http://minap.hu/cikkek/orban-azok-utan-hogy-az-eu-keptelen-megoldani-migracios-valsagot-nincs-mit-csodalkozni-nagy>

³³ Orbán négy pontban reformálná meg az EU-t. (2016). Available at: <http://24.hu/kozelet/2016/08/26/orban-negy-pontban-reformalna-meg-az-eu-t/>

³⁴ Hungary's Orban rejects 'Sovietisation' by Brussels, defends nation state. (2016) Available at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-hungary-orban-idUSKCN12N0PJ>

³⁵ Vona Gábor: Eurázsiai vagyok. (n.d.). Available at: <http://www.oroszvilag.hu/?t1=sajtoszemle&hid=5170>

³⁶ Electograph poll results Hungary. Available at: <http://www.electograph.com/2016/10/hungary-september-2016-nezopont-poll.html>

³⁷ Especially its former leader Ján Čarnoguský, who at the time of NATO accession advocated for Slovakia's neutrality, is still one of the strongest proponents of close Slovak-Russian ties and a member of the prominent Valdai Club.

On a symbolic level, the leader of the SMER-SD - **Prime Minister Robert Fico** - **often crossed the line from a purely pragmatic relationship based on energy dependence and economic ties into an openly pro-Kremlin stance**, defiant of the common EU position. This approach manifested itself mostly in his public statements intended for a domestic audience and through symbolic acts, such as paying visit to Moscow at the time of **70th anniversary of the end of World War II** and **omitting any mention of Russian aggression in Ukraine**. Slovak foreign policy, on the other hand, firmly supported the EU Eastern Partnership Program and the aspirations of former Soviet Union countries to join the EU. Following the Ukraine crisis, Slovakia did not block EU sanctions against Russia and helped Ukraine significantly by providing it with gas using the reverse current on the Druzba pipeline, despite Russian threats.

Since the emergence of the Ukrainian crisis in 2013-2014, relations with Russia became an important and divisive topic again. The current Slovak government is aware of the need to stabilize the situation in Ukraine, as well as to protect its territorial integrity and its pro-European orientation. The annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation also raised negative reactions among Slovak political elites. Both the government and the parliament expressed their support for the territorial integrity of Ukraine. At the same Slovakia, in accordance with other EU member states, condemned the incorporation of Crimea as a “violation of international rights” by the Russian Federation.

From the early ‘90s until this day, one of the most vocal supporters of strong Slovak-Russian ties was the Slovak National Party - SNS. In the ‘90s, SNS was strongly against joining NATO and openly voiced preference for pro-Eastern and pro-Russian orientation of the Slovak Republic. At this time, the party even had a cooperation agreement with the Russian Liberal Democratic Party. Currently SNS is a member of the ruling coalition and under its new leader Andrej Danko, it toned down its language, including its pro-Russian stance, and opted for a more pragmatic and neutral position.

Opposition parties are composed of two groups - centre right and liberal parties, which could be characterised as pro-European and pro-western (OLANO, SaS) and **extreme right People’s Party Our Slovakia (LSNS) and anti-establishment populist ‘We are the family’ (Sme rodina)**. While the first group has been the main architect of the European and NATO integration, the latter are openly anti-American, anti-EU and pro-Russian. Especially **LSNS became famous for a letter issued by its leader, Marian Kotleba, in February 2014 to the then president of Ukraine Viktor Janukovič**, urging him not to step down from his post and warning him against joining the EU. In the aftermath of the Brexit referendum, **Marian Kotleba congratulated the UK citizens for their decision to refuse Brussels’ ‘dictatorship’**. Kotleba stated that “the time has come even for Slovakia to leave the sinking European Titanic.” **Since July 2016, LSNS party has been collecting signatures for the referendum to leave the EU and NATO.**³⁸ Deputy chairman of LSNS party, **Milan Uhrík even informed Russian media that the initiative is widely supported by the public** and the party had already collected more than half of the necessary signatures.³⁹

The financing of **LSNS** political party has been questioned on several occasions. **The ties with foreign actors and foreign support have been noted by the investigative project Bellingcat.**⁴⁰

In conclusion, the **vulnerability of the Slovak political landscape is a direct consequence of three elements**: Firstly, **considerable pro-Russian popular sentiments**, which are reflected also in the political rhetoric. Secondly, a high level of **energy dependency**, strong economic ties and the lack of values-based approach to international relations. Thirdly, the **rising popularity of openly anti-establishment political forces with pro-Russian geopolitical worldviews**, rejecting the euro-atlantic orientation of Slovakia.

³⁸ Marian Kotleba, Facebook video of Marian Kotleba. (2016) Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/Marian-Kotleba-443847705690023>.

³⁹ LSNS informs Russian media about Slovexit, Info.sk. (2017) Available at: <http://www.info.sk/sprava/126753/lSNS-informovala-ruske-media-o-slovexite/> and Dmitry Lau, In Slovakia, a referendum on withdrawal from the EU is being prepared, Russian Daily Известия.рф. (2017) Available at: <http://izvestia.ru/news/664629>.

⁴⁰ Mirek Toda, Bellingcat’s investigator: Russia believes, that will persuade Slovakia leave NATO and are actively working on it, Dennik N. (2017) Available at: <https://dennikn.sk/703357/investigativec-z-bellingcatu-v-rusku-veria-ze-slovensko-dostanu-z-nato-a-robia-na-tom/>

CZECH REPUBLIC

The Czech Republic ranked as the third most vulnerable country with the score of 47.

The positions of the Czech political elites towards Russia and the United States and their support of the European Union differs quite significantly across different branches of legislative and executive power.

The coalition government of the Czech Republic is composed of the Czech Social Democratic Party (traditional political party on the centre left), **ANO 2011** (centrist and populist party led by Andrej Babiš, businessman who among other things owns several media outlets in the Czech Republic) and the Christian and Democratic Union - Czechoslovak People's Party (traditional Christian-democratic party). **The Prime Minister is a social democrat with relatively principled position on Russian aggression, which is one of the several reasons he is under fire by the current Czech President, a strongly pro-Kremlin figure.**

The positions of individual coalition parties towards international events from the last few years differ from each other and also changed significantly over time. This could be illustrated by the case of EU sanctions against Russia. The initial lukewarm support for the sanctions against Russia following its occupation of Crimea ⁴¹ later changed to a firm support stating that the sanctions are bound to the fulfilment of the Minsk agreements and should continue until Russia changes its behaviour. On the other hand, it is difficult to assess the position of Deputy Prime Minister Andrej Babiš, (the leader of the ANO 2011 party and the Minister of Finance), on Russia and the sanction regime since he avoided the subject completely. There are also members of the Czech Social Democratic Party present in the Czech Parliament, whose positions on Russia differ significantly from the official position of the government.⁴² Overall, the position of the government cannot be evaluated as anti-Russian or pro-Russian. It has been assessed as assuming quite a **pragmatic and objective position with a clear but not too vocal support of the EU sanctions towards the Russian Federation.**

The United States continue to be an important ally and a partner for the Czech government and transatlantic relations are considered a steady part of the governmental foreign, security and defence policy. The decline in public support for the U.S. foreign policy and the increased share of people who would prefer neutrality over the alignment with the United States within NATO does not seem to influence the positions of the political elites.

The situation in the Parliament is even more mixed. The opposition parties present in the Czech Parliament could be divided into two groups. One of them includes the Civic Democratic Party, a traditional conservative centre-right party, and the Top 09, a relatively new party leaning to the liberal centre-right. In both cases, their position is slightly more anti-Russian than that of the government, with Top 09 being the most anti-Russian opposition party in the Parliament.

The second group includes **two more radical political parties present in the Czech Parliament**, but from completely different parts of the political spectrum. Both the **Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia and the Dawn – National Coalition**, which is a recently established party focusing mostly on an anti-immigration agenda, **share highly pro-Russian views, promoting the Russian geopolitical worldview.** This state of play corresponds with a general European trend of the extremist and radical parties and movements leaning towards Russia and their ambition to disrupt the EU and transatlantic partnership.

The position and activities of the **Czech President Miloš Zeman** also contribute to increased vulnerability of the political landscape. President Zeman has **repeatedly echoed Russian narratives on many issues and is seen as the most important pro-Kremlin politician in the region.** He frequently

⁴¹ EU navrhne nové sankce vůči Rusku, Česko je zdrženlivé. Available at: <https://zpravy.aktualne.cz/zahranici/zive-sobota-30-srpna-ukrajina-rusko-separatiste/r~c8b9d6622ec11e49669002590604f2e/?redirected=1479125504>.

⁴² Jaroslav Foldyna: V protiruských sankcích hraje roli užitečných idiotů. Available at: http://www.rozhlas.cz/plus/dnesniplus/_zprava/jaroslav-foldyna-v-protiruskych-sankcich-hrajeme-rolu-uzitecnych-idiotu--1579897.

visits Moscow⁴³, attends events organized by the Kremlin's allies⁴⁴ and even prefers these relations over activities and commitments related to the **EU and NATO, constantly undermining their credibility in the eyes of the public**. This is all happening despite the fact that his powers are mostly ceremonial. Since the Czech Constitution defines his powers concerning foreign policy quite generally, he tends to use this to promote himself as the main Czech foreign policy actor. Moreover, he tries to **set a different agenda than the one pursued by the Czech government**. Unfortunately, from the view of the Czech public, domestic and foreign media, he often succeeds.

Overall, the position of the Czech Republic is getting slightly more uncertain in the light of the upcoming general elections planned for October 2017. According to the latest opinion polls, ANO 2011 (party of Finance minister Andrej Babiš) is the most popular party with the level of support reaching up to 29 %.⁴⁵ This makes Andrej Babiš the most likely candidate for Prime Minister, following parliamentary elections in October 2017. Although Mr. Babiš publicly supports the Czech membership in the European Union and the geopolitical inclination to the West, he rarely ever speaks about the sanctions regime against Russia nor did he condemn Russian aggression against Ukraine. Together with his occasional alignment with President Zeman, this uncertainty creates a space for shifting the foreign policy in a new direction, less anchored in the Euro-Atlantic orientation and more open to Russia.

The combination of rising populist elements, a business-like, values free approach to politics by some major political parties and the vocal pro-Russian stance of the President make the Czech political landscape vulnerable to subversive foreign influence.

POLAND

Poland is the least vulnerable country in this category with the vulnerability score of 28.

The Polish political system is the least vulnerable to subversive foreign influence among the V4. **Despite the anti-liberal discourse of the government**, resulting in Poland's self-isolation and self-marginalisation in the EU, a **Polish-Russian rapprochement is unrealistic**. It rather shows **Polish enchantment with the U.S.**, and in a near future, the closer relations with the United Kingdom. We can expect the in the EU-UK Brexit talks, Poland will be on the UK side, and play against the EU interest.

After 12 years of the EU membership, Poland faces a challenge to define the quality and essence of its membership in the club. While in the past, the Poles saw the EU as a source of opportunities, nowadays the government portrays it as a project with an uncertain future. Jarosław Kaczyński, the head of ruling Law and Justice (PiS) party and the true leader of Poland calls for opening up treaties. Witold Waszczykowski, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, in his annual speeches to the Sejm in 2016, said that the European project is in crisis and the member states must regain their central place in the Union. He also said Poland will conduct a negative policy towards the EU after Poland failed blocked its compatriot Donald Tusk' candidacy as president of the European Council in March 2018.⁴⁶ Main Polish opposition political parties such as the Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska) or the Modern (Nowoczesna) are pro-EU and call for the constructive membership of Poland in the EU.

The Polish government takes a **firm stance towards Russia**. While the previous government intended to maintain pragmatic relations, **today's Poland perceives the threat from Russia as imminent**. 71% of Poles feel that Russia poses a threat to their country, which is almost double the average of the ten countries polled by the Pew Research Centre in June 2016. Since the annexation of Crimea and war in Donbas, the Polish officials have been one of the most outspoken critics of Mr. Putin's regime.

⁴³ Czech President Breaks Ranks With Moscow Visit. Available at: <http://www.rferl.org/a/czech-president-zeman-breaks-ranks-moscow-visit/27010077.html>

⁴⁴ President Zeman calls for lifting of Russia sanctions at event organized by Putin associate. Available at: <http://www.radio.cz/en/section/curaffrs/president-zeman-calls-for-lifting-of-russia-sanctions-at-event-organized-by-putin-associate>

⁴⁵ Public opinion polls. (February)Volební preference – únor(February 2017) Available. Available at: <http://www.sanep.cz/pruzkumy/volebni-preference-unor-2017-publikovano-16-2-2017/>

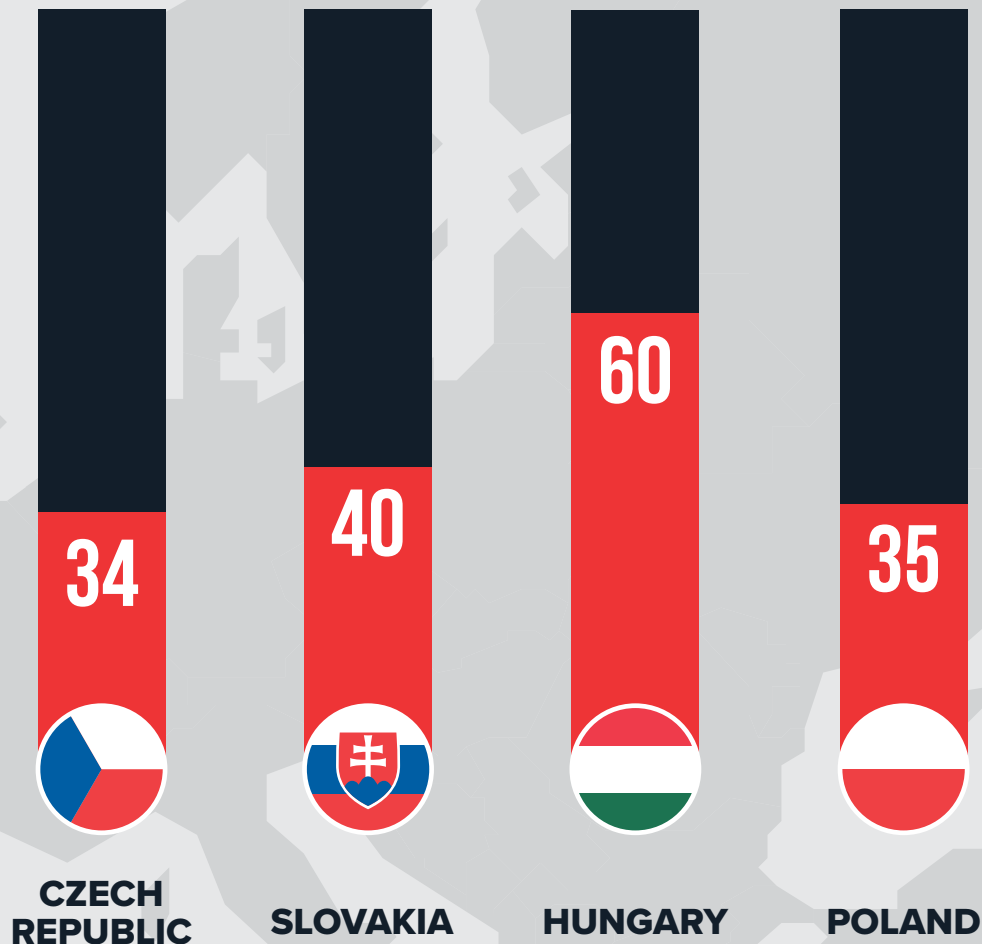
⁴⁶ Poland says will 'play rough' with EU after Tusk vote (2017), Reuters, Available at: <http://af.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idAFKB-N161003>

Poland is among the strongest proponents of maintaining EU sanctions on Russia and the block on Russian accession to the OECD.

None of the mainstream Polish opposition political parties are openly pro-Russian. **There are however individuals or fringe parties that are either pro-Russian or anti-EU and anti-NATO.** For example, some members of KUKIZ'15, the third largest parliamentary caucus, who have roots in the National Movement party (Ruch Narodowy), are openly anti-European (Bartosz Józwiak) or pro-Russian (Marek Jakubiak). Janusz Korwin-Mikke, a Member of the European Parliament, was the founder of the Congress of the New Right (Kongres Nowej Prawicy) that is radically Eurosceptic. Mr. Korwin-Mikke himself is pro-Russian too. During the European Parliament campaign, he appeared to agree with Russian President Vladimir Putin that Poland had trained 'Ukrainian terrorists'. A good example of a pro-Russian and anti-NATO party is the **Change Party (Partia Zmiana)**, created in 2015, whose **founder Mateusz Piskorski, a frequent commentator in Russia Today**, was arrested in 2016.

As Poland sees the United States as the guarantor of the security in the region, its governments have always paid a lot of attention to its relations with the United States. While the previous government concentrated on relations within the EU and with Germany, nowadays the **United States is considered Poland's strategic ally.** Poland looks at its relations with the U.S. through the lens of NATO, which continues to be the chief multilateral revenue of Poland's security policy. GLOBSEC Trends polls show that 74% of the population is in favour of increasing NATO infrastructure, such as command and training facilities, logistical centres, in Poland. Finally, there is significant consensus among the biggest political parties in Poland on strong support and relations with the United States.

3. Media



In case of the V4 countries, 37% of respondents in Hungary are the most likely to say their national media are less free and independent. 53% of Slovaks are the most likely to think the level of media independence is the same as five years ago, while 39% of Poles are the least likely to think so. Furthermore, in 22 member states, respondents are most likely to say national media provide the same diversity of views and opinions compared to five years ago, although the Czech Republic, Croatia (both 56%), Slovakia (54%), Luxembourg and Romania (50%) are the only countries where at least half think this way.⁴⁷

The results of the Eurobarometer also show that 75% of respondents have experienced abuse, hate speech or threats directed at journalists, bloggers or people active on social media. Close to half of the respondents (48%) who have heard, read, seen or experienced cases of hate speech or threats on social media say such cases make them hesitate to engage in social media debates.⁴⁸

One of the major aims of foreign hostile efforts is to undermine the confidence and belief of the general public in the independent media, whether it is public or privately owned. Fabricated

⁴⁷ Special Eurobarometer 452 – October 2016 'Media pluralism and democracy' Summary. (2016) Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/newsroom/image/document/2016-47/sp452-summary_en_19666.pdf

⁴⁸ Special Eurobarometer 452 survey – October 2016 'Media pluralism and democracy' Factsheet. More information available at: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/fundamental-rights/files/media-pluralism-factsheet_en.pdf

emotive visual content and the activism of trolls disseminate fear, anger and spread distrust in the mainstream media among EU citizens. Efforts of foreign actors trying to entrench doubt among people are already occurring in the Central and Eastern European countries. But how resilient are the media of Visegrad countries against these hostile foreign efforts?

HUNGARY

The country with the most vulnerable and the least independent media is Hungary, with a vulnerability score of 60.

In Hungary, the **majority of mainstream media outlets are under the direct control of the government**, including the Public Broadcaster (PBS). Since dominant media are owned by pro-government oligarchs and they tend to **use unreliable foreign sources, Hungarians are subjected to highly inaccurate information that does not deviate from the official stance of the government.** Since the **public channel M1** was turned into an all-day news channel⁴⁹, it has played a major role in disseminating the government's messages, and played an **active role in Fidesz's anti-West campaign**, including broadcasts of U.S., EU and migration-related conspiracy theories⁵⁰. The large web portal Origo was also taken over the government.⁵¹ The public channel M1⁵² and other pro-government media outlets are regularly sharing the Russian viewpoint on the U.S., Syria and NATO⁵³. The all-day news channel M1 did not even inform people that that Russian state media labelled the Hungarian revolutionaries of 1956 "Nazis"⁵⁴. **The media is also used as a tool for discrediting the undesirable opponents of the government.**⁵⁵ TV2 airs a "millionaires in hiding" segment, in which they use inaccurate information to attack people undesirable to the government. Furthermore, experts pointed out that **mainstream media sometimes use RT and Sputnik as news sources**, as Magyar Idők did when it wrote about George Soros and Hillary Clinton calling Breitbart's Jewish founder Andrew Breitbart anti-Semitic⁵⁶. These inaccurate pieces of information, combined with public media outlets' reach, significantly increase Hungary's vulnerability.

Almost half a dozen large media owners left Hungary in recent years, while dominant media have fallen under the ownership of pro-government oligarchs and supporters. Film Commissioner Andrew G. Vajna owns TV2, several other commercial channels and a radio station. The owner of Magyar Idők is also the owner of a radio station. Mediaworks – which owns the recently shut down left-leaning daily newspaper Népszabadság, together with a plethora of local papers – was bought by Lőrinc Mészáros, a close friend of Orbán⁵⁷. The unofficial advisor to the prime minister, Árpád Habony owns the only free daily Lokál and 888.hu. Thus, only few media outlets that do not belong to pro-government oligarchs provide mostly accurate coverage of daily events.

In addition, **fringe media have a considerable base of followers on social media**, particularly on Facebook. The most popular fringe media site on Facebook is Világlátó with just over 75 thousand fans, while the others do not even reach 25 thousand. **One of the most important sites is Hídfő, which has 13 thousand Facebook fans and is allegedly connected to Russian intelligence**⁵⁸. The website

⁴⁹ Keserves rajtot vett az M1 hírtévé. (2015) Available at: <http://www.origo.hu/teve/20150320-m1-nemzeti-hirteve-rajtja-also-het.html>

⁵⁰ Az "amerikai birodalom" nem akarja, hogy tovább gyengüljön a pozíciója. (2015) Available at: <http://www.hirado.hu/2015/11/02/az-amerikai-birodalom-nem-akarja-hogy-pozicioja-tovabb-gyenguljon-allitja-bogar-laszlo/>

⁵¹ Igen, ez egy kormánypárti napilap. (2015) Available at: <http://www.demokrata.hu/cikk/igen-ez-egy-kormanyparti-napilap>

⁵² A magyar közmédia úgy terjeszti az orosz háborús propagandát, mintha közvetlenül Moszkvából szerkesztenék. (2016). Available at <https://444.hu/2016/12/16/a-magyar-kozmedia-ugy-terjeszti-az-orosz-haborus-propagandat-mintha-kozvetlenül-moszkvából-szerkesztenek>

⁵³ Lavrov: Törvényes célponttá válhatnak a Washington által támogatott fegyveresek. (2016) Available at: <http://magyaridok.hu/kulfold/lavrov-torvenyes-celpontta-valhatnak-washington-altal-tamogatott-fegyveresek-1140247/>

⁵⁴ Lenácizták az orosz médiában az '56-os szabadságharcosokat. (2016) Available at: <http://magyaridok.hu/belfold/lenaciztak-az-orosz-mediaban-az-56-os-szabadsagharcosokat-1125991/>

⁵⁵ Soros után Spédernek ment neki a TV2. (2016). Available at: http://hvg.hu/itthon/20160608_tenyek_rejtozkodo_milliardosok_speder_zoltan_fhb_soros_gyorgy

⁵⁶ Már a zsidókat is antiszemizálja a Soros-Clinton páros. (2016) Available at: <http://magyaridok.hu/kulfold/mar-zsidokat-antiszemizazza-soros-clinton-paros-939607/>

⁵⁷ Mészáros Lőrinc-közeli cég kezébe került a Népszabadság kiadója. (2016) Available at:

⁵⁸ Orosz diplomaták hadgyakorlatoztak a rendőrgyilkos brigádjával. (2016) Available at: http://index.hu/belfold/2016/10/27/orosz_hirszerzok_gyakorlatoztak_a_rendorgyilkos_harcosaival/

was previously operated by the far-right paramilitary group Hungarian National Front (MNA) and at the time it caused a diplomatic row between Hungary and Russia by sharing pictures of Hungarian tanks allegedly being transported on a train towards the Ukraine. The Hungarian government denied the allegations.

According to the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade's background institution⁵⁹, Hungary is used in pro-Russian propaganda as a tool to achieve a variety of goals, depending on the target audience. For the Russian domestic audience, Hungary is part of anti-EU and US propaganda efforts. In stories aimed at Western consumers, Hungary is used to attack Western values. Regionally, topics related to Hungarians are used to incite hatred and generate ethnic tensions.

The combination of propaganda and disinformation via mainstream pro-government media and fringe outlets, the governmental control of the PBS, the authoritarian measures, the anti-West narratives of the government and the lack of transparency in ownership makes Hungarian media vulnerable to the hostile influence of foreign efforts.

SLOVAKIA

Slovakia has the second most vulnerable media in the Central European region with a score of 40.

In Slovakia it is possible to observe **two tendencies in the mainstream media**. Firstly, the **government attempts to influence the public media** and therefore it undermines its perception of impartiality and accuracy to report on domestic and international affairs. Since the parliamentary elections in early 2016, the Slovak National Party (SNS) has been trying to take over the independent Board of the Radio and Television of Slovakia (RTVS) or the Ministry of Culture, which supervises the public media. Such tendencies, however are not new. In years 2006 – 2010 Rafael Rafaj, at that time the chairman of the Slovak National Party, used his influence to install people close to the SNS in the Slovak National Television (STV), which led to the reporting of STV being compared to the PR activities of the government.

A **second characteristic** of Slovak media is that apart from a few exceptions, a **majority of the Slovak private media are currently owned by a few local financial groups and businessmen, in particular J&T, Penta Investments, Ivan Kmotřík and Andrej Babiš**. Despite existing legal provisions aimed at limiting cross-ownership and media concentration, it is possible to say, particularly in the last 10 years, that there is a clear trend of consolidating ownership of Slovak media in the hands of big financial groups. These Slovak financial groups and businessmen have **close ties to the Slovak government and political parties**. State advertising in the media has tended to change according to election results.⁶⁰ In 2015, without open calls or tender procedures, state institutions hand-picked the media outlets that later promoted the accomplishments and successful spending of European funds in Slovakia, thus creating positive publicity for the government.⁶¹

The concentration of ownership of private media puts pressure on independence as well as calls into question the functioning of regulatory organs and the appropriateness of connections between media owners, the government and political parties. The Council for Broadcasting and Retransmission, the Office for Regulation of Electronic Communication and Post Services⁶² and the Anti-Monopoly Office have been unable to adequately tackle this concentration of ownership. It is important to note that the heads of these institutions are elected and appointed by politicians.

When it comes to Russian international media outlets, RT and Sputnik have a minor impact, since they don't have their own website or news channels in Slovakia. However, this could have changed.

⁵⁹ Tölgyesi, B. (2017). Magyarország-kép az orosz és ukrán médiában, 2016-ban. Külügyi és Külgazdasági Intézet. Available at http://kki.gov.hu/download/f/4e/a1000/01_KKI-elemzes_HUN_Tolgyesi_20170105.pdf

⁶⁰ Gabriel Šípoš, "Viva, TA3 and Pravda benefited with Fico's second government (Viva, TA3 a Pravda zarobili na príchode Fica II.)", Blog of Transparency International Slovakia. Available at <http://www.transparency.sk/sk/viva-ta3-a-pravda-zarobili-na-prichode-fica-ii/>

⁶¹ Michal Piško, "Bought promotion of EU funds in televisions is allegedly not an advertisement (Kúpená propagácia eurofondov v televíziách vraj nie je reklama)", Blog of Transparency International Slovakia. (2016) Available at <http://transparency.blog.sme.sk/c/418964/kupena-propagacia-eurofondov-v-televiziach-vraj-nie-je-reklama.html>

⁶² Name in Slovak language Úrad pre reguláciu elektronických komunikácií a poštových služieb

On the 29th March 2017 Sputnik announced that it had signed a cooperation agreement with the Press Agency of the Slovak Republic (TASR). 24 hours after the news broke, and the public began to question the cooperation, TASR cancelled the agreement. TASR's management declared that within the one month of the validity of the cooperation agreement, TASR had not taken on a single story from Sputnik.⁶³ **Disinformation and propaganda are usually spread covertly, hidden among information and press releases directly taken over from the Slovak news agencies.** The most influential online portals spreading fake news and disinformation are Hlavné správy, Parlamentné listy and Zem a Vek, which is also printed as a glossy 100 page monthly.

Furthermore, Slovakia is also a country where the **Prime Minister calls journalists “dirty anti-Slovak prostitutes”**⁶⁴ and refuses to answer questions from particular investigative media outlets⁶⁵. It is also a country where politicians and governmental representatives sue journalist for defamation and request large penalties compensations that are able to destroy the journalists career. In contrast, in the “Western democracies”, an apology and a symbolic compensation of one Euro is sufficient. All these factors contribute to the vulnerability of the Slovak media towards hostile foreign influence.

However, in the past months, it is possible to observe **increasing coverage of issues connected with disinformation and foreign subversive efforts** in the mainstream media. Daily **Dennik N prepared an educational manual for students** of secondary schools, explaining the risks of disinformation and conspiracies spread on the Internet, and several other news outlets created special sections dedicated to countering and demasking hoaxes and fake news⁶⁶.

POLAND

Polish media is the second least vulnerable in the V4 region with a score of 35. The vulnerability of media in Poland and the Czech Republic is almost identical when it comes to the score achieved with only a one-point difference. **Poland and the Czech Republic are also two countries where Sputnik - the online news service established by the Russian government-controlled news agency Rossiya Segodnya – broadcasts in national languages.**

The public trust in the media has fallen sharply in recent years. More and more **people believe media is under political influence**⁶⁷. According to the GLOBSEC' polls only 25% believe to have an informed picture of the world affairs from the information available. nearly two-thirds (68%) do not trust media and believe the reality is different from what the media portray. Trust started falling when a law passed in December 2015 **shifted control of public media from the regulatory body to the Treasury Ministry.** Since then, the public **media takes a pro-government line** on many issues. The polish government also tries to defend “the good reputation of the country, which is often misunderstood by foreign readers”⁶⁸. For this purpose, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland changed the description of its portal Polska.gov.pl/Poland.gov.pl from ‘cultural/promotional’ to ‘information and news service’.

The trust for “alternative” media (that of conspiracy theories, pro-Russian or anti-West propaganda) is still low in Poland. Only 9% of respondents in the latest GLOBSEC' survey admitted to reading disinformation websites such as i.e. kresy.pl, prawy.pl, parezja.pl, polmedia.pl when they want to learn about political events. Only 5% read alternative newspapers (print and digital).

As **Polish-Russian relations are difficult**, pro-Russian views have a hard time making their way to the general public. For example, as of March 2017, Polish Sputnik's Facebook page (Sputnik Polska) has 12 078 likes and its Twitter account followed by 2534 users. To compare Gazeta Wyborcza has

⁶³ Vladimír Šnidl, Verejnoprávna TASR ide preberať správy od agentúry Sputnik, ktorá šíri prokremelskú propagandu, Daily Dennik N. (2017)

Available at <https://dennikn.sk/718747/verejnopravna-tasr-ide-preberat-spravy-od-agentury-sputnik-ktora-siri-prokremelsku-propagandu/>
⁶⁴ Slovakia's PM calls journalists 'dirty anti-Slovak prostitutes', The Guardian. (2016) Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/nov/23/slovakias-pm-calls-journalists-dirty-anti-slovak-prostitutes>

⁶⁵ Matej Dugovič, “Fico does not answers and posts videos on his Facebook (Fico neodpovedá a nahráva videá na svoj Facebook),” Dennik N. (2016) Available at: <https://dennikn.sk/534047/fico-komunikuje-na-videach-na-svojom-facebooku/>

⁶⁶ Daily SME has a dedicated section on debunking hoaxes, as well as tabloid style online outlet Topky.sk

⁶⁷ Digital News Report (2016), Reuters Institute, Available at: <http://www.digitalnewsreport.org/>

⁶⁸ Polish diplomacy priorities in 2016. Available at: http://www.msz.gov.pl/en/news/minister_witold_waszczykowski_on_priorities_of_polish_diplomacy

475338 likes in Facebook and 709 000 followers in Twitter. The most read pro-Russian outlet is web portal is kresy.pl (2300000 monthly entries)⁶⁹. It is financed (and broadly quoted) by the Polish deputy Marek Jakubiak from Kukiz '15. However some tabloids, such as Super Express, or TV stations such as Republika, sometimes repeat the unreliable information from other unchecked sources.

There are several NGOs monitoring the disinformation narratives in Poland and actively debunking them. One of them is the **“Russian fifth column in Poland”** – a Facebook page⁷⁰. It is edited by Marcin Rey, a blogger and translator. The “Russian fifth column in Poland” publishes valuable information regarding connection between people and organizations that spread propaganda or take concrete actions on a regular basis.

CZECH REPUBLIC

The vulnerability of Czech media was assessed by the experts as the lowest among the V4 countries, with a score of 34. However, there is still space for improvement and decreasing the vulnerability of Czech media. In the Czech Republic politicians have the **tendency to influence the Czech public broadcasters using the concessionary charges. Czech Television has especially been under pressure and criticism from the President and even disinformation outlets.** There have been several proposals by politicians calling for the abolishment of public broadcasting or total state control of public media.

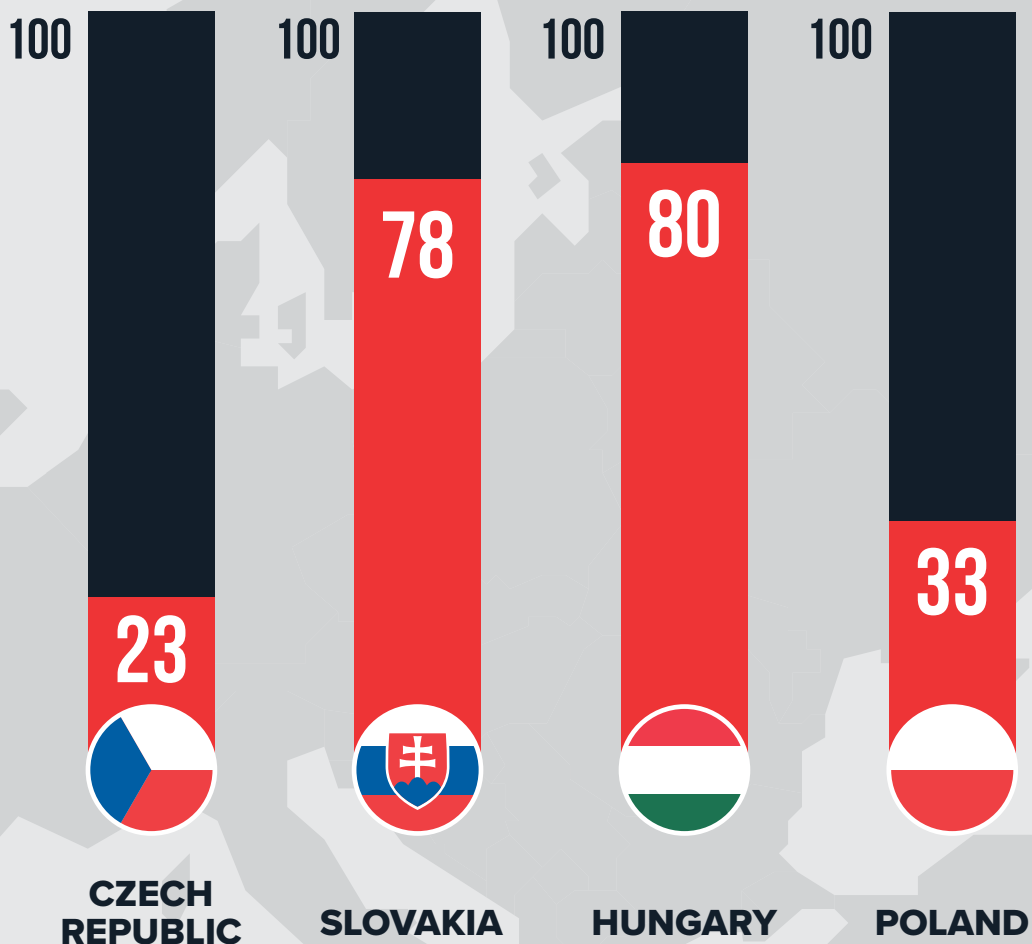
An example of the **alarming concentration of media ownership is that of Andrej Babiš**, the leader of the ANO 2011 party, the Minister of Finance and the Deputy Prime Minister of the Czech government. His publishing companies run two print dailies, two radio stations and three news websites. And this is not a complete list of media that Andrej Babiš owns. His conflict of interest and exploitation of “his” media for political campaigns have stirred a huge public debate ever since Babiš’ entry in politics. Nevertheless, so far this conflict of interest has not impacted foreign-policy agenda of the media outlets owned by Mr. Babiš. The disputes, so far focused on domestic affairs, un-related to actions of Russia.

Furthermore, the Czech Republic has **some 40 websites with thousands of followers spreading disinformation and pro-Kremlin narratives.** Fringe media also have quite significant impact on shaping the public debate in the Czech Republic. Fringe media enjoy popularity on social networks and their narratives and disinformation are often adopted by certain politicians.

⁶⁹ About Kresy.pl (2016), Eastbook, Available at: <http://www.eastbook.eu/2016/09/19/na-kolanach-przed-rosyjska-potega-o-dzialalnosc-portalu-kresy-pl/>

⁷⁰ Facebook page Rosyjska V kolumna w Polsce, <https://www.facebook.com/Rosyjska-V-kolumna-w-Polsce-218251225011751/?fref=ts>

4. State Countermeasures



HUNGARY

Hungary ranked as the most vulnerable country in this category with a score of 80.

Hungary's latest document on its security policy was promulgated in 2012 ⁷¹, which bears no mention of Russia. Since then, the strategy has not been updated which is troubling, as the international environment has changed significantly in the last few years. A working group was created in November 2016 to re-evaluate the strategy ⁷², however, no information about their progress is available at the time of this report. It is, however, **highly unlikely that Russia would be given a more prominent role in the new National Security Strategy**, as PM Orbán⁷³, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó⁷⁴ and Minister for the Prime Minister's Office János Lázár ⁷⁵ all stated publicly that Russia poses no threat to Hungary,

⁷¹ Governmental decree 1035/2012. Available at: http://2010-2014.kormany.hu/download/f/49/70000/1035_2012_korm_hatarozat.pdf

⁷² Munkacsoport alakul a nemzeti biztonsági stratégia felülvizsgálatára (2016). Available at <https://444.hu/2016/11/24/munkacsoport-alakul-a-nemzeti-biztonsagi-strategia-felulvizsgalatara>

⁷³ Orbán: Oroszország nem fenyegeti a biztonságunkat. (2016) Available at: http://index.hu/belfold/2016/10/20/orban_orszorszag_nem_fenyegeti_a_biztonsagunkat/

⁷⁴ Szijjártó: Nem támadna meg Oroszország egy NATO-tagországot. (2016). Available at http://www.portfolio.hu/gazdasag/szijasarto_nem_tamadna_meg_orszorszag_egy_nato-tagorszagot.245250.html

⁷⁵ Lázár magasról tesz az orosz információs hadviselés elleni védekezésre. Available at http://index.hu/belfold/2017/02/08/lazar_magasrol_tesz_az_orsz_informacios_haboru_elleni_vedekezesre/

the EU and NATO. Even at the time of a relatively cordial relationship it would have been necessary to address a potential threat from Russia, let alone when the Ukrainian crisis is taking place a couple hundred kilometres from the Hungarian border. There are general official press releases concerning Ukraine, stating that Hungary supports the country's territorial integrity, the EU's policy regarding the annexation of Crimea and granting Ukraine visa-free status.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, according to experts interviewed for this study, governmental documents mention the Russian Federation in regards to Ukraine, but without a positive or negative description.

Respondents also mentioned that the **Russian Federation's role is not portrayed in publicly available counter-intelligence documents** in Hungary. The riskiest factor, according to respondents, is that **almost no government policy is in effect to counteract Kremlin disinformation and influence**, and none are expected to be implemented in the near future due to the government's firm pro-Russian stance. Experts also claimed that there are almost **no dedicated state experts** working on understanding and assessing the threat of Kremlin disinformation in government ministries. The lack of state countermeasures was also revealed by a recent interview with a former Hungarian intelligence officer, who claimed that the efforts of Hungarian intelligence services to counter the activities of Russian secret services in Hungary are obstructed at the political level.⁷⁷

The government used the **case of Jobbik MEP Béla Kovács** for domestic political gains. The investigation into the MEP who allegedly spied on the EU for Russia has been proceeding slowly since the 2014 general election. In addition, investigative journalists revealed that **the far-right organisation Hungarian National Front (MNA) held joint drills with members of the GRU. MNA was dissolved by the Hungarian Counter-Terror Centre (TEK) after its leader murdered a police officer in Bőny.** Government officials have so far refused to address the connections between the MNA and the GRU. In conclusion, it is concerning that the Russian threat is never officially recognised in cases involving the activities of Russian secret services that threatening national security.⁷⁸

Moreover, the communist past of Hungary has not been dealt with properly since the democratic transition which increases the vulnerability of the country to pro-Kremlin influencing efforts. The list of people who worked for the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party as secret agents has never been published, thus, information on connections between Hungarian and Russian decision-makers is lacking. This also creates opportunities for potential blackmailing attempts.

Overall, the lack of state countermeasures proves to be another highly risky factor in the vulnerability of Hungary to Kremlin influences and the situation is unlikely to change in the near future.

SLOVAKIA

Slovakia is almost as vulnerable as Hungary in the area of state countermeasures with a score of 78.

There are several factors driving such a high level of vulnerability. First and foremost, the **existing security related public policies do not reflect the new realities** created by Russian intervention in Ukraine and the use of hybrid warfare and disinformation by the Kremlin. The **Slovak National Security Strategy was adopted in 2005** and has not been updated since then. As such, it reflects the security threats existing at the time of its creation and the post 9/11 era. Currently, a new National Security Strategy is being drafted and, according to preliminary information, it should reflect the new geopolitical and security realities and threats.

⁷⁶ Bemutatkozott az új ukrán nagykövet. (2016). Available at: <http://www.kormany.hu/hu/kulgzdasagi-es-kulugyminiszterium/parlamenti-alamtitkarsag/hirek/2016-junius-13-an-csutora-zsolt-helyettes-allamtitkar-bemutakozo-latogatason-fogadta-ljubov-nepop-uj-ukran-nagykovetet> Last downloaded: 4 November 2016

⁷⁷ Hungarian secret agent reveals in detail how serious the Russian threat is. (2017). Available at http://index.hu/belfold/2017/03/21/hungarian_secret_agent_reveals_how_serious_the_russian_threat_is/

⁷⁸ Orbán continues to follow Putin's path. (2017). Available at http://politicalcapital.hu/news.php?article_read=1&article_id=399 Last downloaded: 22 March 2017.

Publicly available reports from the Slovak intelligence service until recently did not mention attempts by foreign powers to influence public opinion and the geopolitical orientation of Slovakia at all. The only instance when such subversive foreign efforts are mentioned is the **Slovak Intelligence Service 2015 annual report** published in late 2016⁷⁹, which **contains one sentence on the subject**. The 2015 annual report of the Slovak Military Intelligence Service⁸⁰ mentions negative effects of foreign propaganda on armed forces and foresees the increasing impact and intensity of such activities in Slovakia. However, the report does not mention who are the actors behind such subversive efforts. Lack of public acknowledgment of such efforts increases vulnerability of the whole society and complicates attempts by other actors - civil society or media - to raise awareness on the subject.

The only high-level state representative that repeatedly and publicly proclaimed propaganda and the influence of foreign subversive actors in Slovakia to be a security threat has been the **President of the Slovak Republic, Andrej Kiska. At the 17th Annual Foreign Policy Review Conference of the Slovak Republic on March 17 2017, President Kiska stated that “Slovakia is a target of information war and propaganda and Slovak security services are doing next to nothing to counter it”**. The lack of counter-measures against the information war and hybrid threats as well as deficiencies in the strategic communication of Slovakia, are also acknowledged by the Secretary of State of the Ministry of Defence, Róbert Ondrejcsák.⁸¹

The situation is further compounded by **lack of any STRATCOM capacities dedicated to subversive foreign influence at key ministries** - Defence, Foreign Affairs and Interior. In case of any sustained use of information warfare, Slovakia would be powerless and not able to respond in a timely and coordinated manner. Such an event occurred in February 2017, when a NATO convoy of military equipment was passing through eastern Slovakia by rail. Despite the press release issued by the Ministry of Defence, Slovak public was surprised and alarmed by the transport and disinformation outlets spread hoaxes about the threat of looming NATO's occupation of Slovakia.

There is a difference of more than 40 points between Slovakia, Hungary and the two other countries - Poland and the Czech Republic (33 and 23 points respectively), reflecting the fundamental difference in state policies and structures dedicated to addressing the information warfare and hybrid threats.

POLAND

Poland is the second least vulnerable in the V4 region in this category with a score of 33.

The government addresses relations with Russia in the following strategic national security documents - the **National Security Strategy of Poland** (2014) and the **Strategy for the development of the system of national security by 2022** adopted in 2013. Good relations are positioned as a key priority for the national interest of the country and its security. Poland's eastern border is also the border of NATO and the EU, hence considerable space in the strategic documents is devoted to the question of (sub) regional and international military cooperation and the need to respect international law, sovereignty and the territorial integrity of nation-states.⁸²

Polish authorities publicly recognise the disinformation operations from Russia and consider them as a major threat at the national and international level⁸³. **Even though Poland still lacks the tangible, institutional solution for fighting disinformation, the authorities have already undertaken some countermeasures.**

⁷⁹ Annual report of Slovak Intelligence Service for 2015. (2016) Available at: <http://www.sis.gov.sk/pre-vas/sprava-o-cinnosti.html#bezpecnostna-oblast>

⁸⁰ Annual report of the Military Intelligence Service for 2015 (2016) Available at: <http://vs.mosr.sk/sprava-o-cinnosti-vs-2015/>

⁸¹ Zuzana Gabrižová, Ondrejcsák: Hybrid threats? We are just waking up in Slovakia. Euroactiv.sk. (2017) Available at: <https://euractiv.sk/rozhovory/zahranicie-a-bezpecnost/ondrejcsak-hybridne-hrozby-na-slovensku-sa-len-zobudzame/>

⁸² National Security Strategy of Poland https://www.bbn.gov.pl/ftp/dok/01/sbn_rp_2014.pdf

Available at: https://www.bbn.gov.pl/ftp/dok/01/strategia_rozwoju_systemu_bezpieczenstwa_narodowego_rp_2022.pdf

⁸³ Minister Witold Waszczykowski opens conference on disinformation, (2016), MFA, Available at: http://www.msz.gov.pl/en/news/minister_witold_waszczykowski_opens_conference_on_disinformation

First, the broadcasting license of the Warsaw-based station **Radio Hobby** that rebroadcasted programming produced in Polish by Radio Sputnik was cancelled⁸⁴. Second, authorities launched the **consultations on disinformation** in Warsaw last November 2016. The conference was attended by practitioners from the U.S., Finland, Ukraine, Czech Republic, NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence and European External Action Service. Third, **since 2015, the Ministry of Defence has worked on “Strategic Defence Review” and the National Security Bureau on “Doctrine on Information Security”**, which will address foreign disinformation operations.

On the European level, **Poland supports the activities on counteracting Russian propaganda run by the European Endowment of Democracy (EED) and the EU East STRATCOM Task Force**. Anna Fotyga, Polish MEP and former Minister of Foreign Affairs under PiS, was one of the driving forces behind the budget upgrade for the Task Force. Poland also **launched two initiatives**. First, a plan to **create a European media platform in Russian language**, an idea that floated already in 2015 but has not materialised yet⁸⁵. Second, it is actively working on the **creation of Visegrad TV**, an English channel that would present the joint interests of Visegrad states. As Slovakia and Czech Republic declined to participate in the project, the future of the initiative is put into question too⁸⁶.

Despite the authorities' acknowledgement of the existence of disinformation media, they **often use disinformation themselves for political purposes**. They accuse the private media or journalists in Poland of manipulating the facts and disinforming the audience. To stop fake news, Bartłomiej Misiewicz, the Ministry of Defence spokesperson created the **webpage dezinformacja.net**. However, instead of debunking fake news, it was rather a **politically biased forum**. After the immediate and vast criticism over the content of the webpage, it was quickly shut down. Another negative example includes the Minister of Interior who publicly stated that the refugees who came to Europe were, in fact, economic migrants, therefore calling them 'refugees' was a disinformation by European media. Finally, the Minister of Defence said that Russia fabricated the developments of the plane crash in Smolensk, and used Polish media to spread fake news among Polish audiences.

CZECH REPUBLIC

The Czech Republic is the least vulnerable country in the region in this category with a Vulnerability Index of only 23. This is mainly due to the **open acknowledgement of the threat of subversive foreign efforts in public policy documents, annual reports and the existence of dedicated structures countering such threats**.

Aggressive, expansionist Russian policy towards its neighbours, including Ukraine, was described in detail in the Czech strategic documents, and recognized as a major threat. The **Concept of the Czech Republic's Foreign Policy** from 2015⁸⁷ stated that **Russia “fundamentally destabilizes European security architecture”**. However, it also notes the need for “constructive cooperation” with this important political and economic partner. According to this document the Czech foreign policy towards Russia depends on its respect for international law and territorial integrity and the sovereignty of its neighbours.

The Security Strategy of the Czech Republic from 2015⁸⁸ is very open in describing expansionist and aggressive policies pursued by “some actors” (meaning the Russian Federation), its use of hybrid warfare, disinformation efforts and cyber operations, causing erosion of security and stability in Europe.

⁸⁴ Radio Hobby without a license (2016), KRRIT, Available at: <http://www.krrit.gov.pl/krrit/aktualnosci/news,2144,radio-hobby-bez-koncesji.html>

⁸⁵ The idea was supported by the Netherlands, and recommended by the EED.

⁸⁶ V4 TV without Slovaks and Czechs (2017), Business Insider, Available at: <http://businessinsider.com.pl/media/tv-radio/telewizja-wyszehradzka-v4-bez-czechow-i-slowakow/kxfdmkr>

⁸⁷ Concept of the Czech Republic's Foreign Policy. Available at: http://www.mzv.cz/jnp/en/foreign_relations/policy_planning/concept_of_the_czech_republic_s_foreign.html

⁸⁸ Security Strategy of the Czech Republic. Available at: http://www.army.cz/images/id_8001_9000/8503/Security_Strategy_2015.pdf

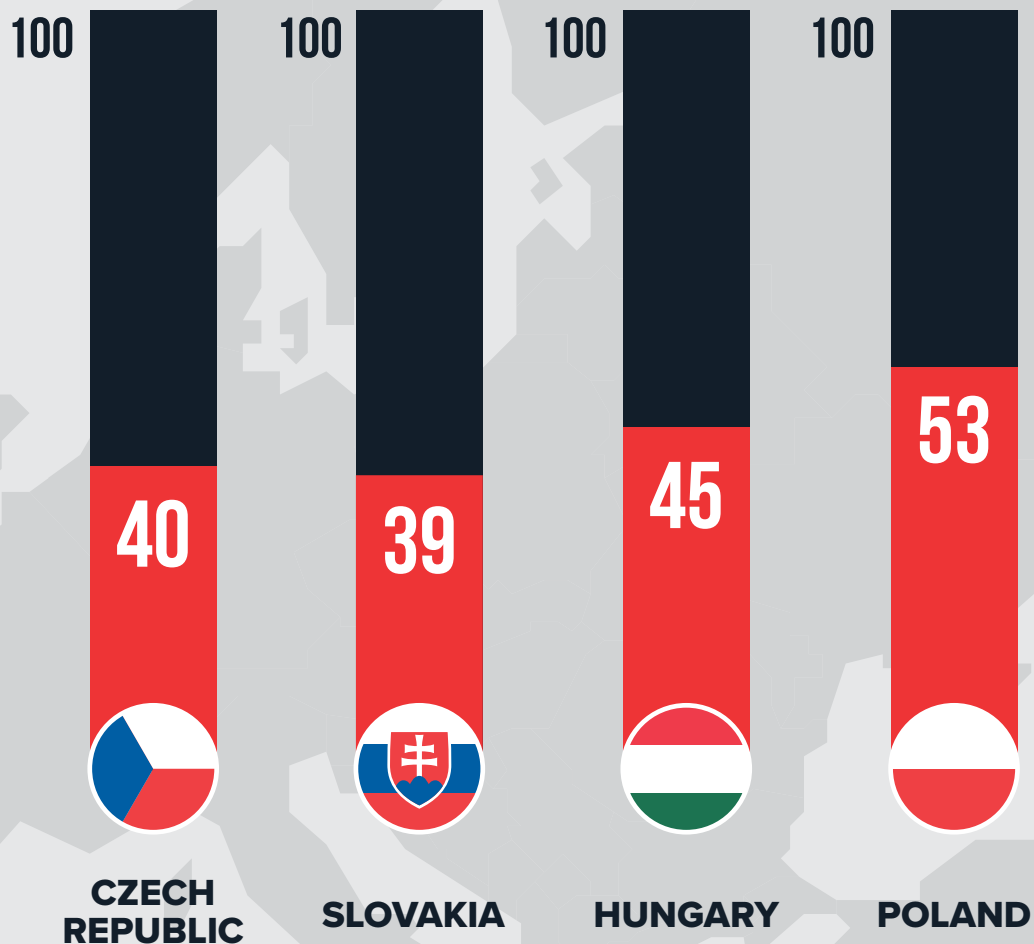
Perhaps the most open assessment of foreign subversive operations was included in the 2015 **annual report of the Czech Intelligence Service (BIS) openly describing Russian activities in the Czech Republic.**⁸⁹

Moreover, during 2016, key members of the Czech government went public to address the threat of Kremlin-linked disinformation operations. The Prime Minister, the Defence Minister, the Foreign Minister, the Interior Minister, and the State Secretary for EU Affairs publicly acknowledged the existence of such operations in the Czech Republic.

As a consequence of this acknowledgement, the Minister of Interior decided to establish a special task force on monitoring and countering hybrid threats, the first of its kind in the V4 region. The **Centre against Terrorism and Hybrid Threats** has been up and running since January 2017. However, at the beginning of the year, it had to face a concerted disinformation campaign regarding its activities, competencies and false claims of censorship even from the Czech President Zeman. Still, **the recognition of the foreign subversive operations which led to the establishment of a dedicated governmental institution, merits the highest appreciation.**

⁸⁹ Annual Report of the Security Information Service for 2015. (2016) Available at: https://www.bis.cz/vyrocní-zprávaEN890a.html?ArticleID=1104#_2_Australská_skupina.

5. Civil Society



POLAND

Poland's civil society⁹⁰ ranked as the most vulnerable within the V4 region, with the vulnerability score of 53.

While pro-Russian activists or civil society groups are on the side lines, nationalists, the groups that appeal to anti-immigrant sentiments, Polish-Ukrainian history or support the anti-Ukrainian demonstrations, have recently flourished in Poland.

Despite being marginalised, **pro-Russian activists are getting more and more effective in spreading disinformation.** Bartosz Bekier, editor of Xportal.pl who openly supports pro-Russian separatist in Ukraine, has a Facebook page with 13518 likes (similar number to Sputnik PL). Aleksander Usowski, a Belarussian neonazi paid by Russian Deputy Konstanty Zatulin, boasts about his connections with the right-wing Kukiz'15 political movement, the rightist KORWiN party, and the nationalist Great Poland Camp (Oboz Wielkiej Polski or OWP).

⁹⁰ For the purpose of this research civil society means not only activities of individuals, non-governmental organizations or institutions that manifest interests and will of citizens, but also activities of paramilitary organizations, extremist groups and other non-state actors.

Nowadays, the **most vocal are the anti-immigrant groups**. With the tacit consent from the government, the **far-right nationalist groups act more freely and their activities are more visible to the general public**. Setting up the Ukrainian flag on fire during the commemoration of Polish Independence Day in 2016 is the best example. They also actively spread fake news about the Ukrainians living in Poland. In March 2017, the members of the National-Radical Camps (Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny) and the All-Polish Youth (Młodzież Wszechpolska) were surprisingly invited for a conference in the Sejm (Polish Parliament) where, among other effects, they twisted the numbers of Ukrainians living in Poland and accused them of taking advantage of the new social program “500+”, both of which are false. Another example is OWP, which is a far right political organisation of approximately 100 members that organises the anti-Ukrainian demonstrations. They call the Ukrainians “judeosatanists” who occupy the “beloved Slav’s motherlands”. Finally, there is a „Borderland Trusteeship” (Powiernictwo Kresowe) that seeks either compensation or restitution of the property lost by Poland back in the XVIII century.

Finally, **NGOs promoting Russian narratives** have both far-right and far-left wing ideological backgrounds. While their activities might not be so visible, these civil society initiatives are to some extent **effective at delivering and spreading disinformation to key media outlets**. Furthermore, local civic actors and activists spread Russian disinformation within their networks and thus serve as echo chambers for spreading the Russian narratives within Polish society.

There are several NGOs monitoring the disinformation narratives in Poland and actively debunking them. Poland is one of the Central and Eastern European countries where the **Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA) has been conducting its Information Warfare Initiative**⁹¹ - analysing, rebutting and exposing Russian disinformation. For Poland, it is Andrzej Poczobut - a journalist, a publicist and a correspondent of “Gazeta Wyborcza” in Belarus for many years - who has been monitoring and analysing Russian disinformation practices at the institutional, strategic and conceptual levels. The Information Warfare Initiative includes among other activities a regular monitoring of country-specific applications of Russian disinformation content and techniques and an Information Warfare website centralizing data and analytical inputs on disinformation in the CEE region.

Another interesting civic activity countering Russian foreign influence is the **“Russian fifth column in Poland”** – a Facebook page⁹² edited by Marcin Rey, a blogger and translator. The “Russian fifth column in Poland” publishes valuable information regarding connection between people and organizations that spread propaganda or take concrete actions on a regular basis. For instance, it revealed information regarding the protests with Novorossiia flags or anti-Ukrainian border patrols. “Russian fifth column in Poland” reports on people who represent extreme entities or political parties, but also those considered to belong to the group of so called “useful idiots”, further spreading disinformation among the Polish public. **The “Russian fifth column in Poland” reveals networks of connections between different people and entities spreading Russian narratives and propaganda in Poland and demonstrates that often those networks reach far beyond Poland itself.**

On the other hand, **activities promoting the Russian narrative are also observable in academic circles**. Narratives on rising nationalism and fascism, as well as disinformation regarding Ukraine, the war in Donbas, and Ukrainian migration in Poland are being spread in Polish society. Numerous **extremist and paramilitary groups** also exist in Poland. For example, the “Volunteer Anti-Bandera border patrols” („Ochotnicze Patrole Antybanderowskie), organise themselves at the Polish-Ukrainian border to protect Poland from alleged Ukrainian fascists illegally entering the country⁹³. Additionally, there is also **Falanga** which is a far-right political group whose members are openly anti-NATO and **openly support unrecognized republics such as the Donetsk People’s Republic and Luhansk People’s Republic**. Astonishingly, **its members took part in a state supported military exercise, which was organised simultaneously with the NATO exercises known as “Anakonda 16” in June**

⁹¹ Andrzej Poczobut, Information War Monitor, CEPA. More information available at: <http://infowar.cepa.org/Monitors/Andrzej-Poczobut>

⁹² Facebook page Rosyjska V kolumna w Polsce, <https://www.facebook.com/Rosyjska-V-kolumna-w-Polsce-218251225011751/?fref=ts>

⁹³ „Volunteer Anti-Bandera border patrols” (2015), Gazeta Wyborcza, Available at: <http://wyborcza.pl/1,75398,18530517,antybanderowskie-patrole-przy-granicy-z-ukraina-dlaczego.html>

2016⁹⁴. As Poland is now in the process of creating the Territorial Defence Forces, a component to the Polish army, it may raise some security concerns that people who represent strong opposition towards NATO and promote Russian narratives may be also enrolled there⁹⁵.

HUNGARY

Hungarian civil society ranked as the second most vulnerable V4 country towards the influence of foreign hostile actors, with a score of 45.

This is no surprise, since **NGOs committed to the values of liberal democracy have been subjected to constant crackdowns by the government.** For example, in 2014 Hungarian authorities raided the offices of civil society organisations funded by the NGO Fund of the Norway/EEA Grants. Furthermore, Szilárd Németh, the vice-president of Fidesz, asked the Hungarian secret service to perform **background checks on NGOs “connected to the Soros-network”**, as he believed they were breaching Hungarian and European legislation during the migrant crisis by encouraging refugees to break the law⁹⁶. In addition, Németh stated in January 2017 that **NGOs funded by George Soros should be “swept out” of Hungary**⁹⁷. parliament is expected to pass a law in spring limiting foreign funding for NGOs or requiring special registration. Even though none of the NGOs are specifically dedicated to addressing the issue of Russian influence, their views contradict those of the Kremlin and the Orbán government on most issues.

Another interesting characteristic of Hungarian civil society is **government-organized nongovernmental organizations (GONGOs).** In Hungary, **advocacy-type government-funded organizations counterbalance the critics of government, defend the governmental measures through seemingly professional and independent comments, and react to statements critical of the government.** One example is the **Centre for Fundamental Rights**, which nowadays is usually preoccupied with validating the government’s decision from a legal standpoints.⁹⁸ Additionally, there are GONGOs that act as national activists, standing behind the government against its opponents. One of the prime examples is the **Civil Alliance Forum (CÖF)**, which organised the so-called peace marches (Békemenet) to support government policies⁹⁹.

Besides GONGOs, there are also NGOs **directly involved in spreading Russian views.** **Honfoglalás 2000** and the **Nationalist Social Democrats** are Hungarian organizations supporting the government and its pro-Russian foreign policy, including the organisation of rallies supporting Russian-Hungarian friendship. Furthermore, both of these organizations were **founded by the Friends of Vladimir Putin Circle.**¹⁰⁰ According to the press release, the *Friends of Vladimir Putin Circle* was established to “inform the population on the incredibly successful work of the Russian president”. A slightly more visible organisation is the **Tolstoy Society, which is headed by Sándor Lezsák, a Fidesz MP**¹⁰¹. This organisation promotes political, economic, societal, cultural and sports-related cooperation between the two sides, and they have organised trips to Moscow for secondary school students¹⁰².

In Hungary there is also a **lively scene of paramilitary organisations** following the Russian world view. **The main two are the Army of Outlaws and the Sixty-Four Counties Youth Movement, both of which are tied to the pro-Russian Jobbik Party.** These organizations are regularly endorsed by rather strong far-right political players and neither side is trying to hide the connections between

⁹⁴ Exercise Anakonda 2016, which involved 31,000 personnel from Allied and partner nations.. More information available at: <http://shape.nato.int/2016/polished-exercise-anakonda-2016-a-huge-success>

⁹⁵ As for now, there are only 4 thousand volunteers, and the official goal of attracting 53 thousand soldiers by 2019.

⁹⁶ Németh Szilárd a titkosszolgálattal világgítatná át a Soros-hálózatot. (2016). Available at: <http://vs.hu/kozelet/osszes/nemeth-szilard-a-titkosszolgaltal-vilagitatna-at-a-soros-halozatot-0927#%s22>

⁹⁷ Németh Szilárd: Minden eszközzel el kell innen takarítani a civil szervezeteket. (2017) Available at <https://444.hu/2017/01/10/nemeth-szilard-minden-eszkozzel-el-kell-innen-takaritani-a-civil-szervezeteket>

⁹⁸ There are no obstacles to amending the Fundamental Law. (2016). Available at: <http://alapjogokert.hu/there-are-no-obstacles-to-amending-the-fundamental-law/>

⁹⁹ Unpublished Political Capital Study

¹⁰⁰ Megalakult a Vlagyimir Putyin Baráti Kör. (2015). Available at: <http://444.hu/2015/10/30/megalakult-a-vlagyimir-putyin-barati-kor>

¹⁰¹ More information available at: <http://www.tolsztojtarsasag.hu/>

¹⁰² Moszkvában jártunk. (2013). Available at: <http://www.tolsztojtarsasag.hu/en/magunkrol/moszkvaban-jartunk.html>

each other. In addition, the **Hungarian National Front (MNA) is a paramilitary organisation which has direct connections to Russian military intelligence (GRU) and Russian diplomats took part in airsoft drills organised by the MNA**, about which Hungarian secret services knew. Furthermore, the **leader of the Hungarian National Front, shot a Hungarian policeman dead during police raid** of his house in October 2016. MNA is a key evidence for the Kremlin-backed radicalisation among far-right groups in Hungary¹⁰³.

While experts assess that neither NGOs adhering to Western values nor government-organised/pseudo-NGOs advocating the Russian viewpoint have a meaningful impact on society, it is practically only Political Capital's studies on Russian influence¹⁰⁴ and certain pieces of investigative journalism "bordering on academic precision" that constitute academic work in the topic. According to experts, it is primarily mainstream media spreading Russian narratives and covertly endorsing the government's pro-Russian attitudes that has influence.

CZECH REPUBLIC

The civil society of the Czech Republic ranked, with a score of 40, as the second most resilient towards the foreign influence.

The Czech Republic has a **well-established and active civic society**. There are number of non-governmental organizations, think-tanks and associations actively monitoring the influence of the disinformation and Russian propaganda. European Values, a Czech Think-Tank produces **weekly reports on disinformation trends** and narratives spread in the Czech Republic, among other outputs and activities - **Kremlin Watch**. The Association for International Affairs (AMO) launched a **Czech version of the Ukrainian web site StopFake.org** in October 2016 that aims to verify or disprove disinformation about the situation in Ukraine; the organization People in Need produced an instructive material for teachers on Russian disinformation¹⁰⁵. However, the lack of coordination leads to the overlap of activities. Greater coordination and share of know-how would lead to the more efficient use of scarce financial resources. Therefore, the Czech branch of the Open Society Foundation has stepped forward to offer a seed grant and a coordinating role of activities focusing on the influence of hostile foreign actors in the Czech and Slovak Republics.

Activities of NGOs addressing the impact of the hostile foreign influence in the Czech Republic are supported by the academic sphere. The Department of Political Science at the Faculty of Social Studies at **Masaryk University in Brno analyses manipulation techniques and emotions used by the pro-Kremlin disinformation media and provides training in media literacy**. The Masaryk University also launched a project of its students in order to raise awareness of the importance of media literacy among young people in the Czech Republic¹⁰⁶.

The pro-Russian view and narratives are spread by NGOs targeting the Russian minority in the Czech Republic. The two most influential are Artek and the Institute of Slavic Strategic Studies. The Artek association publishes a magazine in Russian language and the Institute of Slavic Strategic Studies manages a website and organizes events and public debates with proponents of the Kremlin regime. In general, the actions of NGOs advocating Russian culture and interests are supported by the Russian Embassy in Prague, which organizes meetings with their representatives and serves as a coordination platform. Russian interests are also represented by the Russian-Czech Chamber of Commerce, calling for the lifting of the sanctions against Russia and the revival of economic cooperation between the countries.

¹⁰³ Far-right murder of Hungarian police officer: pro-Russian radicalization in the CEE (2016), Political Capital, http://politicalcapital.hu/library.php?article_read=1&article_id=320

¹⁰⁴ Juhász, A.; Győri, L.; Krekó, P.; Dezső, A. (2015). "I am Eurasian" The Kremlin connections of the Hungarian far-right. Available at: http://www.politicalcapital.hu/wp-content/uploads/PC_SDI_Boll_study_IamEurasian.pdf

¹⁰⁵ The One World in Schools project run by the NGO People In Need attempts to help teachers with their effort to prepare their students for the challenges such as the Kremlin disinformation campaign.

¹⁰⁶ More information about the students' project available in Czech at: <http://zvolsi.info/>

In addition, the **narratives of the Kremlin were taken over by far-right extremist groups as well as several small paramilitary groups**. Paramilitary groups are usually organized in so called Czech National militia. There are indications that their members became Czech volunteers who left to fight for the separatists in Ukraine. Experts assessed that these extremist and paramilitary organizations have a negligible impact on society.

SLOVAK REPUBLIC

Slovak civil society ranked as the least vulnerable within the V4 region, with the vulnerability score of 39.

It scored better than Czech civil society only by one point. A **small number of civic organizations and think tanks** started to address the influence of disinformation and Russian propaganda in Slovakia including the GLOBSEC Policy Influence, the Slovak Security Policy Institute, the Slovak Foreign Policy Association and Institute for Public Affairs (IVO). However, the most visible countermeasures and activities¹⁰⁷ resonating among the public are those of individual activists or representatives of these organizations. In addition, the representatives of civil society – journalists, researchers, academics and even politicians - meet on a regular basis within the framework of the **Slovak Forum against Propaganda**, an unofficial platform and online group at which ideas and information on countering disinformation and propaganda are shared and discussed.

A good job in debunking propaganda by making fun of it is done by Facebook pages as **“Die” (Zomri)**, **“Disinformation and hoaxes”** (Dezinformácie a hoaxy), **“Why are people crazy”** (Prečo ľudom hrabe) or **“I’ll eat even a chair-lift”** (Zjem aj vlek, which is a parody on the famous propaganda outlet Zem a vek).

However, the activists and civic organizations analysing the influence of foreign propaganda and disinformation undermining the institutional structures of the European Union or NATO have **often been labelled as being foreign agents working for the CIA or George Soros**. This notion was adopted by the far-right People’s Party Our Slovakia, which drafted the amendment of the civic organizations law, proposing that all civic organizations funded by the foreign donors and grants should be registered in the Registry of foreign agents, which should be established by the Ministry of Interior. The Registry should make the work and the funding of such civic organizations more transparent and it should provide a better oversight over their activities .

Promotion of Russian views and disinformation in Slovakia is primarily spread in Slovakia by the **Slovak-Russian association** and its chairman of the Board of Trustees **Ján Čarnogurský**, who is a former Prime Minister and former chairman of the Christian Democratic Movement, which organizes often protests “against neo-liberalism and NATO”. Ján Čarnogurský even proclaimed Marian Kotleba, leader of the openly pro-Russian, far right ‘People’s Party, Our Slovakia’ to be the only Slovak politician, “who did not sell himself to the aggressive West” and praised para-military units, who could “potentially be the movement, which **with Russia’s help, will drive out (the Western) invaders” out of Slovakia**.¹⁰⁸ Similar anti-NATO rhetoric is spread by civic organization, **Alliance of Slovak Soldiers**. Its chairman even accused the Minister of Defence, the State Secretary of Ministry of Defence and think-tank representatives of treason and anti-Slovak activities, due to their support of transatlantic cooperation with the United States and NATO.¹⁰⁹

Another institution spreading anti-Western narratives in Slovakia, with direct ties to Russia is **Eastern European Cultural Initiative** (Východoeurópska kultúrna iniciatíva) established in Slovakia

¹⁰⁷ TASR, “The People’s Party Our Slovakia wants to have NGOs financed from abroad in a registry (LSNS chce mať mimovládky financované zahraničím v povinnom registri)”. Available at: <http://www.teraz.sk/slovensko/nrsr-lsns-chce-mimovladky-financovan/220516-clanok.html>

¹⁰⁸ Vladimír Šnidl, Čarnogurský chválí Kotlebu a Slovenských brancov za to, že nedopustia americkú okupáciu. (2017) Available at: <https://dennikn.sk/703363/carnogursky-chvali-kotlebu-a-slovenskych-brancov-za-to-ze-nedopustia-americku-okupaciju/>

¹⁰⁹ GLOBSEC Policy Institute, Top hoaxes of February 2017. Blog Disinformation, Hoaxes and Propaganda at Daily Dennik N. (2017). Available at: <https://dennikn.sk/blog/top-hoaxy-vo-februari-2017/>

by **Belarusian extremist Alexandr Usovski**, who was known for his **financial ties with Konstantin Malofeev**.¹¹⁰ Using the cover of “spreading the ‘Russian world perception’ in the Central European region,” the Eastern European Cultural Initiative was allegedly involved in providing funding to several anti-EU and anti-NATO protests and extremist groups activities in Slovakia. The Initiative also organized public fundraising for separatists in Ukraine.¹¹¹

Spreading of pro-Russian narrative is, in some cases, supported also by the academic sphere via exchange of students and lectures of professors. For example, in March 2017 the Economic University in Bratislava held a lecture of Russian political scientist **Andranik Migranyan**, member of the Valdai Club who presented the Kremlin perspective on Ukraine and Crimea. Migranyan, who works as a professor at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations, told Slovak students that “Maidan revolution was a military coup and that Nazi and neo-Nazi groups are in power in Ukraine”.¹¹²

Furthermore, it is possible to observe that **certain pro-Russian narratives are also adopted and disseminated by mainstream politicians** including Prime Minister Fico and people close to him,¹¹³ as well by Marián Kotleba, the leader of the far-right People’s Party - Our Slovakia. In addition, Slovak politicians often give **interviews or write blogs on alternative media outlets**, such as Hlavné správy, Zem a Vek, Parlamentné listy or Slobodný vysielač, which give them additional space for their public relations. However, this increased preference for alternative media and rhetoric of Slovak politicians help further disseminate and establish certain narratives among the public and undermine the work mainstream media and fact-based political discourse.

Similarly to other countries in the region, **far right groups in Slovakia transformed from marginal groups of neo-Nazi thugs into a full-fledged political actors**, running in municipal or parliamentary elections. The most successful far-right party so far, has been the **People’s Party – Our Slovakia led by Marián Kotleba**, which received 8% of votes in the parliamentary elections in March 2016 and has 14 MPs. The party is **very well organized on social media with over 140 Facebook groups and accounts** bringing together their followers.¹¹⁴ Other significant far right extremist groups remaining on the outskirts of the political scene are the Kysuce Resistance (Vzdor Kysuce)¹¹⁵ and the Slovak Revival Movement (Slovenské hnutie obrody)¹¹⁶. Both are very vocal about their pro-Russian, anti-EU and anti-NATO sentiments, which create an important element of their anti-establishment narrative. In November 2010, **SHO signed and official cooperation agreement with the Russian umbrella organization Narodniy Sobor (National Union)** represented by the head of Moscow regional department, Alexander Lapin¹¹⁷. SHO was represented by the head of its international relations department, Marek Rusyniak, who has extended ties to various Russian and pro-Russian subjects, and he is also an administrator of the Facebook group called “Russian Combat”¹¹⁸ with some 20 000 followers, which is used extensively for spreading of pro-Russian propaganda. However, the most influential para-military group active in Slovakia are **Slovak Conscripts** (Slovenskí branci). The founder of paramilitary association Slovak Conscripts, Peter Švrček, in 2012 attended a week-long military training in Russia. The association provides military training combined with pan-Slavic and pro-Russian ideological indoctrination and has approximately 150 members¹¹⁹.

While the impact of extremist groups on Slovak society is still marginal, these organizations are becoming more attractive to the younger population disappointed by the mainstream political parties.

¹¹⁰ Mirek Toda, Bellingcat’s investigator: Russia believes, that will persuade Slovakia leave NATO and are actively working on it, Dennik N. (2017) Available at: <https://dennikn.sk/703357/investigativec-z-bellingcatu-v-rusku-veria-ze-slovensko-dostanu-z-nato-a-robia-na-tom/>

¹¹¹ Olexia Basarab and Zuzana Petková, Hackeri zistili: Peniaze separatistom majú tiecť cez združenie na Slovensku. Trend.sk. (2017) Available at: <https://www.etrend.sk/ekonomika/hackeri-zistili-peniaze-separatistom-maju-tiect-cez-zdruzenie-na-slovensku.html>

¹¹² Vladimír Šnídl, Prokremelský profesor vysvetlil slovenským študentom, že Majdan bol vojenský puč, Daily Dennik N. (2017) Available at: <https://dennikn.sk/699218/prokremelsky-profesor-vysvetlil-slovenskym-studentom-ze-majdan-bol-vojensky-puc/>

¹¹³ In the past, it was the Slovak National Party (SNS) with its old leadership that expressed close affinity to Russia.

¹¹⁴ Filip Struharik, Supporters of Kotleba have some 140 Facebook pages, Dennik N. (2017) Available at: <https://dennikn.sk/684530/kotlebovci-ovladaju-na-facebooku-zhruba-140-stranok/>

¹¹⁵ More information on the Kysuce Resistance is available: http://vzdor.org/?page_id=1957

¹¹⁶ Slovak Revival Movement. More information available at: <http://www.sho.sk/>

¹¹⁷ Marching towards Eurasia, The Kremlin connections of the Slovak far right, Political Capital 2015, http://www.politicalcapital.hu/wp-content/uploads/PC_Study_Russian_Influence_Slovakia_ENG.pdf

¹¹⁸ Rusky styl boja. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/ruskystyl/>

¹¹⁹ Dušan Mikušovič, Rozhovor s brancami: Čo je zlé na cvičení so zbraňou v lese?, Daily Dennik N. (2015) Available at <https://dennikn.sk/57900/rozhovor-s-brancami-co-je-zle-na-tom-cviceni-v-lese-zbranou/>

Best Practices

MEDIA

Identification of “voices of Russia in Hungary”. Several initiatives give examples of how Russian propaganda outlets try to manipulate public opinion and point out the connections between the Hungarian version and the original, Russian version of the same news article. The investigative portal atlatszo.hu managed to find out that the servers of several pro-Russian websites, such as szentkoronaradio.hu are operated in Russia. Internet portal vs.hu also includes information on why fringe portals have been created.

Slovak daily **Dennik N** prepared an educational manual for teachers and students of high schools explaining the mechanisms of manipulation used by disinformation media outlets and the risks conspiracies and fake news being spread on the Internet. The initiative gained huge support via crowd-funding.

CIVIL SOCIETY

The annual **Forum Against Propaganda** (Fórum proti propaganda), which is organized as a side event of the Slovak Security Forum, brings together individuals and organizations interested in the topic of disinformation from the public, private and NGO sectors. This platform serves as a place for the exchange of ideas and better coordination of joint efforts in counter measures. The idea of the Forum Against Propaganda could easily be transferred to other countries.

Blogger, activist and teacher Juraj Smatana, in cooperation with the digital agency NetSuccess and Seesame, developed “**the conspirators**” website,¹²⁰ which collects websites of media outlets spreading disinformation, propaganda and lies. The database should help companies advertising online so that their brand is not associated with content that can seriously damage their reputation. Furthermore, by using such websites for their advertisements, companies would be directly financing activities spreading disinformation. The database is designed to prevent that. Furthermore, it is actively increasing the ability of companies to be socially responsible, because it enables them to consider who benefits from their marketing activities.

Debunking and fact-checking of Russian propaganda. In the Czech Republic think-tank European Values issues weekly newsletter the [Kremlin Watch](#), the Association for International Affairs together with [StopFake.org](#) launched a Czech version of StopFake website. In Slovakia the GLOBSEC Policy Institute with its partners has been producing Information War Monitor, analysing the narratives and disinformation spread in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia. The Slovak Security Policy Institute has been [translating Disinformation Digest](#) of EEAS’ Strategic Communication Unit into Slovak language. In Poland CEPA has been producing [weekly briefs](#) on country-specific applications of Russian disinformation content and techniques and the effectiveness or weakness of propaganda.

The **One World in Schools**¹²¹ project run by the Czech organization People In Need helps teachers to educate responsible young people to approach information in an open and critical manner. People in Need also produced a manual for teachers with case studies on disinformation to be used in classes.

STATE COUNTER-MEASURES

In 2015 – 2016, the Czech Government launched a process called “**Audit of National Security**”, analysing 11 areas of internal security for blind spots in the security architecture. Among the 11 areas, there were two relevant for Russian influence: “Influence of Foreign Powers” and “Hybrid Threats”.

¹²⁰ More information available at: <https://www.konspiratori.sk/>

¹²¹ More information available at: https://www.jsns.cz/cz/article/111/What_is_jsns.html?id=243

Based on this Audit, the Ministry of Interior of the Czech Republic decided in May 2016 to establish a unit of 20 experts monitoring the spread of disinformation in the Czech media and disinformation campaigns in general, especially coming from Russia and the Islamic State. As of January 2017, the new “Centre for countering terrorism and hybrid threats” was established at the Ministry of Interior. Its task is to monitor the disinformation campaigns, send early warning alerts on politically relevant disinformation and train other parts of the state administration with special program focused on this threat.



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