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Testing Democratic Resolve in Slovakia

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This study examines the soft power activities of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China as they relate to Slovakia. The “soft power” mechanisms² of particular states should be examined in a number of contexts, including the nature of the state's political regime; the hierarchy of foreign-policy priorities of that state and the place that soft power promotion occupies in this hierarchy; the nature of bilateral relations between the promoter and the target of soft power; and the internal conditions in the target country.

Russia and China are non-free states with nondemocratic political regimes whose actions are characterized by the illiberal exercise of power. Both are key international players: Each holds the status of permanent member of the UN Security Council, and each is a nuclear power with specific geopolitical interests accompanied by assertive or even aggressive foreign policies that are marked by expansionist practices and rhetoric. To a certain degree, these factors have prompted Russia and China to embrace similar forms of soft power strategies.

At the same time, there are important differences between Russian- and Chinese-style soft power. With regard to Slovakia in particular, these differences spring from the countries' historic relationships with Central Europe and Slovakia, and their objectives in the region. Differences between Russia's and China's respective roles in international trade relations should be taken into account, as should the proportion and manner of their participation in the international division of labor, which affects the interactions of each with the outer world.

Slovakia has its own set of factors that shape its relations with foreign states. It is a democratic country that has completed the transition from authoritarianism to democracy. It is a member of the EU and of NATO, and its foreign policy and bilateral relations with other

international players are influenced by its integration into Euro-Atlantic structures. Since both Russia and China, as nondemocratic states, act as rivals of the Euro-Atlantic community (though often in different ways), their relations with Slovakia can hardly be based on close partnerships or alliances. However, the situation at a given time can play an important role acting in favor of, or against, the deepening and broadening of cooperation.

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RUSSIA

Ideological Constructs Behind the Russian Concept of Soft Power

Russia's soft-power efforts rely on an ideological arsenal of narratives that correspond to the main lines of Russian foreign policy. These narratives include certain interpretations of historical events, the circumstances of current developments in different regions of the world, and the actions of individual states. They include, for instance, the assessment of Russia's historical role during events of the twentieth century, especially during the Second World War (liberation of Europe from fascism and Nazism), Russia's exceptional ties with the Slavic nations, or Russia's policy toward and recent events concerning Ukraine.

One important line in the promotion of Russia's influence in Central Europe is support for social conservatism and "traditional values." This narrative presents Russia's moral superiority over the "decadent" West, and resonates with the reactionary and illiberal agendas of some fringe social and political movements, as well as with some segments of the nationalist and conservative establishment that oscillate around the edge of the political mainstream.³ This soft power strategy was recently described in the conceptual document *Strategy for Russia. Russian Foreign Policy: The End of the 2010s—Beginning of the 2020s*, released in 2016 by the Russian Council on Foreign and Defense Policy (SVOP).

SVOP serves as a reservoir of policy proposals for the leadership of the Russian state. The document argues that Russia offers an alternative set of values, which are drawn from the past and emphasize "state sovereignty; national dignity; noninterference into internal affairs [of foreign countries]; reliance on traditional social, personal, and family values; support for religion; [and] denial of militant secularism."⁴

Russian state-sponsored and pro-government media, which monopolize information inside Russia and dominate the media market for Russian-speaking communities abroad, represent a pivotal organizational element of the Russian system for exerting soft power.⁵ However, soft power is exerted not only by state-sponsored and pro-government media, but also by specialized Russian organizations active in scientific, professional, and cultural areas. These include a variety of agencies, institutes, funds, foundations, and associations created by the Russian state. These organizations are based in Russia, but some have branches abroad, including in EU member states.⁶

Russian Organizations Operating in Slovakia

A number of Russian organizations are active in Slovakia's cultural and scientific scenes. While some are affiliated with Russian government agencies or receive funding directly from the Russian state, others operate as nongovernmental organizations but are separated by only one degree from the Russian government, and conduct activities that support the objectives of the Russian government's foreign policy agenda.

ORGANIZATION NAME	TYPE OF ORGANIZATION	ACTIVITIES
Rossotrudnichestvo	State-sponsored institution	Funds Russian cultural organizations
Russian Center of Science and Culture (RCSC)	Cultural center (affiliated with the Russian embassy in Slovakia)	Hosts cultural events and marks historical anniversaries
Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO)	Postgraduate education and research institute (part of Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs)	Sends Russian experts to conferences in Slovakia
Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund	Foundation	Sends Russian experts to conferences in Slovakia
Russian Institute for Strategic Studies (RISI)	State research institute	Sends Russian experts to conferences in Slovakia
International Council of Russian Compatriots (ICRC)	Association	Connects with associations of ethnic Russians living in Slovakia
Valdai Discussion Club	Russian president's discussion forum	Invites Slovak participants to gatherings in Russia
Russkiy Mir Foundation	Foundation	Sponsors cultural events and conferences in Slovakia

The Historical, Political, and Cultural Roots of Russia's Influence in Slovakia

Slovaks' perceptions of Russia are shaped by the complex historical, political, and cultural relationship between the two countries. On the one hand, there are political and social actors in contemporary Slovakia who, in part by drawing on linguistic and cultural affinities with Russia, as well as on the idea of Russia as a protector of small Slavic nations from hostile forces, advocate for stronger Slovak-Russian relations. However, the negative experiences of Slovakia's relationship with the USSR after World War II, and more recently, Russia's resistance to Slovakia's decision to join NATO and the EU following the collapse of communism, give credence to pro-Western political and intellectual circles that are critical of Russia.

Recent opinion polls have shown that Slovaks are less critical of Russia and less pro-American than are Czechs, Hungarians, and Poles.⁷ Additionally, the 2017 *Vulnerability Index*,⁸ produced by the Bratislava-based GLOBSEC Policy Institute with other think tanks from the Visegrád 4 countries, surveyed the extent of each Visegrád country's vulnerability to subversive foreign—in this case, Russian—influence; it ranked Slovakia the second most vulnerable, after Hungary. The survey's results suggested a reluctance among many Slovaks to align with either Russia or the West, instead preferring an “in-between” position. This reflects persisting geopolitical ideas about Slovakia as a bridge between East and West, and about neutrality as an option for foreign

policy orientation. The survey also found a lack of effective state countermeasures to hostile foreign influences. The *Vulnerability Index*'s findings on Slovakia would seem to indicate Slovaks' underestimation of the existent risks of Russian state subversion, and a careless approach of Slovak institutions toward the issue.⁹ This provides Russia with fertile ground upon which to employ its tools of influence.

Indoctrination via the spread of Russian narratives through instruments of Russian influence is harmful for the value orientations of the population—it can weaken adherence to democratic values, decrease trust in the democratic system, and indirectly strengthen the positions of antisystem, extremist, Europhobic, and populist political forces.

Why is Slovakia so vulnerable in the areas in which Russia uses soft power tools in order to reach its goals? A significant factor is a historical Russophilia in Slovakia. In a country with a predominantly ethnic Slavic population, Slovak sociopolitical and intellectual circles have traditionally held the view that Slovakia maintains a special relationship with Russia on the basis of linguistic and cultural closeness. Additionally, especially during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, these circles imagined Russia as a defender of small Slavic nations in Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe from nations that were considered their historical enemies or oppressors, including Germans, Hungarians, and Turks. This narrative is still relevant in the country's public discourse in the twenty-first century. It is often used by opinion-shaping figures, including politicians and public intellectuals, and is shared by certain segments of the population. Given the close historical relationship between Slovakia and Russia, Russophilia continues to have a significant presence within Slovakia's domestic political and cultural discourse.

Historical Events Shaping Modern Slovakia–Russia Relations:

1914–18	1917	1939–45	1944	1948	1968–91	1989	1993	2004
World War I	The Communist Revolution in Russia	World War II	Slovak National Uprising	Communist Coup in Czechoslovakia	Prague Spring, USSR Invasion of Czechoslovakia, and Soviet Occupation	Collapse of Communism	Foundation of the Slovak Republic	EU and NATO Membership for Slovakia

Moreover, historical personalities who represented favorable attitudes toward the Russian state can still be found today throughout Slovakia's national cultural landscape.¹⁰ Among them is the nineteenth-century thinker Ľudovít Štúr, the codifier of the modern Slovak language and a proponent of the Russophile pan-Slavic concept in Slovakia, who is considered a formative influence on the linguistic and cultural identity of the Slovak nation. In his work *Sľovanstvo a svet budúcnosti* (Slavdom and the World of the Future), published in Russia in 1867, he concluded that the optimal and only meaningful option for all Slavs—including Slovaks, who in the nineteenth century did not have their own independent state—was unification with Russia and the accompanying dissolution of Slovak identity within the Russian nation. This involved the adoption of the Russian language and the conversion of all Slavs to Orthodox Christianity. Štúr's views have been cited frequently by others over time who promote convergence with Russia.¹¹ It is a paradox that Štúr—who during his life and more than century and a half after

his death is considered the epitome of Slovaks' efforts to sustain their independent national existence—proposed for his nation a solution which, if implemented, would mean its gradual disappearance as a separate ethnic entity with a specific language, culture, and other historically inherited characteristics. The state of affairs nowadays is, however, absolutely different: Slovakia is an independent democratic state, a free society, and an active part of Europe's multinational democratic community.

Attitudes toward Russia and Russians are also affected by the complicated social experience of Slovakia's population after World War II, when a communist regime backed by the Soviet Union took power in Czechoslovakia. Under this regime, the Slovak population benefited from a modernization process that equalized socioeconomic inequalities between the Czech and Slovak regions, somewhat softening the resentment of the Slovak population for being subjected to an undemocratic regime imposed from outside the country.

The Basic Framework of Bilateral Slovak-Russian Relations

Being an EU and NATO member state, Slovakia generally engages with Russia on a multilateral level, with the influence of these supranational bodies shaping the framework of Slovakia's cooperation in particular areas. However, Prime Minister Robert Fico has signaled an openness to developing deeper relations with Russia—particularly through economic and energy partnerships—on a bilateral basis if such opportunities emerge.

Slovak-Russian bilateral relations since 1993 have been dependent on the varying foreign-policy approaches of the dominant political forces in each; Slovakia's energy dependence on Russia has also played a notable role. Political parties that promoted Slovakia's pro-Western orientation, represented by its eventual accession to NATO and the EU, tried to build Slovak-Russian relations in a manner that would not complicate or negatively affect implementation of this basic pro-Western course. Essentially, these parties tried to separate economic cooperation with Russia on the one hand from the main priorities of a pro-Western political agenda on the other, in order to sidestep ideological differences and minimize their possible impact on domestic political development. Parties that were not the main drivers of the country's pro-Western line handled bilateral relations with Russia in a manner that—as they argued—did not contravene Slovakia's overall pro-Western course. They promoted, however, the unsustainable idea of participation in Euro-Atlantic integration and friendship with the Russian Federation.

This latter attitude was represented, and still is represented, by Fico's Direction–Social Democracy (Smer–SD) party. While Smer–SD representatives have characterized this approach as a sign of pragmatism, it is in fact inconsistent, and in its basic points unrealistic. It underestimates the fact that the Russian side always sought to prevent the deeper integration of former communist countries in Central Europe, including Slovakia, into European and Euro-Atlantic structures.

During the administration of populist Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar (1994–98) Slovakia effectively disqualified itself from joining the EU and NATO due to growing autocratic tendencies and internal political instability. Russia welcomed this development because it precluded Slovakia's closer cooperation with the West. In contrast to the reforms being implemented elsewhere in Central Europe, Mečiar's use of state media for propaganda, corrupt privatization ploys, and authoritarian political practices made Slovakia more closely resemble Russia than a Euro-Atlantic aspirant.¹²

Two important events that have influenced the Slovak-Russian relationship in recent years are Russia's annexation of Crimea, part of Ukraine's territory, and the Russian-inspired war in eastern Ukraine. As an EU member state, Slovakia abides by the common policy of sanctions imposed by the EU on Russia in response to its aggression. However, Prime Minister Fico many times has expressed support for lifting them.¹³ During an August 2016 visit to Moscow—just weeks after the EU voted to renew sanctions against Russia—Fico told Russian president Vladimir Putin that he did not see any reason for decreasing trade between Russia and Slovakia.¹⁴

A new element in bilateral Slovak-Russian relations that Slovak political actors should take into account when they define their approach to Russia is the recent rise of populist and extremist political forces, directly or indirectly supported by Russia, and the spread of toxic content via “alternative” pro-Russian media and social networks. The right-wing, neofascist People's Party—Our Slovakia (ĽSNS) grouping, which won representation in the Slovak parliament in 2016, expresses clearly pro-Russian foreign policy stances combined with fierce anti-EU and anti-NATO views. Formations such as ĽSNS became an unexpected—albeit problematic—ally of Russia on Slovakia's domestic political scene.

The Russian Community in Slovakia

Persons of Russian origin constitute a natural audience targeted by Russian soft power or propaganda tools. Due to historical circumstances in some countries, such as the Baltic states and Germany, this part of the population is relatively robust, and allows Russia some opportunity to transmit information through the Russian minority to a country's broader society. However, Slovakia's Russian population—meaning persons of Russian origin with Slovak citizenship, citizens of the Russian Federation living in Slovakia, as well as ethnic Russians with citizenship of other states—is very small, comprising 0.1% of the country's total population of 5.4 million.¹⁵ According to Slovakia's 2011 census, 1,997 ethnic Russians lived in Slovakia.¹⁶ The number of Russian citizens with permanent residence in the Slovak Republic in 2015 was 3,532.¹⁷ Nevertheless, Russian actors do try to engage this population, both on an individual and organizational level. Presumably, there are considerations behind these efforts, such as that in smaller countries like Slovakia, even a small number of people and organizations can make a meaningful impact. This is relevant not only for ethnic minority organizations, but also for other types of associations and initiatives.

One organization that presents itself as a representative of ethnic Russians living in the Slovak Republic is the Union of Russians in Slovakia (ZRS),¹⁸ which has been registered as a civic association with the Slovak Ministry of Interior since 1997 and counts among its early achievements a successful drive to see Russians formally recognized as an ethnic minority in Slovakia.¹⁹ It is a member of the International Council of Russian Compatriots (ICRC), a grouping established by the Russian government in 2001.²⁰ In 2003, the Slovak Government Council for Ethnic Minorities recognized ZRS as a representative of Russians in Slovakia, and thus ethnic Russians were officially counted by the state as one of Slovakia's ethnic minorities. ZRS consists of eight formally independent regional organizations of “compatriots” (expats) that operate under different names.²¹ All Russian expatriate organizations in Slovakia cooperate closely with ZRS, even those which are not formal members of the association. According to the Russian Embassy's website, ZRS has 1,500 members. ZRS's activities are marked by an apparent discrepancy between its mission as defined in its statute and its actual activities. Formally, ZRS is a domestic civic association established for the purpose of fulfilling the needs of Slovak citizens of Russian origin and fostering cooperation with other ethnic minority associations, both in Slovakia and abroad.²²

But in recent years, the organization has grown closer to the Russian government, including various state organs such as the Russian embassy in Bratislava. This shift corresponded with the consolidation of the current political regime in Russia, especially in the years after Russia annexed Crimea and initiated a separatist rebellion and military conflict in eastern Ukraine.

Although ZRS's statute claims it is an apolitical organization, some of its major events, as well as the public appearances of its representatives, reflect political views close to the positions and policies of the Russian government. Moreover, the Russian embassy in Bratislava supports the activities of the ZRS, and embassy representatives, including the ambassador, take part in ZRS events, which include concerts, exhibitions, and lectures. ZRS meetings are held on the premises of the Russian Center for Science and Culture (RCSC), which is part of the embassy and sometimes formally co-organizes events with the ZRS. Participants of events organized with the involvement of the RCSC generally represent the official positions of the Russian state on various historical narratives, as well as on the interpretation of Russia's relations with other states.

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Beginning in 1999, ZRS has produced a bimonthly magazine, *Vmeste* (Together), for its members; it is jointly funded by Moscow's municipal government and the Slovak government.²³ Although print circulation is quite small, at only 350 copies, the way the magazine describes itself is remarkable. While the Slovak-language subtitle on the cover page defines it as a "Journal of the Russian ethnic minority in Slovakia," the Russian subtitle on the same page defines the magazine as a "Journal of the Russian-speaking community of Slovakia." The content of its articles reveals clear ideological inclinations, including criticism of "liberal" values, "immoralism," and "cosmopolitanism" being imported from the West, versus support for "traditional" and "national" values. EU policies in some areas, including its policies on refugee resettlement, are sharply criticized. Although the circulation of the journal is too low to meaningfully influence public discourse, its content is illustrative of how some Russian-speaking citizens are involved in activities of Russian soft-power projection.

The ZRS also closely cooperates with the Slovak-Russian Society (SRS), another formally registered Slovak civic association.²⁴ The SRS is known for its strong anti-NATO, anti-American, and anti-Western stance; it is today the most committed supporter among Slovak NGOs of Russia, Russian foreign policy, and Slovak-Russian cooperation. Its members include Slovakia's citizens of Russian origin as well as ethnic Slovaks who share critical attitudes toward liberal democracy and integration with NATO and the EU. In effect, the organization challenges the official foreign-policy priorities of the Slovak Republic.

ZRS and SRS co-organize some public events, and their representatives take similar stances concerning domestic and international affairs. SRS chairman Ján Čarnogurský—the former anti-Communist dissident, chairman of the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH, 1990–2000), and prime minister (1991–92) and minister of justice (1998–2002)—is the author of numerous articles, and frequently appears in interviews during which he advocates for Russian foreign, security, and defense policies. Speaking in his capacity as the head of SRS, Čarnogurský criticizes Western countries for their alleged anti-Russian policies, expresses his objections to the EU as a "non-Slavic" project, and blames NATO and the U.S. for aggressive, warmongering rhetoric.

For a long time, SRS's website has served as an aggregator of reports produced by Russian officials, the Russian Embassy in Bratislava, and pro-Russian media in Slovakia and other countries (especially in the Czech Republic), with a clear intention of justifying the foreign policy line of the current Russian leadership and questioning Western policies.

The SRS (among others) has invoked the concept of "Russophobia" in order to discredit liberal democracy and Slovakia's pro-Western agenda. The term Russophobia was invented by Russian Slavophile writers of the nineteenth century to label negative attitudes toward Russians. For many years it was primarily used as a tool of extreme Russian nationalists. It is now used by official representatives of the Russian Federation to describe any critical stance toward Russia or its foreign or domestic policies, as well as events unfavorable to the current Russian regime's illiberal paradigm, such as the Euromaidan protests in Ukraine, sanctions imposed by Western states against Russia for its incursions into Ukraine, NATO and EU enlargement, and Western support for dissidents in the former USSR. In early 2015, the SRS conducted a survey asking its members and supporters to identify the "worst Russophobes" in Slovakia from several categories including individual politicians, organizations, and media outlets.²⁵ The SRS's employment of this concept of Russophobia offers local supporters an opportunity to claim that proponents of liberal democracy and Slovakia's pro-Western orientation oppose Russia and Russians on the basis of ethnic prejudice. This SRS initiative aligned with the stance of Russia's Ministry of Culture, which in 2016 announced a public tender for a study titled "Russophobia and de-Russification," the purpose of which would be to identify tools for the fight against Russophobia, which was characterized as a growing trend that threatened Russia's national security.²⁶

Media

Slovak media outlets are to a large degree divided by their attitudes toward political and socioeconomic reforms, with debates over the foundations of Slovakia's current liberal-democratic regime and pro-Western foreign-policy orientation common. These debates, including over membership in the EU and NATO, trace their origins to Slovakia's democratic transition in 1990. Usually, media outlets and journalists that have favorable attitudes toward the process of democratization have also demonstrated positive attitudes towards Slovakia's membership in the EU and NATO. Such outlets have thus taken critical stances toward internal and external forces that oppose democratic reforms and Slovak participation in the two organizations.

The Russian government has been the primary external force opposing Slovakia's membership in the EU and NATO.²⁷ Russia's position has duly evoked negative responses from the part of the Slovak political and media scene that favors liberal democracy and a pro-Western orientation in Slovakia, but a positive response from Slovak media that oppose a pro-Western trajectory. It was therefore quite expected that after Russia's aggression toward Ukraine, the Slovak media became polarized according to each outlet's approach to Russian policies.

After Russia's annexation of Crimea and occupation of Donbas, the Russian state launched a massive propaganda campaign in Europe and across the world to justify its aggressive policies, discredit Ukraine, and confront the West. The main actors of this campaign were Russian state-sponsored media, which target news consumers in Russia, Ukraine, and other post-Soviet states, as well as the Russian-speaking diaspora in Europe. Slovakia, too, has become the focus of Russia's propaganda machine, with both Russian state media outlets and some local Slovak media involved in processes aimed at shaping opinions to favor Russian policies.

Russian Media in Slovakia

Selected Russian television channels are available in Slovakia through nationwide and local subscription-based cable networks. Russian channels, and notably RT, a news channel run by the Russian government, are available through four of Slovakia's seven nationwide cable and satellite networks.²⁸ RT is among Slovakia's "free-to-air" channels that may be included with cable packages at no extra cost; cable operators determine whether to include free-to-air channels in their packages. In contrast, CNN and BBC belong to another category of news channels that offer their broadcasting to cable operators in exchange for payment. As one anonymous source at a cable network mentioned, "CNN is quite expensive."

Sources working in cable television indicated that they perceive RT to be a standard international television news channel, either failing to recognize or choosing to ignore the fact that it can be a source of disinformation. However, at the same time, operators do not ascribe high importance to RT and consider its reach minimal. Indeed, according to studies of television audiences in Slovakia, Russian channels have very low viewership.²⁹ Media analyst Miroslava Kernová, editor of the *Omediach* web portal, argues that "RT's rating is definitely below 0.1 percent; It can be watched by only a few thousand people. In general, the average Slovak viewer has little interest in foreign news channels."³⁰



In recent years, the mainstream Slovak television channels have paid less attention to international events, focusing news reports mostly on domestic agendas. It is thus likely that some viewers who seek out alternative sources of information about international affairs watch Russian television channels, either via cable or online. Such viewers may include those with positive perceptions of the previous communist regime, and those who combine resistance to liberal reforms and Slovakia's pro-Western orientation with pan-Slavic sentiments and Russophilia. Viewing Russian television channels can potentially strengthen these ideological patterns and inclinations.

Slovak Media Coverage of Russia

Slovak independent media have played a crucial role promoting democratic values and endorsing Slovakia's integration with the European community, and mainstream outlets generally

take a pro-Western line and are critical of Russian foreign policy, especially since Russia's incursion into Ukraine.

The opinion-making mainstream print media of liberal (or liberal-conservative) orientation—the daily *Sme* (We), daily *Denník N* (Daily N) and weekly *.týždeň* (Week), known for their pro-reform and pro-Western orientation—harshly criticized ongoing Russian aggression against Ukraine. They condemn Russia's propaganda war against the West. The content of articles published in these outlets reflects the values that these periodicals have supported over the long-term: Slovakia's pro-Western foreign policy orientation, socio-economic reforms, membership in the Atlantic community, liberal democracy, an open society, and civic principles.

However, there are some exceptions among mainstream outlets. The pro-government, left-leaning daily newspaper *Pravda* publishes articles manifesting understanding for some of Russia's foreign policy steps. At the same time, *Pravda* also publishes articles that correspond with Slovakia's general pro-Western orientation. The inconsistency of views here is a consequence of personal preferences of individual journalists and editors.

Ambivalent (and sometimes camouflaged) pro-Russian stances are manifested to some extent by the private television channel TA3. Pro-Russian attitudes and criticism of the EU, U.S., NATO, and Ukraine are commonly found in the pro-government, biweekly periodical *Slovenský rozhľad*, which is close to Smer–SD. Its articles also offer support for Fico's initiatives aimed at strengthening cooperation with Russia.

Other outlets taking a pro-Russian, anti-Western stance include the web portal *Slovo*, the biweekly periodical *Literárny týždenník*, and the monthly Extra Plus. The Slovak Union of Antifascist Fighters, a group representing those who fought in the antifascist uprising of 1944 and members of their families, publishes the periodical *Bojovník*, which prints materials taken directly from Russian sources, and has openly supported separatist rebels in Donbas.

The relatively new cultural and social magazine *Pontes* is devoted almost exclusively to Russia and issues related to Russia, and publishes articles on culture, art, travel, and science. It also carries articles on historical and political topics, which generally reflect positive attitudes toward the policies of Russia's current leadership. The magazine's publisher, Izdatelstvo Ltd., registered in Slovakia in August 2014 as a private company co-owned by several Slovak citizens and another limited company registered to Russian citizens under a residential address in Moscow.³¹ (The company's name, "Izdatelstvo," is the Russian word for "publishing house.") Unusually for a culture magazine, it also offers commercial services including recommendations for trustworthy business partners in Russia, as well as professional assistance in establishing entities in both Slovak and Russian markets.

Pro-Russian programming is also found in public media, including on the public Radio and Television of Slovakia (RTVS). The broadcaster's second television channel, which shows educational programs and documentaries, has screened a number of Soviet and Russian films and programs that contain ideologically motivated narratives. One notable example was the three-part documentary *Russian Secrets of World War I*, which featured the Russian radical nationalist historian Natalia Narochnitskaya. The documentary's screening suggests that among those within RTVS management responsible for purchasing programs from abroad are persons who at a minimum appear to underestimate the risk of toxic ideological influence, if

they do not directly support such ideas. Pro-Western Slovak journalists characterized this as a “spreading of Russian lies, undermining our democracy.”³² The aired Russian documentary programs emphasize distrust of the West and of democracy, and are often based on misleading interpretations of history.

Slovakia's largest public news agency, TASR, has only a few of its own reporters working abroad, and consequently carries reports from foreign media on international affairs. Among the organizations with which it has cooperation and exchange agreements is Russia's TASS agency; TASR often disseminates reports taken from TASS's service.³³ TASR does not noticeably differentiate foreign reports from its own, and true sources of information may not be clear to Slovak recipients. Moreover, for many Slovak local media, TASR is one of the most readily available sources of information; In this manner, Russian state news can be inadvertently packaged as being from TASR and distributed by Slovak media.

In March 2017, the Russian media agency Sputnik announced that it had reached a cooperation agreement with TASR. The report prompted an immediate outcry, as Sputnik in November 2016 had been included in the European Parliament's list of media and other organizations taking part in Russian information warfare against the EU.³⁴ The pressure from civil society, independent media, and some opposition figures was so strong that TASR cancelled its contract with Sputnik days after its initial announcement.

Slovakia is also home to a variety of conspiracy-minded fringe outlets that typically combine a direct approval of Russia's state policies with criticism of the West. Such outlets include the web portals *Hlavné správy*, *Medzičas*, and the online radio station *Slobodný vysielateľ*. In 2014, Russia's military invasion of Ukraine, its annexation of Crimea, and the separatist rebellion in the Donbas—inspired, organized, and supported by Russia—gave pro-Russian media outlets in Slovakia an opportunity to be engaged in a propaganda campaign related to the issue of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and to particular events in this context.³⁵ All of the fringe media outlets unambiguously support Russia's policies, and they demonstrate it openly, without hesitation. There is no open evidence (or disclosed information) about Russia's direct material support for these outlets, either from public or from private sources. However, there have been a few documented attempts of fringe Slovak outlets attempting to seek support from the Russian government.

Among these is the monthly *Zem a Vek*, which praises the current Russian regime and the separatist rebellion in Donbas, while weaving anti-Semitic conspiracy theories into its criticism of liberal democratic values, the EU, and NATO. In May 2015, the magazine's editors, Tibor Rostás and Dušan Budzák, met with the Russian ambassador to Slovakia, Pavel Kuznetsov, and asked him to consider backing their media activities, including a planned online television channel, as well as an unidentified “new political force.” The conversation during the meeting was taped, probably by the participants themselves, and later leaked and posted on YouTube. The Russian ambassador avoided direct promises of support during the meeting, but said he could provide assistance finding helpful contacts in Moscow.³⁶ At the beginning of 2015, *Zem a Vek* announced the start of a petition for Slovakia's withdrawal from NATO, a clear step supporting Russia's foreign policy line.³⁷

In 2016, a group of people with links to *Slobodný vysielateľ* and *Zem a Vek* established INTV, a pro-Russian television channel in Slovakia which broadcasts pro-Russian, anti-Western,

and radical-nationalist content.³⁸ The founders were previously engaged in the radio program *Slobodný vysielateľ* (Free Broadcaster) and were also close to the *Zem a Vek* magazine. The establishment of INTV represented an attempt to build a broader complex of pro-Russian conspiracy and disinformation media outlets (a periodical, radio station, and TV channel). The channel formally emerged as a result of the renaming of a pre-existing TV channel, *Karpaty* (Carpathians). A company of the same name became INTV's owner, but with new co-owners. The Broadcasting and Retransmission Council, Slovakia's licensing authority, extended the broadcast licenses to rename TV *Karpaty* as INTV. Subsequently, INTV was included at no extra cost within the packages of several cable operators. The station requested to be included in satellite broadcasting, too, which indicates that the owners had sufficient funding to operate their TV without needing to solicit extra broadcasting fees from satellite and cable providers. However, the channel's television broadcasting stopped only a short time after it was launched, reportedly because of personal conflicts between the channel's founders as well as difficulties attracting qualified staff.³⁹ INTV representatives then failed to notify the licensing authority and cable operators that broadcasting had stopped, placing the channel in violation of the law. Its license was subsequently cancelled, and cable companies withdrew INTV from their offerings. The project's failure appears to be related to personal conflicts among the new channel's founding staff, a low level of professionalism among its employees, and the inability of the channel owners to hire credible, qualified editors. According to one trustworthy source, INTV was given a broadcasting license—despite the dubious credibility of its founders—because some members of the licensing authority were convinced that such “alternative” media would serve as a counterbalance to the pro-Western mainstream media.⁴⁰

Undeterred by INTV's failure and united by their pro-Russian, nationalist, anti-Western, and conspiracy-minded views, in November 2016 the operators of *Zem a Vek* and *Slobodný vysielateľ*, along with those of the *Hlavné správy* and *Medzičas* web portals, formed the Association of Independent Media (ANM), a union apparently formed to boost the outlets' public profiles. In July 2017, Rostás of *Zem a Vek* announced plans to create a pan-Slavic media holding, claiming that he was in negotiations with Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov and deputy of State Duma Viacheslav Nikonov to that end.⁴¹

Meanwhile, the presence of outright Russian propaganda in Slovakia exploded in the wake of Russia's annexation of Crimea and incursion into eastern Ukraine. Dozens of Slovak- and Czech-language websites emerged following these events, offering support for the Russian position alongside nationalist, xenophobic, and anti-Western views.⁴² The websites, which frequently cite the same positions, often feature Russian sources and personalities and present themselves as the holders of “real truth,” independent of the interests and money of powerful globalist elites. Many of them were founded before the Ukrainian crisis but only began publishing after these events, suggesting that this network may have been established with some degree of planning.⁴³

Academia

In 1995, the Slovak and Russian governments formed the Intergovernmental Commission for Economic, Scientific, and Technical Cooperation. Its statutes outline the basic framework for bilateral cooperation in those areas, with partners typically including the countries' respective governments, ministries of culture and education, and national academies of science. This commission lays out the standard conditions for educational and academic cooperation between the two countries, and has provided avenues for bilateral, mutually-beneficial cooperation in the areas within its scope.

However, this more formal framework is less conducive to Russian soft-power efforts that seek to justify more illiberal or aggressive state policies, such as its annexation of Crimea and incursion into eastern Ukraine. Therefore, in recent years, Russian institutions in Slovakia have greatly stepped up their efforts to organize events that use an academic pretense to promote views reflecting the Russian government's perspectives on history, global development, and international relations in Europe and beyond.

Frequently, Russian institutions will seek out partnerships with local, private educational or academic institutions in order to boost an event's profile and confer legitimacy upon it. Cooperation with private partners is easier for the Russian organizers than is cooperation with public universities, as the former tend to be "independent" of official pro-Western policies, as well as smaller and more flexible in their decision-making processes.

Framework Agreements Between Slovakia and Russia

Agreements made since the establishment of the 1995 Intergovernmental Commission for Economic, Scientific, and Technical Cooperation include:

The agreement between the governments of Slovakia and the Russian Federation on cooperation in the areas of culture, education, and science (signed in 1995, valid without time limitation).

The agreement between the ministries of education of Slovakia and the Russian Federation on cooperation in the area of education (signed in 2006, valid without time limitation).

The agreement between the Slovak Education Ministry and the Russian Science Ministry on cooperation in the areas of science and technology (signed in 1995, valid without time limitation).

The memorandum on mutual cooperation between the Slovak Education Ministry and the Committee for Informatization of the president of the Russian Federation (signed in 1995, valid without time limitation).

The program of cooperation between the ministries of culture of Slovakia and the Russian Federation (signed in 2013, valid between 2013 and 2017).

The agreement on scientific cooperation between the Slovak Academy of Sciences and the Russian Academy of Sciences (signed in 1993, renewable every 5 years).

For example, in April 2016, the Russian Embassy in Bratislava organized a conference called "Russia's Geopolitics" in cooperation with the Educational and Consulting Institute in Bratislava (a branch of the High School of International and Public Relations in Prague), as well as the Central European Education Institute. Attendees included the Russian ambassador, the rector of the Prague-based high school, representatives of several Russian academic institutions, representatives of academic institutions from Slovakia and the Czech Republic, and, notably, the well-known Russian nationalist author Nikolay Starikov. Despite the partnership with local academic institutions, the conference was held in the hall of a private hotel, and its

discussion panels generally served not as platforms for genuine expert discussion, but justified the positions of the Russian government on topics including the development of the Russian state, common challenges for Russia and the EU, Russia's role in global institutions, and Russia's view on its military and political situation in the world.

In September 2016, the Russian journal *Mezhdunarodnaya Zhizn*, or International Affairs,⁴⁴ in cooperation with the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, organized in Bratislava the international conference, "Russia and Europe: Topical Issues of Contemporary International Journalism." The conference's primary goal was "to cover the issues of interaction between Russian and European media." Attendees included the Russian ambassador, the deputy head of Russia's Federal Agency for Press and Mass Communication, Ján Čarnogurský of the SRS, and representatives of several Russian state institutions, including MFA, MGIMO, Foundation "Russian World"), and Russian media.

In September 2015, the Russian embassy in Slovakia arranged for a lecture tour by the Russian historian Sviatoslav Rybas, whose views are closely aligned with the current Russian government. He visited several secondary schools and universities in Košice, Banská Bystrica, and Bratislava. In his lectures, he claimed that Czechoslovak leader Alexander Dubček, whose attempts to introduce liberal reforms during the communist period led to the 1968 Soviet-backed invasion of Czechoslovakia, had telephoned Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev to request the invasion. The Russian embassy posted a report on Rybas's lectures on its Facebook page, which sparked outrage among Slovak readers angered by the portrayal of Dubček as a traitor. The embassy later withdrew the report.⁴⁵

In February 2016, Sergej Chelemendik, a nationalist Russian writer living in Slovakia, invited the Russian Stalinist and nationalist political scientist Nikolay Starikov to lecture in Bratislava. Starikov counts among his books *Russia's Main Enemy: All Evil Comes from the West*, and through that lens, during his Slovak lecture series, offered his views on U.S. foreign policy, the situation in Ukraine, and NATO bases in Slovakia.⁴⁶ Among the groups that hosted Starikov was a club associated with the pro-Russian *Nové slovo* web portal.⁴⁷ The visit came after the publishing house of the nationalist-oriented Society of Slovak Writers had published Starikov's book, *Geopolitics*, the previous year.⁴⁸

In March 2017, the Russian embassy organized a lecture tour in Slovakia for Andranik Migranyan, a Kremlin-backed author and political science professor, and a strong supporter of Russia's foreign policy, particularly in Ukraine. Matej Bel University of Banská Bystrica, which had signed a cooperation agreement with the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO) in December 2016, declined the embassy's request to organize Migranyan's lecture for students—probably given that hosting such a controversial figure could damage the university's credibility. However, two other institutes—the public University of Economics in Bratislava, and the private Central European High School in Skalica—agreed to host Migranyan. His lectures there provoked critical responses in the Slovak media and among politicians, who expressed concern that the facilities had helped to amplify Russian propaganda.⁴⁹

In April 2017, the Russian embassy proposed that another controversial Russian scholar, Vladimir Kozin, lecture at Slovak universities on Russia's policy in Syria. Kozin, an expert at the Russian Institute for Strategic Studies (RISI), is known for his anti-American stances and his attacks on NATO and the West. Matej Bel University once again declined the embassy's

request, as it had turned down the request to host Migranyan. Kozin ended up lecturing at a conference organized by a local Armenian association and an organization called the Pan-European Center for Political and Economic Analyses and Prognoses (PANAP). The event was supported by Russia's embassy and attended by local pro-Russian activists including Čarnogurský, as well as by Štefan Harabin, the former minister of justice and former chairman of Supreme Court. Kozin then lectured in Bratislava at a local branch of the Czech High School of International and Public Relations, and was invited to participate in a discussion program on the private television channel TA3.

In May 2017, at the invitation of the Russian embassy in Bratislava, Alexey Podberezkin, a former Russian lawmaker and current director of the Center for Military and Political Studies at MGIMO, delivered lectures at the Czech High School of International and Public Relations and the Central European High School in Skalica, during which he promoted the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), a Russian-led military alliance intended as a counterweight to NATO.⁵⁰ He too was invited to appear on TA3.

In addition to organizing lectures in Slovakia, the Russian government also promotes its foreign policy and values through exchange programs. Some aspects of these programs do provide Slovak students with educational opportunities. However, they also give the Russian government the opportunity to expose Slovak students to its preferred narratives that promote ostensibly traditional values over liberal-democratic ones, and justify Russia's aggressive foreign policy in Ukraine.

In December 2016, the political science faculty at Matej Bel University concluded a cooperation and exchange agreement with MGIMO. In accordance with the agreement, Slovak students can spend summers at a camp in Odintsovo, near Moscow. As UMB rector Vladimír Hladovský said in an interview for the Russian-language online resource svk360.com, after his appointment as head of the university in 2014, he focused on "broadening cooperation with China and [the] Russian Federation." As justification for the cooperation between UMB and MGIMO, he emphasized that "MGIMO is one the most prestigious universities in the world."⁵¹

The Institute for Russian-Slovak Cultural Studies operates at the Catholic University in Ružomberok, in northern Slovakia, and focuses on past and present Russian-Slovak cultural links. Its partner organizations include the Russkiy Mir Foundation, an influential Russian soft power organization that propagates Kremlin-approved views on history and culture through its Russian-language classes and other programs.

Until recently, Russkiy Mir also funded the Russian Center at the private Pan-European High School located in Bratislava, though it was not a formal part of the school. Čarnogurský, the head of the pro-Russian SRS and one of the founders of this school, was linked to the Russian Center's establishment, and for a time the body held joint public events with the RCSC, SRS, and ZRS. The Russian Center closed in 2015, after a new Czech owner took over the school's management from the previous Russian owner.

Among public Slovak universities, it seems that the most favorable conditions for cooperation with Russian actors exist at the Institute of Economy of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, which regularly hosts representatives from the Russian embassy and visiting scholars from Russian state universities. Several scholars either working at the Institute or in close cooperation with it hold

critical attitudes toward liberal democracy and globalization (which they consider a harmful U.S.-led phenomenon), and hold that an aggressive West works to diminish the role of other actors, including Russia. Figures with similar profiles also teach at the Economic University in Bratislava. Such figures from the two mentioned public institutions have participated in events organized by Russian institutions and their local partners.

Slovak academics who favor Russian policies are offered attractive opportunities to travel to Russia in order to participate in “prestigious” events, such as meetings of the Valdai Club or to lecture at Russian universities, publish articles in Russian scholarly periodicals, and generally partake in activities through which they may earn professional recognition in Russia.

According to some experts monitoring the issue of Russia’s influence in Slovakia, Slovak academics who favor Russian policies are offered attractive opportunities to travel to Russia in order to participate in “prestigious” events, such as meetings of the Valdai Club—an academic conference backed by the Russian government that typically draws high-profile members of the Russian administration and the country’s academic elite—or to lecture at Russian universities, publish articles in Russian scholarly periodicals, and generally partake in activities through which they may earn professional recognition in Russia. Such figures may also enjoy private trips to more remote, tourist-oriented locations on invitation from Russian organizations.⁵²

Think Tanks

Russian efforts to infiltrate the space of independent policy analysis in Slovakia have been extremely limited, as the community of Slovak independent scholars working at think tanks is strongly pro-Western and pro-Atlanticist. Therefore, Russian actors with pro-Russian viewpoints have found it easier to cooperate with Slovak public (state-backed) academic institutions.

Slovakia’s think-tank community emerged in the second half of the 1990s, when various institutes were formed as part of the struggle to establish a democratic political system, implement liberal socioeconomic reforms, and participate in Euro-Atlantic integration. Their partners and donors were mostly foundations, funds, and other think tanks operating in the U.S. and Western Europe, or independent centers of analysis in other transitioning countries including the Baltic states and other members of the group of Central European countries comprising the Visegrád 4. Without exception, these think tanks supported Slovakia’s membership in the EU and NATO, the values of liberal democracy, and the overall pro-Western line of the post-communist government.

The pro-democratic and pro-Western orientation of Slovak think tanks is as strong today as it was during the previous two decades. Think tanks constitute an inseparable part of the community seeking to ensure Slovakia’s embeddedness in Euro-Atlantic groupings. Moreover, representatives of these think tanks—which include the GLOBSEC Policy Institute, the Institute for Public Affairs (IVO), the Slovak Foreign Policy Association (SFPA), the Strategic Policy Institute (STRATPOL), the Center for European and North Atlantic Affairs (CENAA), the Slovak Security Policy Institute (SSPI), and the Euro-Atlantic Center (EAC)—in recent years have begun to warn the Slovak public about the risks created by Russia’s efforts to influence the country’s domestic politics, media scene, public discourse, and foreign policy, and have urged the Slovak government to intensify its countermeasures.

Because the pro-Western orientation of Slovakia’s think tanks is essentially fixed, the probability of pro-Russian infiltration of think tanks and subsequent indoctrination of public space by

disseminating pro-Russian content through them is close to zero. Given the Slovak think tank community's robust support for liberal values, there have been no known attempts by Russia to establish analytical centers that would influence public discourse in favor of Russia. There is no space within Slovakia's independent analytical centers for Russia to promote illiberal or anti-Western narratives.

As an example of the strength and independence of Slovakia's think tank community, efforts by several Russian state-backed research institutes to engage in a series of dialogues with their Slovak counterparts were discontinued, after a first attempt at organizing one such meeting was met with skepticism and even resistance from the Slovak side. In May 2016, SFPA organized an expert roundtable, "Slovak-Russian Discussion Forum I" with the stated goal of establishing working relations between Slovak and Russia experts and providing a space for the exchange of opinions; it included representatives from the Russian embassy, as well as from Russian bodies including the Gorchakov Fund, the Center for International and Regional Policy, MGIMO, RISI, the National Energy Security Fund, the Institute of Europe of the Russian Academy of Science, Saint Petersburg State University, and the Russian news agency REGNUM. In the end, several Slovak participants took clearly critical stances toward Russia's foreign policy, and the Russian partners dropped their requests to hold future meetings.

Culture

Established through a bilateral agreement in 2001, the Russian Center of Science and Culture, or RCSC, which is part of Russia's official diplomatic mission in Slovakia, is the main actor promoting Russian culture in Slovakia.⁵³ Since its establishment, RCSC has organized hundreds of concerts, art and photography shows, book exhibits, and other cultural events, as well as dozens of scientific conferences, symposia, and roundtable discussions.

RCSC tries to present itself as a peer among state cultural institutes of established democracies, such as the Czech Republic's Czech Centers, Germany's Goethe Institutes, France's Alliance Française institutes, Poland's Polish Institutes, or Spain's Cervantes Institutes. However, there are several key differences in the way RCSC operates that distinguish it from traditional state-funded cultural institutes. First, the RCSC is more formally integrated within the Russian government as a unit of Russia's diplomatic mission in Slovakia. Second, rather than offering cultural activities that promote and represent Russian civil society, its activities since its founding have corresponded quite closely with Russia's foreign policy. Events organized by RCSC often carry a clear ideological message aimed at influencing Slovak domestic public discourse in favor of views shared by the Russian government. This stands in contrast to the public diplomacy of states whose cultural events offer opportunities for local people to view performances or artifacts without ideological accompaniments designed to influence domestic public discourse. Especially after 2014, when Russia came into a sharp confrontation with the West over events that have undermined democracy in Ukraine, RCSC's cultural events have focused on Russian state patriotism; the uniqueness of Russia's history; the legacy of its military victories, especially in the "Great Patriotic War"; cooperation with Slovakia and other Central European countries based on common Slavic linguistic and cultural roots; the spiritual role of Orthodox Christianity and the Russian Orthodox Church; and the values of "social conservatism," including family, tradition, and religion. Russia's independent or critically engaged artists are not usually invited to participate in cultural and educational events at the RCSC.

The RCSC also serves as a hub that connects Russian state, academic, cultural, and other institutions and organizations with Slovak partners, including local agencies and governments, business groups, and associations of Russians in Slovakia. By facilitating these connections and organizing cultural events that involve these groups, the RCSC has an opportunity to preside over cultural events that combine arts with its preferred sociopolitical message and Russian patriotic narratives. While some of these events attracted relatively limited audiences, others have drawn many participants.

Analysis

The Russian government leverages an array of soft power tools to project authoritarian influence in Slovakia. These include local pro-Russian organizations that frequently cooperate with Russian government institutions; fringe conspiratorial media; lecture programs, conferences and academic exchanges that promote a particular ideological agenda; and politicized cultural events. Many of these activities are coordinated with assistance from the Russian embassy and the RCSC.

The ultimate goal of Russian influence efforts in Slovakia is to weaken the country's ties with EU and NATO, and, if the situation would allow it, to achieve Slovakia's withdrawal from both groupings and instead see the country's alignment with Russia. The second apparent goal of Russia's soft power operations in Slovakia is to weaken the population's support for universal liberal values, democratic norms and principles, human rights, and trust in democratic institutions. Russia's influence efforts aim to displace societal values that emphasize democratic standards and individual freedoms. They do so by supporting alternative ideas such as "traditional values" of religious fundamentalism, ethno-nationalism, and Slavic solidarity.

Another important goal of Russia's soft power activities is to neutralize the negative impact its aggressive and expansionist steps have had on its own image in the international arena, and to instead project an image of the regime's strong credibility. To this end, the Russian regime collaborates with Russian groups in Slovakia that present pro-Russian, anti-Western views. The key element in working toward this goal is supporting the spread of narratives that justify and legitimize Russia's foreign and domestic policies.

Efforts to weaken Western pressure on Russia in response to its aggressive foreign policy and subversive activities inside the West are also a target of Russia's soft power efforts, including those carried out in Slovakia in last three years. As an EU member state, Slovakia is a part of the EU's common political decision-making mechanisms; It has supported all EU decisions concerning sanctions against Russia, and abides by the sanctions regime. However, some Slovak officials including Prime Minister Fico have cast doubt on the necessity and effectiveness of sanctions. He has instead offered a "pragmatic" view of the benefits of economic cooperation with Russia, characterizing Russia as an inevitable, unavoidable partner upon which Slovakia's economic development is dependent. Such statements, combined with Russia's observed soft power efforts, have the worrying potential to encourage skepticism toward the West and to diminish support for democratic assistance in the countries of the Eastern Partnership, including Ukraine. A shift toward a pro-Russian trajectory in Slovakia—which already views Russia more favorably than some of its neighbors—could lead to disunity within the EU and NATO, and ultimately contribute to growing internal disputes and conflicts within the international democratic community.



CHINA

China's Foreign Policy Priorities in Central Europe

Central Europe has not historically been a priority in Chinese foreign policy. Moreover, China has had somewhat fraught relations with some countries in the region, notably the Czech Republic and Poland, which used to be leading critics of the Chinese regime and maintained high-level contacts with Taiwan. Central European countries are now of increasing interest to China due to the countries' membership in the EU, with China viewing them as an avenue through which it might influence EU decision making. Since 2004—when the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia, among others, joined the EU—there has been intensified diplomatic activity from China targeting the Central European region. At the same time, China's growing economic and political significance has also prompted these states to adopt a more pragmatic China policy.

Chinese foreign policy toward Central European countries has three main priorities. As elsewhere in the world, the first priority is securing adherence to the One China principle. As the sinologist Martin Slobodník has observed, for China this not only means that states should maintain diplomatic relations with Beijing and not Taipei: The Chinese government recently broadened the principle to imply that government representatives should also avoid contact with the Dalai Lama.⁵⁴ In addition, China pressures Central European states to minimize interactions with Taiwan on cultural and economic matters, as well as to refrain from meeting with Chinese dissidents and representatives of Uyghur associations that are independent from the Chinese government.

Second, since initiating the 16+1 platform in 2012, China expects each state to be an active contributor to the forum, through which it seeks to foster cooperation with sixteen Central and Eastern European countries. This involves, above all, sending a highest-level delegate—either a prime minister or president—to attend the annual 16+1 summit and to sign a joint document that outlines activities for the forthcoming period. The forum allows China to propagate its landmark enterprises, notably the Belt and Road Initiative and the investment deals that are part of it, such as the reconstruction of Belgrade-Budapest railway. (The Belt and Road Initiative aims to create a Chinese-dominated trade network that counters the U.S.-led transatlantic one.) Moreover, the 16+1 forum helps China foster new relationships and partnerships in

Central and Eastern Europe at various levels. As the most developed part of the region from which 16+1 participants are drawn, the Central European countries claim the lion's share of China's trade and investment in the area, and play an important role in the 16+1 forum.

The third priority for Chinese foreign policy in the region is less tangible than the previous two. In the CCP's framing, China is working to achieve commitments from individual states to build a partnership with it based on mutual respect, shared interests, and win-win cooperation. If countries adopt the language China uses to describe the partnerships, China then pressures their representatives to adjust foreign policy more to China's interest, including, for example, avoiding criticism of China for its human rights record, or supporting China in territorial disputes in the South China Sea. In recent years, China has used different formal and informal tools and channels, including soft power, to achieve this kind of commitment from Central European countries.

Aside from these goals, China also has a stake in fostering its exports to the region and using regional infrastructure to reach markets in Western Europe. However, with the exception of its engagement on the Belgrade-Budapest railway project, the Chinese government does not exert major influence over trade flows, as Central European economies remain very open in terms of international trade.

Slovak-Chinese Bilateral Relations

For more than twenty years, Slovakia's foreign policy toward China avoided any major deviation from the course established following independence. Slovakia has adhered to the One China principle and has prioritized developing economic relations with China, mainly to facilitate exports and to attract Chinese investment. In the interest of advancing economic relations, official Slovak policy tended to avoid engaging in behavior that could potentially irritate China, such as criticizing its human rights record or meeting with Taiwanese representatives, the Dalai Lama, or Chinese dissidents. This courtesy has not always been extended by Slovak intellectuals, activists, individual policymakers, and others who have criticized China on issues including the One China principle, its policies in Tibet, its repression of the Falun Gong spiritual group, and the 1989 massacre at Tiananmen Square.

However, recent developments have signaled a slow change. The Slovak government openly admits dissatisfaction with the outcomes of its China policy and has been more confident taking actions that China views as controversial or in contravention of its interests.⁵⁵ This disappointment over past foreign policy outcomes rests on hard data on economic relations with China. According to Slovakia's Statistical Office, the value of Slovak exports to China was 1.6 percent of Slovakia's total exports in 2016, a similar figure to that reported over the past seven years.⁵⁶ Meanwhile, overall Chinese investment in the country comprised less than 1 percent of all foreign direct investment in Slovakia.⁵⁷ This is despite Slovakia having signed a number of economic agreements and memoranda with China. Probably, this lack of economic activity prompted Prime Minister Robert Fico to say in late 2014 that he would only visit China again if such a visit would bring tangible results.⁵⁸ More importantly, Slovakia has adopted policies that can be considered unusual in the wider European context. In 2013, it admitted Uyghur prisoners from the U.S. detention facility at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba,⁵⁹ and in 2016, Slovak President Andrej Kiska met the Dalai Lama in Bratislava.⁶⁰

However, when the first major investor from China showed interest in Slovakia, Slovak government representatives tried to make use of this opportunity. In August 2016, Fico secretly met

in Bratislava with the president of the Chinese energy holding company China Energy Company Limited (CEFC), which claims to be the sixth largest private company in China, is known for investing in energy and financial sectors, and is considered the flagship of Chinese economic penetration of Central Europe.⁶¹ News of the meeting only appeared in Slovak media after CEFC posted pictures of the talks on its website. Negotiations reportedly concerned investments in tourism, aviation companies, finance, and infrastructure. Slovak Finance Minister Peter Kažimír also met with the CEFC chief twice, in July and September of 2016, but disclosed the meetings.⁶²

While Slovakia is hardly economically dependent on China, and Chinese soft power activities in Slovakia are limited compared to Russian ones, the Chinese government does project its own brand of influence aimed at creating support within Slovakia for its positions and activities.

Chinese Influence Efforts in Slovakia

Unlike Russia, China does not need to expend effort trying to improve its perception among the public in Slovakia, as it does not suffer from a negative image there. Instead, it finds in Slovakia a general lack of interest in China that only changes temporarily on the occasion of some notable event such as a high-level meeting between Slovak and Chinese officials, or news of a potential Chinese-backed investment project. And unlike media in the neighboring Czech Republic, which have been critical of China and have sometimes presented the country as a security threat,⁶³ Slovak coverage of China has been fairly neutral.⁶⁴ Critical reports have appeared only occasionally, such as in 2009 when Chinese supporters of the visiting Chinese president Hu Jintao—apparently including a few members of his security detail—attacked a handful of protesting Slovak human rights activists, as well as some journalists.⁶⁵

Against this background, a survey of Chinese soft power activities in Slovakia suggests that China focuses such efforts on creating groups within the Slovak public that would feel interested in or attached to China and would thus be receptive to the Chinese government's narratives, and on establishing and strengthening channels through which the Chinese government may communicate its key messages to the Slovak public.

Currently, there are two principal actors that work to implement China's soft power initiatives in Slovakia: the Chinese embassy, and the Confucius Institutes. They strive to reach out to four spheres, namely the media, academia, think tanks, and culture, in order to create the desired impact.

Unlike Russia, which generally seeks to encourage or place pro-Russian "talking heads" in Slovakia, China's efforts to foster pro-Chinese narratives focus heavily on educational programs, many of which include opportunities to visit China. These activities may appear less ideological and more pragmatic. But in the long term, they create favorable conditions for bonding the involved individuals to the promoters of such activities: state-controlled Chinese institutions.

There are three categories of local actors shaping public discourse on China in Slovakia. The first are openly pro-Chinese individuals, who seek to create a positive image of China by actively promoting Chinese culture, praising China's social and economic model and its achievements, and defending China's policies. They include politicians, especially representatives of the Communist Party of Slovakia (a minor, non-parliamentary party), but also members of other left-wing parties and groupings including the governing Smer-SD;⁶⁶ public figures,

such as the economist Peter Staněk, who predicts the economic victory of China over the U.S.; businessmen, such as Marián Farkaš, chairman of the Slovak-Chinese chamber of commerce SINACO; and voices in the media scene, including from the mainstream media as well as fringe outlets, such as *Zem a Vek*.

Second, there are those who promote China less overtly by disseminating positive information about select aspects of China's development, while avoiding mention of politically sensitive issues such as its human rights record and authoritarian system. These actors include some politicians and media outlets.

Finally, there are actors with critical stances towards China, who bring forward information about China's human rights abuses, elements of China's expansionist foreign policy in East Asia, and the rise of Chinese military power. These include liberal media outlets, think tanks, academics, nongovernmental organizations, and prodemocratic politicians, mostly from the center-right parties. Some of these personalities are quite proactive, organizing public events and civic initiatives and releasing critical statements.

Cooperation Agreements between Slovakia and China

Slovakia and China have concluded several cooperation agreements in areas that can be considered relevant to China's soft-power activities. These agreements include:

The agreement on cultural cooperation between the governments of Slovakia and the People's Republic of China (signed in 1991, and since 2001 valid without time limitation).

The program of cultural cooperation between the ministries of culture of Slovakia and the People's Republic of China (signed in 2014, and valid from 2015–19).

The agreement on scientific and technical cooperation between the governments of Slovakia and the People's Republic of China (signed in 1997 without time limitation).

The program of cooperation between the ministries of education of Slovakia and the People's Republic of China (signed in 2015 and valid from 2016–19).

The agreement on cooperation in sport between the Ministry of Education of Slovakia and the State Committee for Sports of the People's Republic of China (signed in 1994 without time limitation).

The agreement between the Slovak Academy of Science and Chinese Academy of Science (implementation protocol signed in 2015 and valid from 2015–17).

Culture

Confucius Institutes (CIs) are the main tool the Chinese government uses to popularize Chinese culture beyond the country's borders.⁶⁷ As of April 2017, there were eleven established Confucius Institutes in Central Europe: five in Poland, three in Hungary, two in Slovakia, and one in the Czech Republic. Both of the institutes in Slovakia are located in Bratislava, but they host some activities outside the capital city.

The older of the two institutes is affiliated with the Slovak University of Technology, which opened in 2007. Three other major Slovak universities were among its founding partners, together with China's Tianjin University.⁶⁸ In the years following its establishment, this CI focused on introducing Chinese language courses in Bratislava and other cities, and only organized about five Chinese culture-related events a year, to which prominent guests were typically invited.⁶⁹ Since appointing a new Slovak director in the second half of 2015, this institute has become far more active. In 2016, it prepared eleven events, including a dance performance, a Chinese cuisine workshop, a Chinese language summer camp, and presentations at a book fair and folk crafts festival. It offers Chinese language courses on its premises, and manages language classes at four elementary and high schools in Bratislava, as well as at two universities outside of Bratislava. It has also contributed to the opening of the first Slovak-Chinese five-year bilingual program for high-school students in Banská Bystrica.⁷⁰

The Confucius Institute affiliated with Comenius University in Bratislava was established in 2015. It is led by the chair of the University's Department of East Asian Studies, and a number of departmental staff members and China experts from the Slovak Academy of Science contribute to its activities. The institute offers five language courses a year, in addition to two culture-related courses and sporadic events, such as expert lectures, concerts, and a Dragon Boat festival.⁷¹

Initially, the bulk of activity carried out by both institutes seemed to be unrelated to politics. However, recent initiatives of the Bratislava Confucius Institutes demonstrate that they can also serve broader, political goals of the Chinese government through cultural events. The main impetus for this change came in 2016 when Slovak President Kiska chose to invite the Dalai Lama for a meeting, which—in addition to irking the Chinese government—also prompted media articles critical of China's Tibet policies. Soon afterward, the older Bratislava Confucius Institute co-organized with the Chinese embassy an exhibition entitled “A Chinese Story: Chinese Tibet,” which supported China's claim to Tibet and was displayed in the cities of Trnava, Banská Bystrica, Nitra, and Nové Zámky.⁷² The newer Bratislava Confucius Institute also organized the exhibition at Comenius University,⁷³ which had hosted the Dalai Lama only six months earlier for his third visit to the university. This sent a signal that China has a particular stake in winning back the institutions sympathetic to issues other than those consistent with the official Chinese narratives. To support this campaign, the Chinese embassy in Bratislava distributed to academics and journalists on various occasions a publication called *What Do You Know About Tibet: Questions and Answers*, which sought to justify Chinese claims to the region.

Additionally, the embassy has reintroduced Bratislava's Chinese film festival. The festival first took place in 2004, became dormant, and was reestablished as an annual event in 2014. In November 2016, the film festival was held at the Bratislava art cinema theater, Kino Lumiér, in cooperation with the Slovak Ministry of Culture. At least two of the movies could be identified as stories with a pro-Chinese sociopolitical message. The first was *The Taking of Tiger Mountain*, about China's civil war in 1946. The movie's heroic central character hails from the Chinese People's Liberation Army—the armed forces of the People's Republic of China. The second was *Phurbu and Tenzin*, a movie set in Tibet depicting social changes in the region through the lives of two boys over the period from the end of British rule until China's opening in the 1980s.

A larger event, prepared in part for interested members of the Slovak political and cultural elite, is the annual reception on the occasion of the Chinese New Year. Over 600 guests attended the 2017 event at the Slovak National Theatre, including the chairman of the Committee of Slovak National Defense and Security; the state secretary of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research, and Sport; and the mayor of Nové Zámky.⁷⁴ While Slovakia has yet to see large-scale outdoor celebrations of the Lunar New Year, as take place in some neighboring countries, in recent years the Chinese embassy has made efforts to include more people, such as influential politicians, journalists, academics, businesspeople, artists, and athletes, as well as members of the general public.

China's CEFC is also rumored to be in negotiations to acquire a share of as much as 50 percent in the Central European investment group Penta, which holds controlling shares in countrywide Slovak media outlets.

As part of its efforts to promote the Belt and Road Initiative, the Chinese embassy organized an art exhibition entitled "Silk Road 2017" on the premises of Radio Slovakia. The exhibition's opening ceremony was attended by more than 300 influential guests, including the vice-president of Slovakia's Supreme Court.⁷⁵

Media

Chinese state-backed media, such as CCTV, Xinhua, and China Radio International are not particularly visible in Slovakia. However, in recent years, Chinese ambassadors to Slovakia have begun to appear more frequently in the Slovak media. Interviews with the Chinese ambassadors have been published, for example, in the dailies *Sme* and *TASR*, and the weekly *Slovenka*, and have appeared on the television channel JOJ.⁷⁶ Aside from appearing in the national media, the Chinese embassy publishes editorials on the *Nové slovo* and *Hlavné správy* online news portals. These editorials defend China's claims over Tibet and the South China Sea; explain its vision for the Belt and Road Initiative; and call attention to its opposition to Slovak President Kiska's meeting with the Dalai Lama.⁷⁷ It is notable that

Nové slovo and *Hlavné správy* also serve as two of the main channels for Russian propaganda in Slovakia.⁷⁸ The embassy's tactic is understandable: The editorial staff at such outlets, known for their criticism of liberal democracy and the West, would be more open to cooperation with the Chinese government than many mainstream media outlets. Their audiences are also more receptive to the Chinese point of view.

Separately, China's CEFC is also rumored to be in negotiations to acquire a share of as much as 50 percent in the Central European investment group Penta, which holds controlling shares in countrywide Slovak media outlets, including the dailies *Sme* and *Plus 1 deň*; the weeklies *Trend* and *Plus 7 dní*; and the *Aktuálne* web portal.⁷⁹ Such a deal could extend CEFC a certain level of control over the media in Slovakia, or at least over reporting about China, including on its human rights record, Tibet, Taiwan, and other topics China considers sensitive. In April 2017, Penta denied that it was negotiating with CEFC specifically about a Chinese entry into Penta.⁸⁰

An illustrative example of the consequences related to the Chinese purchase of assets in the Central European media market is CEFC's 2015 takeover of shares of the Czech media conglomerate Empresa. Following the deal, Empresa's popular political weekly *Týden* began to publish articles that favored Chinese government policies, while pieces critical of China became noticeably absent. Toward the end of 2016, a number of people on *Týden*'s editorial

staff were fired.⁸¹ In 2017, CEFC announced that it was leaving the publishing company and would be replaced by a Czech owner. Meanwhile, the activities of CEFC in the Czech Republic have raised concerns there, in connection with the company's alleged links to the Chinese military.⁸²

Academia

China's activities in the Slovak academic realm have thus far not stirred any major controversies connected to infringements on academic freedom. Recent adaptations in the way that Chinese government initiatives collaborate with Slovakia's academic sector seem to suggest that the regime is trying to introduce its perspective through a subtler approach.

Currently, Chinese officials focus on facilitating and strengthening contacts with Slovak university students and professors. This includes bringing Chinese students to Slovak universities, arranging for the Chinese ambassador to give lectures at various universities,⁸³ and offering scholarships for university students and academics (fifteen per year) to study and undertake research in China. However, whereas China has a tradition of awarding one-year scholarships for Slovak university students that goes back to Czechoslovakia's times, in the past few years, the Chinese Ministry of Education has introduced scholarships that allow Slovak students to complete their entire graduate studies in China. Last year, one third of graduates from Comenius University's bachelor's program in Sinology chose to continue their master's degree in China. This program opens the door for China to access and influence young Slovak individuals that already speak Chinese and are interested in Chinese culture, history, and other dimensions.

While delivering presentations and discussing various topics with university students and lecturers, the Chinese ambassador usually adopts a non-confrontational style, explaining where the Chinese government sees international issues differently than Western countries. This approach gives the presentation certain credibility, contrary to practices in the past when Chinese diplomats issued harsh statements, such as one in 2003 that directly denounced the opening of the Taipei Representative Office in Bratislava.⁸⁴

Simply reaching out to collaborate with Slovakia's academic sector also enables the Chinese embassy to introduce the government's policy perspectives in a more credible way to educated elites. In May 2017, the Chinese embassy in Bratislava, in cooperation with *Nové Slovo's Club*, organized a scholarly seminar entitled "The Story of Chinese Tibet" that was hosted by the leading research institution in Slovakia, the Slovak Academy of Science. Almost one hundred people attended this unprecedented event, including the academy's researchers, university professors, think tank representatives, and politicians. Most notable among this group were Ľuboš Blaha, chair of the Slovak Parliament's European Affairs Committee, and Branislav Fábry, an academic known for his strongly pro-Russian stances. Chinese presenters included the head of China's Tibetology Research Center, representatives of the Chinese government's Tibetan region administration, and a lama who described in positive terms the advancements that Tibet has made as a part of the People's Republic of China. The delegation was officially admitted to separate meetings in the Slovak Parliament and the Ministries of Culture and Foreign Affairs.⁸⁵ In cooperating with academia, the Chinese embassy strives to present its Tibet-related campaign as rooted in scientific knowledge.

Think Tanks

Whereas think tanks in democratic countries usually enjoy independence from government, political parties, and interest groups, official Chinese policy-advising institutions work as actors of government policy.⁸⁶ To this end, Chinese think tanks seek to establish and strengthen links with policy advisors in democratic countries, including in the EU. For Slovakia, contacts with representatives of Chinese think tanks have also been limited because Slovakia only has a very small number of China experts working for non-university institutes. Researchers from Chinese think tanks have instead concentrated on establishing contacts that could allow them to reach out to the Slovak policy community through universities, the business sector, local government bodies, and nongovernmental organizations. The individuals they connect with are then invited by their Chinese counterparts to meetings, conferences, and other events, including activities that take place in China. During these meetings, Chinese academics typically try to appeal to their Slovak colleagues by asking them to recall the decades of cooperation between scholars from both countries as a basis to continue cooperation through future meetings and joint publications.

Aside from one-off initiatives, China created in 2013 a specialized forum for facilitating contact with experts from Central and Eastern Europe: the High-Level Symposium of Think Tanks of China and Central and Eastern European Countries. However, after organizing three conferences, this forum's level of activity dropped to only occasional meetings in individual countries, usually coinciding with a high-level visit from a Chinese official.⁸⁷ This could be due to scarce funding: At one of the symposium meetings held in Beijing, the conveners announced that they expected their Central and Eastern European partners to financially support the forum. The partners, however, have not met such an expectation, due to a lack of public funding available for researching relations with China.

Representatives from Chinese research institutes have rarely participated in public discussions, seminars, and roundtables in Slovakia. A likely reason for this is that most Slovak scholars of China work at universities, rather than in the think tank community. However, China tries to create a sort of competition among experts studying China by attempting to foster circles or researchers who may publish studies that are in line with China's official policies and are uncritical of China's regime. One of the most visible examples of outreach to Slovak think tanks concerns an academic journal published by the Slovak Foreign Policy Association on the topic of the Belt and Road Initiative, which was sponsored in part by the Chinese embassy in Bratislava.⁸⁸ However, the journal's editor, Peter Brezáni, saw no evidence of attempts by the Chinese embassy to influence the content of contributions to this issue. When the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague announced in June 2016 its ruling rejecting China's claims in the South China Sea, the Chinese embassy approached Brezáni with a request to publish a rebuttal on the issue, which he refused.⁸⁹

Analysis

When comparing the functioning of soft power mechanisms of Russia and China in Slovakia, it is worth noting that Slovak relations with Russia are influenced by centuries of historical, cultural, linguistic, and other ties, which are absent as far as Slovakia's relations with China are concerned. In Slovakia, China is primarily perceived as an important external actor with low levels of involvement in domestic affairs. China is valued for its potential to bring benefits through future economic cooperation, although political elites in Slovakia are growing increasingly skeptical of this prospect. China's enhanced involvement in Slovakia's media sector is not

likely to change this perception. However, China's image as a state possessing an efficient and successful socioeconomic model could be strengthened. Chinese soft-power efforts could also influence the views of the part of the population that may consider an authoritarian system a legitimate alternative to liberal democracy.

For a variety of reasons, there are distinctions between the Chinese and Russian influence efforts. China's approach tends to be more pragmatic and is focused on creating networks of influential individuals and institutions that would be supportive of China's economic expansion into Central Europe. China also aims to leverage its history, culture, and economic and technological achievements in such a way that the Slovak public would perceive China as nothing more than a non-threatening country of mild fascination.

Although the scope of Chinese activity in Slovakia has been more limited than in some other Central European countries, Chinese soft power activities have increased during the past five years. This is in large part a result of the work of the two Confucius Institutes in Bratislava and the Chinese embassy. The institutes have introduced new culture-promotion activities, such as regular courses on Chinese culture, as well as events, including China-related lectures, performances, culinary events, exhibitions, and presentations. All of these are organized for the broader public, including schoolchildren, students, and various adult groups. While the scope of these events is limited due to the institutes' small staff, the Confucius Institutes have the potential to attract wider audiences in the future. China's presence in Slovakia's public life may also grow through the development of economic ties between the two countries via the multilateral 16+1 format, and through particular projects within the Belt and Road Initiative.

Chinese soft power activities can create certain challenges for the country's pro-democracy community, though they pose less of a threat to Slovakia's established democratic institutions than they do to civil society. Unlike Russia, China is not seeking to back domestic partners who are openly destabilizing and undermining democratic mechanisms from the inside, such as right-wing populists, extremists, and reactionary social conservatives. It is probable that many civil society actors, representatives of NGOs and think tanks, independent journalists, and scholars will stand as committed defenders of democratic institutions, norms, and values.

However, in the societal realm of general values, norms, ideas, stances, and public activities, it may be necessary to react to the ideological contents Chinese soft-power initiatives seek to spread that are incompatible with democracy, ideas of human rights, and civil liberties. The primary variable here is the public positions of politicians and representatives of business circles whose interests can be dependent on economic deals with China. Executives remain an important target audience for China's embassy, which actively seeks to bring them to events such as the Chinese New Year reception. China's main agenda in Slovakia is similar to its agenda in other countries: present a strong, united China, its traditional culture and achievements, and convey that China is undergoing a transformation through which it will become equal to Western powers.

China's soft-power campaign appears to be targeting many recipients, with an expectation that some will be receptive to this outreach and could be included in a wider network of contacts favorable to China. Aside from this, China employs soft power tools to support its policy aims, including minimizing the influence of the Dalai Lama or Taiwan's representatives. The fact that the Chinese ambassador has published material on the pro-Russian web portal *Hlavné správy*

indicates that China may in the future share more communication tools with Russia that are aimed at the same audiences: people distrustful of the West and its democratic values, and who are instead admirers of authoritarian regimes.

The views expressed in this paper represent the opinions and analysis of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the National Endowment for Democracy or its staff.

NOTES

- ¹ Acknowledgement: the authors would like to thank Martin Slobodník for his comments on the draft of this study.
- ² Editor's note: Although the overview essay to this report uses the term "sharp power" to characterize the more malign and manipulative aspects of authoritarian influence, the authors of the individual country reports instead generally use the broader term "soft power." In the country studies, the authors were asked to inventory and analyze the methods of authoritarian influence applied by China and Russia in democratic settings. The concept of "sharp power" introduced in the overview essay is an outgrowth of their comparative findings.
- ³ Peter Krekó et al., *The Weaponization of Culture: Kremlin's Traditional Agenda and the Export of Values to Central Europe* (Budapest: Political Capital Institute, August 2016), www.politicalcapital.hu/news.php?article_read=1&article_id=66.
- ⁴ Sergey Karaganov et al. *Strategiya dlya Rossii. Rossiyskaya vneshnyaya politika: konec 2010-kh – nachalo 2020-kh godov* [Strategy for Russia. Russian foreign policy: the end of 2010s—beginning of 2020s], Council on Foreign and Defense Policy (Moscow: SVOP, 2016). http://svop.ru/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/%D1%82%D0%B5%D0%B7%D0%B8%D1%81%D1%8B_23%D0%B C%D0%B0%D1%8F_sm.pdf.
- ⁵ Salome Samadashvili, *Muzzling the Bear. Strategic Defence for Russia's Undeclared Information War on Europe* (Brussels: Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, 2015), <http://stratcomcoe.org/salome-samadashvili-muzzling-bear-strategic-defence-russias-undeclared-information-war-europe>.
- ⁶ For more about institutions involved in activities of Russia's "soft power," their profiles, representatives, main characteristics see Orysia Lutsevych, *Agents of the Russian World: Proxy Groups in the Contested Neighbourhood* (London: Chatham House, April 2016), www.chathamhouse.org/publication/agents-russian-world-proxy-groups-contested-neighbourhood; Vladislava Vojtíšková et al., *The Bear in Sheep's Clothing: Russia's Government-Funded Organisations in the EU* (Brussels: Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, 2016), www.martenscentre.eu/publications/bear-sheeps-clothing-russias-government-funded-organisations-eu.
- ⁷ *GLOBSEC Trends: Central Europe Under the Fire of Propaganda: Public Opinion Poll Analysis in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia* (Bratislava: GLOBSEC Policy Institute, September 2016), www.martenscentre.eu/publications/bear-sheeps-clothing-russias-government-funded-organisations-eu.
- ⁸ The Index's methodology was based on a measurable set of societal and political indicators, including analyses of opinion poll data and the political landscape, as well as the structure of the media and the state of civil society. Five areas were analyzed: public perception, political landscape, media, state countermeasures, and civil society.
- ⁹ *Vulnerability Index: Subversive Russian Influence in Central Europe* (Bratislava: GLOBSEC Policy Institute, 2017).
- ¹⁰ On some aspects of political Russophilia in contemporary Slovakia see: Juraj Mesík, "Kde sa vzala naša nekritickosť k Rusku," [Where did our uncritical attitude to Russia come from?] *Sme*, 12 April 2017, <https://komentare.sme.sk/c/20507534/sme-okupovani-rusofilmi.html>.
- ¹¹ Ľudovít Štúr, "Slovanstvo a svet budúcnosti" [Slavdom and the world of the future]. Bratislava: Slovenský inštitút medzinárodných štúdií, 1993.
- ¹² See more: Alexander Duleba: *Slepý pragmatizmus slovenskej východnej politiky: aktuálna agenda slovensko-ruských bilaterálnych vzťahov*. [Blind Pragmatism of Slovak Eastern Policy: Current Agenda of Slovak-Russian Bilateral relations]. Slovak Foreign Policy Association, Bratislava 1996.
- ¹³ Jakub Groszkowski, "Prime Minister Fico's Russian Card," *Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich* [Center for Eastern Studies], 1 July 2015, www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2015-07-01/prime-minister-ficos-russian-card.
- ¹⁴ "Putin: Tovaroorobot mezhdu Rossiei i Slovačiek mozhet byt vosstanovlen." [Putin: Trade Turnover Between Russia and Slovakia Can Be Restored] *Vzgliad*, 25 August 2016. <http://vz.ru/news/2016/8/25/828867.html>.

- ¹⁵ This includes persons of Russian origin with Slovak citizenship, citizens of the Russian Federation living in Slovakia, as well as ethnic Russians with citizenship of other states. "Tab. 10 Obyvateľstvo SR podľa národnosti – sčítanie 2011, 2001, 1991" [Table 10: Population of the Slovak Republic by Nationality, Census 2011, 2001, 1991], Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic. 2011. Zuzana Bargerová, "Migrácia ako spoločenský fenomén: historické, sociálne a právne aspekty," [Migration as societal phenomenon: historical, social and legal aspects] in Miroslava Hlinčíková and Grigorij Mesežnikov, eds., *Otvorená krajina alebo nedobytná pevnosť? Slovensko, migranti a utečenci* [Open Country or Impenetrable Fortress? Slovakia, Migrants and Refugees]. (Bratislava: Inštitút pre verejné otázky–Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, 2016): 32, https://cz.boell.org/sites/default/files/otvorena_krajina_alebo_nedobytna_pevnost_slovensko_migranti_a_uteцени_e.pdf.
- ¹⁶ "Tab. 10 Obyvateľstvo SR podľa národnosti – sčítanie 2011, 2001, 1991" [Table 10: Population of the Slovak Republic by Nationality, Census 2011, 2001, 1991], Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic. 2011. https://slovak.statistics.sk/wps/wcm/connect/1f62189f-cc70-454d-9eab-17bdf5e1dc4a/Tab_10_Obyvateľstvo_SR_podľa_národnosti_sčítanie_2011_2001_1991.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=knLHmhe.
- ¹⁷ Zuzana Bargerová, "Migrácia ako spoločenský fenomén: historické, sociálne a právne aspekty," [Migration as societal phenomenon: historical, social and legal aspects] in Miroslava Hlinčíková and Grigorij Mesežnikov, eds., *Otvorená krajina alebo nedobytná pevnosť? Slovensko, migranti a utečenci* [Open Country or Impenetrable Fortress? Slovakia, Migrants and Refugees]. (Bratislava: Inštitút pre verejné otázky–Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, 2016): 32, https://cz.boell.org/sites/default/files/otvorena_krajina_alebo_nedobytna_pevnost_slovensko_migranti_a_uteцени_e.pdf.
- ¹⁸ Zväz Rusov na Slovensku [Union of Russians in Slovakia] (ZRS), <http://zvazrusov.vlmedia.sk/>.
- ¹⁹ "O Nás" [About Us], Union of Russians in Slovakia (ZRS), http://zvazrusov.vlmedia.sk/?page_id=114.
- ²⁰ The International Council of Russian Compatriots (ICRC) established in 2001, presents itself as "the only global association of organizations of Russian compatriots," with membership of 137 organizations from 52 countries. See International Council of Russian Compatriots (ICRC), <http://www.msrs.ru/about-us>.
- ²¹ "Unions of Russians" in Bratislava, Košice and Poprad, "Ruslana" in Martin, "Russophiles" in Žilina, "Obshchina" in Nitra, "Považan" in Považská Bystrica, and the youth organization Initiative 21. Several other Russian "expats" organizations exist in Slovakia; "Russia" (Rossiya), "Young Russia" (Rossiya Molodaya), "Chapayev," "Teremok," "Kalinka."
- ²² "Stanovy OZ Zväz Rusov na Slovensku," [Statute of Civic Association Union of Russians in Slovakia] 2007 *Union of Russians in Slovakia (ZRS)*, last modified 26 February 2016, <http://zvazrusov.vlmedia.sk/?p=503>.
- ²³ http://zvazrusov.vlmedia.sk/?page_id=447.
- ²⁴ Slovensko-ruská spoločnosť [Slovak–Russian Society] (SRS), www.srspol.sk/.
- ²⁵ Politicians who were declared "the worst Russophobes" included President Andrej Kiska, MP František Šebej and Minister of Foreign Affairs Miroslav Lajčák; individual personalities included political scientists Alexander Duleba and Ivo Samson (both from the Slovak Foreign Policy Association, SFPA) and sociologist Martin Bútora; organizations included SFPA, IVO and MFA; media included daily *Sme*, weekly *Týždeň* and the public Radio and Television of Slovakia (RTVS); and political parties included SDKÚ-DS, SaS and Most-Híd. See "Definitívne výsledky ankety—Najhorší rusofóbi Slovenska," [Definitive results of the survey—The worst Russophobes in Slovakia] Slovak-Russian Society, 18 February 2015, www.srspol.sk/clanky/clanek?navez=&id_clanek=10545.
- ²⁶ "Rusko chce zakročiť proti rusofóbi vo svete, ktorú vraj zneužíva NATO." [Russia wants to intervene against Russophobia in the world that is allegedly misused by NATO] *Parlamentné listy*, 11 July 2016, www.parlamentnelisty.sk/arena/monitor/Rusko-chce-zakrocit-proti-rusofobii-vo-svete-ktoru-vraj-zneuzyva-NATO-272284.
- ²⁷ The Slovak Republic became a member-state of the EU and NATO in 2004 after the country had overcome the consequences of turbulent internal developments during the government of populist Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar. Russia sympathized with Mečiar's policies.
- ²⁸ UPC offers in its enhanced cable subscription packages two Russian television channels, RT and the First Channel. SWAN offers two Russian channels, RT and RTD, in all its packages. Skylink offers three Russian stations, RT, RT en Español, and the First Channel. Antik offers four Russian channels: RT, RTD, RTR, and Rossiya 24.
- ²⁹ "Trhový podiel TV" [TV Market Share], *Mediálne*, <https://medialne.etrend.sk/grafy-a-tabulky.html>; "TAM výskum na Slovensku," *PMT*, www.pmt.sk.
- ³⁰ For comparison, viewership of the domestic Slovak TV news channel TA3 is 1.5%. Author's interview with Mirka Kernová, 21 July 2017.
- ³¹ Pontes, www.pontes.sk/index.php/sk/.
- ³² Peter Morvay, "Prečo konšpirátori potrebujú profesorov," [Why do conspiracists need professors] *Denník N*, 7 March 2017.
- ³³ Author's interview with Mirek Toda, reporter of the daily *Denník N*, 2 February 2017.

- ³⁴ On November 23, 2016, the European Parliament approved the resolution “EU strategic communication to counteract propaganda against it by third parties,” which defines the Russian Federation (together with ISIL) as the main source of disinformation and propaganda. See more: “European Parliament Resolution of 23 November 2016 on EU Strategic Communication to Counteract Propaganda Against it by Third Parties,” European Parliament, last modified 11 April 2017, www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P8-TA-2016-0441&format=XML&language=EN; “EU Parliament Urges Fight against Russia’s ‘Fake News.’” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 23 November 2016. www.rferl.org/a/eu-fight-russia-fake-news-rt-sputnik/28135752.html.
- ³⁵ For more, see Dušan Fischer, “The Channels and Distinguishing Elements of Russian Propaganda in Slovakia,” in Katri Pynnöniemi and András Rácz, eds., *Fog of Falsehood: Russian Strategy of Deception and the Conflict in Ukraine* (Helsinki: Finnish Institute of International Affairs, 2016): 295–305, <https://www.fiia.fi/en/publication/fog-of-falsehood>.
- ³⁶ Ján Benčík, “Ako je to s údajnou nezávislosťou Tibora Rostása,” [How it is with the alleged independence of Tibor Rostas] *Denník N*, 22 February 2016, <https://dennikn.sk/blog/ako-je-to-s-udajnou-nezavislostou-tibora-rostasa/>; “Rostás (ZEM A VEK) žiada ruského veľvyslanca o podporu na médiu a politiku,” [Rostas from Zem a Vek asks Russian ambassador about support for media and politics] YouTube video, 49:59, posted by Juraj Smatana, 3 February 2016, www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=14&v=Ot2yAax3_2s; “Slováci spojencami Putinovho režimu: Odborník tvrdí, že médiá ako Zem a Vek, pomohli Ficovi,” [Slovaks are allies of Putin’s regime: expert argues that media as Zem a Vek helped Fico] Topky, 21 February 2016, www.topky.sk/cl/11/1527019/Slovaci-spojencami-Putinovho-rezimu--Odbornik-tvrdi--ze-media-ako-Zem-a-Vek--pomohli-Ficovi.
- ³⁷ Ján Benčík, “Rostás vymýšľa referendum o vystúpení z NATO,” [Rostas is inventing referendum on withdrawal from NATO] *Denník N*, 2 February 2015.
- ³⁸ Miroslava Kernová, “Bublina okolo INTV splasla,” [Bubble around INTV has giggled] O médiách, 20 July 2016, www.omeiach.com/tv/item/9459-bublina-okolo-intv-splasa.
- ³⁹ Author’s interview with Miroslava Kernová, 21 July 2017.
- ⁴⁰ Author’s interview with anonymous source.
- ⁴¹ “Video záznam: Prejav Tibor Eliot Rostas/Slovanský mediálny dom,” [Video record: Tibor Eliot Rostas’ speech/Slavic Media House] Rostas News video, 8 July 2017.
- ⁴² Ivana Smoleňová, *The Pro-Russian Disinformation Campaign in the Czech Republic and Slovakia* (Prague: Prague Security Studies Institute, June 2015), www.pssi.cz/publications/39-the-pro-russian-disinformation-campaign-in-the-czech-republic-and-slovakia.htm.
- ⁴³ Ivana Smoleňová, *The Pro-Russian Disinformation Campaign in the Czech Republic and Slovakia*, 3.
- ⁴⁴ The journal *Mezhdunarodnaya Zhizn* is published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russian Federation. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov is a chairman of journal’s advisory board.
- ⁴⁵ Dušan Mikušovič, “Ruská propaganda vyrábala z Dubčeka zradcu priamo na našich školách,” [Russian propaganda was presenting Dubček as a traitor directly in our schools] *Denník N*, 1 March 2016, <https://dennikn.sk/386624/nas-ruska-propaganda-vyrabala-dubceka-zradcu-masaryka-americkeho-agenta/>; “Ruské veľvyslanectvo urobilo z Dubčeka zradcu.” [Russian Embassy has made Dubček traitor] *Aktuality*, 1 March 2016, www.aktuality.sk/clanok/317607/ruske-velvyslanectvo-propaguje-falosnu-historiu/.
- ⁴⁶ “Vstrecha v Bratislave” [Meeting in Bratislava], Nikolaj Starikov blog, 14 February 2016, <https://nstarikov.ru/blog/62851>.
- ⁴⁷ “Nikolaj Starikov o geopolitike v Bratislave,” [Nikolaj Starikov on geopolitics in Bratislava] Association of Slovak Writers, 6 February 2016, www.spolok-slovenskych-spisovatelov.sk/news/nikolaj-starikov-o-geopolitike-v-bratislave/.
- ⁴⁸ “Nikolaj Starikov o geopolitike v Bratislave,” [Nikolaj Starikov on geopolitics in Bratislava] Association of Slovak Writers, 6 February 2016, www.spolok-slovenskych-spisovatelov.sk/news/nikolaj-starikov-o-geopolitike-v-bratislave/.
- ⁴⁹ Šnidl, Vladimír. “Prokremelský profesor vysvetlil slovenským študentom, že Majdan bol vojenský puč.” [Pro-Kremlin profesor explained to Slovak students that Maidan was a military putsch/coup d’etat] *Denník N*, 8 March 2017. <https://dennikn.sk/699218/prokremelsky-profesor-vysvetlil-slovenskym-studentom-ze-majdan-bol-vojensky-puc/>; “Stanovisko poslanca Európskeho parlamentu Ivana Štefanca k prednáške putinovského propagandistu Andranika Migraňana na Ekonomickej,” [MEP Ivan Štefanec’s statement on the lecture of pro-Putin propagandist Andranik Migranian] Facebook, posted by Ivan Štefanec, 9 March 2017, www.facebook.com/notes/ivan-%C5%A1tefanec/stanovisko-poslanca-eur%C3%B3pskeho-parlamentu-ivana-%C5%A1tefanca-k-predn%C3%A1ke-putinovsk%C3%A9h/838624386276603/.
- ⁵⁰ The Collective Security Treaty Organization (“Tashkent Treaty,” signed in 1992) is a military alliance formed by six post-Soviet states (Russia, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan).

- ⁵¹ Варгова, Ленка. "Интервью: Ректор УМБ Хиадловски о сотрудничестве с МГИМО, иностранных студентах и роли возраста в менеджменте." [Interview: Rector of Matej Bel University Hladlovsky about cooperation with MGIMO, foreign students and the role of age in management] Slovakia 360, 27 December 2016. <https://svk360.com/intervyu-rektor-umb-hiadlovski-o-sotrudnichestve-s-mgimo-inostrannyh-studentah-i-rol-i-vozhista-v-menedzhmente/>.
- ⁵² Author's interview with Juraj Mesik, writer and civic activist, 8 December 2016.
- ⁵³ "15th anniversary of Russian Center of Science and Culture in Bratislava," Rossotrudnichestvo, 22 January 2016, available at <http://prev.rs.gov.ru/de/node/11602>.
- ⁵⁴ Following the Dalai Lama's visit in Slovakia in October 2016, Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying said that the meeting between the Slovak President Andrej Kiska and the Dalai Lama was not in line with Slovakia's adherence to the One China principle. See Martin Slobodník, "Ze slovenského tisku: Čína pri dalajlámových cestách testuje, kam až môže zájsť" [China uses the Dalai Lama's trips as a test for where it can go], Sinopsis, 25 October 2016, <https://sinopsis.cz/ze-slovenskeho-tisku-cina-pri-dalajlamovych-cestach-testuje-kam-az-moze-zajst>.
- ⁵⁵ Gabriela Pleschová, "The Slovak and Hungarian Partnerships with China: High Hopes that Did Not Come True." In *China's Comeback in Former Eastern Europe: No Longer Comrades, Not Yet Strategic Partners*, edited by Rudolf Fürst and Filip Tesař. Prague: Institute of International Relations, 2013.
- ⁵⁶ See the website of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic: www.statistics.sk.
- ⁵⁷ "Počet čínskych investorov na Slovensku klesá, ich investície ale rastú" [The number of Chinese investors in Slovakia is falling but the amount of investment is on rise]. TERAZ, 29 October 2016. www.teraz.sk/ekonomika/pocet-cinskych-investorov-na-slovensku/225394-clanok.html. The rumored purchase by Chinese He Steel of the steel mill in Košice from the American corporation U.S. Steel could profoundly change this. However, if this deal materializes, it would contravene the earlier intentions of the Slovak government, which included a binding memorandum with U.S. Steel that puts a financial penalty on the factory's current owner for selling or transferring the Košice plant earlier than 26 March 2018. See Liptáková, Jana. "Speculations About the Sale of USSK Continue." Slovak Spectator, 7 December 2016. <https://spectator.sme.sk/c/20404031/speculations-about-the-sale-of-ussk-continue.html>; and "Memorandum of Understanding [Between the Slovak Republic and the United States Steel Corporation]," Government Office of the Slovak Republic, 26 March 2016, www.vlada.gov.sk/memorandum-o-porozumeni-medzi-slovenskou-republikou-a-us-steel-corporation/.
- ⁵⁸ "Fico plánuje navštíviť Čínu, chce prehĺbiť spoluprácu" [Fico plans to visit China, wants to deepen cooperation]. Sme, 16 December 2014. www.sme.sk/c/7551232/fico-planuje-navstivit-cinu-chce-prehlbit-spolupracu.html#ixzz3M5yyTtX.
- ⁵⁹ Shannon Tiezzi. "US Releases Last Uyghur Chinese Prisoners from Guantanamo Bay." Diplomat, 3 January 2014. <http://thediplomat.com/2014/01/u-s-releases-last-uyghur-chinese-prisoners-from-guantanamo-bay/>.
- ⁶⁰ "China Says to Retaliate After Slovak President Meets Dalai Lama." Reuters, 17 October 2016. www.reuters.com/article/us-china-slovakia-dalailama-idUSKBN12H0U0. Prime Minister Fico distanced himself from this meeting and sharply criticised President Kiska for it, events that occurred in the context of broader political competition between the two leaders. The Dalai Lama delivered a speech at a public event attended by thousands of citizens in Bratislava. He met with three MPs and one MEP, one of whom represented one of the ruling parties and three who represented the opposition, including the vice-speaker of parliament. President Kiska met with the Dalai Lama as a private person in a Bratislava restaurant. Before the meeting, Kiska met with the Chinese ambassador and explained to him his "purely personal" motivation for the meeting. China's government protested and warned that the situation could impede the further development of bilateral relations. President Kiska was criticized by Prime Minister Fico and Foreign Affairs Minister Miroslav Lajčák, who both argued that Kiska's actions undermined economic cooperation between the two states. China then suspended bilateral negotiations with Fico that had been planned to take place before a 16+1 meeting in Riga in November 2016. Minister Lajčák said that after Kiska's meeting with the Dalai Lama, Slovak-Chinese relations grew colder.
- ⁶¹ Adam Valček, "Penta je na predaj. Chcú ju Číňania," [Penta is going to be sold. China wants it] Sme, 17 March 2017; Michaela Kušnírová, "Čína skupuje svet, Slovensko ju neláka" [China buys the world, Slovakia does not attract it] Sme, 3 January 2017, <https://ekonomika.sme.sk/c/20423344/cinania-skupuju-svet-ich-investicie-vytvorili-novy-rekord.html>; Tomáš Němeček, "Český týždeň Tomáša Němečka," [Czech week of Tomáš Němeček] .týžden, No. 11, 13 March 2017.
- ⁶² "Fico silently met with CEFC representatives," *Slovak Spectator*, 11 October 2016, <https://spectator.sme.sk/c/20351628/fico-silently-met-with-cefc-representatives.html>.

- ⁶³ “Škatulata, hejbejte se!” [Boxes move!] Sinopsis, 9 December 2016. <https://sinopsis.cz/skatulata-hejbejte-se>; Břešťan, Robert. “Sinolog Martin Hála: Čínské aktivity v Česku jsou krajně znepokojivé. Politici to ignorují” [Sinologist Martin Hála: Chinese activities in the Czech Republic are most worrying. Politicians ignore that]. HlídacíPes, 18 October 2016, <http://hlidacipes.org/sinolog-martin-hala-cinske-aktivity-v-cesku-jsou-krajne-znepokojive-politici-to-ignoruji>. See also Rudolf Fürst, “The Czech Experience with Relations with China: Nothing to Win, Nothing to Lose.” In *China’s Comeback in Former Eastern Europe: No Longer Comrades, Not Yet Strategic Partners*, edited by Rudolf Fürst and Filip Tesař. Prague: Institute of International Relations, 2013.
- ⁶⁴ Two Slovak daily newspapers, *Sme* and *Denník N*, and the weekly *týžden*, stand out as more vocal critics of China.
- ⁶⁵ Gabriela Pleschová and Rudolf Fürst. “Mobilizing Overseas Chinese to Back Up Chinese Diplomacy: The Case of President Hu Jintao’s Visit to Slovakia in 2009.” *Problems of Post-Communism* 62, no. 1 (2015): 55–65.
- ⁶⁶ MP Ľuboš Blaha (Smer–SD), chairman of the Slovak parliamentary committee for European affairs, wrote the following: “I have received the Ambassador of the People’s Republic of China. It was a very friendly meeting. I respect China, and I am convinced that the U.S. or the EU have no bigger right to impose upon China their liberal model than China has the right to impose its Chinese model upon the Western countries. Like the Chinese, I believe in sovereignty, cultural diversity, mutual respect, and balance. By the way, most statistics on globalization are boosted by the fact that over the past decades, poverty has been greatly reduced in the world. In neoliberal studies, however, it is rare to add that it was only thanks to the fact that China has pulled half a billion people out of poverty. China did not surrender to the neoliberal regime, retains state control over the economy, and controls capital flows, and the state retains decisive property rights. I think that China can be more of an inspiration in many economic decisions for the neoliberal states in the West.” [Author’s translation]. “Blaha (SMER–SD): Rešpektujem Čínu,” [Blaha (Smer–SD): I respect China] *Parlamentné listy*, 15 December 2016, www.parlamentnelisty.sk/politika/politici-volicom/Blaha-SMER-SD-Respektujem-Cinu-281879. In addition, Smer–SD’s chairman Robert Fico has made several positive references to China in recent years.
- ⁶⁷ Zhang, Xiaoling. “The Effectiveness of the Chinese Cultural Centres and Confucius Institutes.” CPI Analysis, 2 December 2016, <https://cpianalysis.org/2016/12/02/the-effectiveness-of-the-chinese-cultural-centres-and-confucius-institutes/>.
- ⁶⁸ See Confucius Institute in Bratislava, accessed 30 March 2017, <http://konfuciovinstitut.sk>.
- ⁶⁹ See, for example, Annual report of the institute for 2014. Information was supplemented though personal interview with Alena Malíčková, institute secretary (Bratislava, 20 August 2015).
- ⁷⁰ See Confucius Institute in Bratislava, <http://konfuciovinstitut.sk>.
- ⁷¹ See Confucius Institute at the Comenius University in Bratislava, accessed 30 March 2017, <http://konfuciovinstitut.sk>.
- ⁷² See the website of Confucius Institute in Bratislava: <http://konfucius.sk/aktuality>.
- ⁷³ See Čínsky príbeh–Čínsky Tibet [Chinese Story–Chinese Tibet], Confucius Institute at the Comenius University in Bratislava, 27 April 2017, <http://konfuciovinstitut.sk/2017/04/cinsky-pribeh-cinsky-tibet/>.
- ⁷⁴ See “Tanečný súbor Pekinskej tanečnej akadémie sa predstavil na Slovensku pri príležitosti čínskeho nového roku Sviatky jari” [The Ensemble of the Beijing Academy of Dancing presented the Spring Festival at the Occasion of the Chinese New Year], Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Slovak Republic, 1 February 2017, <http://sk.chineseembassy.org/slo/xwdt/t1443783.htm>.
- ⁷⁵ See “Otvorenie spoločnej čínsko-slovenskej výstavy Hodvábna cesta 2017” [Opening of the Joint Chinese-Slovak Exhibition Silk Road 2017], Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Slovak Republic, 5 September 2017, <http://sk.china-embassy.org/slo/xwdt/t1493216.htm>.
- ⁷⁶ See, for example, Michaela Kušnírová, “Obchody medzi Čínou a Slovenskom ešte len štartujú (rozhovor)” [Business between China and Slovakia is only starting (An interview)], *Sme*, 6 April 2016, <http://ekonomika.sme.sk/c/20131802/obchody-medzi-cinou-a-slovenskom-este-len-startuju-rozhovor.html#ixzz4BS3uXBI9>; “21-ročné Slovensko oslavuje 65 rokov diplomatických vzťahov s ČLR” [21-year Slovakia Celebrates 65 Years of Diplomatic Relations with the PRC], *Tablet.TV*, 23 October 2014, http://tv.teraz.sk/cd-klub/141043-004-009_cd_klub_20141023mp45448c79f9473995dd0b4eaa8/1596; “Tanečný súbor Pekinskej tanečnej akadémie sa predstavil na Slovensku pri príležitosti čínskeho nového roku Sviatky jari” [The ensemble of the Beijing Academy of Dancing presented the Spring Festival at the occasion of the Chinese New Year]; “Čínsky veľvyslanec Lin Lin: Na Slovensku sa cítim veľmi príjemne” [Chinese Ambassador Lin: I feel very well in Slovakia], *Slovenka*, 6 August 2016, <http://slovenka.zenskyweb.sk/clanok/33358-cinsky-velvyslanec-lin-lin-na-slovensku-sa-citim-velmi-prijemne>.

- ⁷⁷ "Arbitrážny tribunál v otázke Juhočínskeho mora nie je legitímny" [The arbitration tribunal on the issue of the South China Sea is not legitimate], *Nové slovo*, 1 August 2016, www.noveslovo.sk/c/Arbitrazny_tribunal_v_otazke_Juhocinskeho_mora_nie_je_legitimny; "Osem omylov ohľadom čínskeho Tibetu" [Eight mistakes concerning Chinese Tibet], *Nové slovo*, 6 December 2016, www.noveslovo.sk/c/Osem_omylov_ohladom_cinskeho_Tibetu; "Čínsky veľvyslanec na Slovensku Lin Lin o medzinárodnej politike, studenej vojne i "hre s nulovým súčtom" [Chinese Ambassador in Slovakia Lin Lin on international politics, the Cold War and "zero-sum game"], *Hlavné Správy*, 3 November 2016, www.hlavnespravy.sk/cinsky-velvyslanec-na-slovensku-lin-lin-o-medzinarodnej-politike-studenej-vojne-i-hre-s-nulovym-suctom/853669; "Veľvyslanec Lin Lin o korupcii a vzťahoch Číny s prezidentom Kiskom i premiérom Ficom" [Ambassador Lin Lin on corruption and relations with President Kiska and Premier Fico], *Hlavné Správy*, 31 October 2016, www.hlavnespravy.sk/velvyslanec-lin-lin-o-korupcii-a-vztahoch-ciny-s-prezidentom-kiskom-i-premierom-ficom/852497; "GU Ziping: Číne záleží na tradícii priateľstva so Slovenskom" [Gu Ziping: Tradition of friendship with Slovakia is important for China], *Hlavné Správy*, 27 September 2017, www.hlavnespravy.sk/gu-ziping-cine-zalezi-na-tradicii-priatelstva-so-slovenskom/33146.
- ⁷⁸ See, for example, Vladimír Šnidl, "Kto riadi proruský web Hlavné správy? Muž, ktorý neodmieta ani eurofondy" [Who Manages the Pro-Russian website Hlavné správy? A man who does not refuse the Eurofunds], *Denník N*, 2 August 2016, <https://dennikn.sk/521950/kto-riadi-prorusky-web-hlavne-spravy-muz-ktory-neodmieta-ani-eurofondy-2> (Accessed 7 April 2017).
- ⁷⁹ "Do Penty možno vstúpia Číňania" [Chinese May Enter Penta], SITA, 16 March 2016, <http://spravy.pravda.sk/ekonomika/clanok/386890-do-penty-mozno-vstupia-cinania>.
- ⁸⁰ *Penta dementovala, že by rokovala s Číňanmi o vstupe do skupiny* [Penta denied it negotiated with Chinese about entering the group], *Trend.sk*, 21 April 2017. Accessed at: <https://www.etrend.sk/firmy/suska-sa-o-megaobchode-cinania-by-chceli-polovicu-penty.html>.
- ⁸¹ Tomáš Němeček, "Český týždeň Tomáša Němečka," [Czech week of Tomáš Němeček] *.týžden*, No. 11, 13 March 2017).
- ⁸² Martin Hála, "Puzzle jménem CEFC: čínský a světový tisk o tajemné společnosti (a jejím vlivu v ČR)" [Puzzle Entitled CEFC: Chinese and World Press on a Mysterious Company and its Impact in the Czech Republic], *Sinopsis*, 23 January 2017, <https://sinopsis.cz/puzzle-jmenem-cefc-cinsky-a-svetovy-tisk-o-tajemne-spolecnosti-a-jejim-vlivu-v-cr>; Olga Lomová, "Czech-Chinese Honeymoon: Will it Bring Economic Advantage or End in Security Risk?" *V4 Revue*, 9 February 2016, <http://visegradrevue.eu/czech-chinese-honeymoon-part-i-will-it-bring-economic-advantage-or-end-in-security-risk>.
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