Aliaksei Kazharski

On the nexūs between populism and geopolitical rhetorics: Evidence from the Visegrád Four

[aliaksei.kazharski@fsv.cuni.cz] (Institute of Political Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University, Prague)

Abstract

The article argues that the repeated use of geopolitical rhetoric by populist actors of various breeds is directly connected to the structural and conceptual affinities through which populism and geopolitics present themselves as discourses, thereby demonstrating a shared grammar of self-presentation. It relies on the available evidence from the Visegrád Four countries in order to survey identitary and technocratic populisms and the multiple ways in which they co-opt geopolitical reasoning. While the discussion of the V4 is based on previously published research, the study also zooms in on the post-2023 developments in Slovakia to present a new perspective. Examining the case of the most recent (as of 2025) democratic backsliding tendencies in the region, the paper demonstrates how local identitary populism has become (re)connected to a historically rooted 'civilizational' geopolitics of pan-Slavism.

Keywords: Czech Republic, Geopolitics, Hungary, populism, realism, Slovakia, Visegrád Four

1 Introduction

This paper surveys the multiple conceptual interlinkages between populist and geopolitical discourses. It argues that there are a number of possible ways in which the two can become mutually attached and reinforcing, and that these links are, indeed, not accidental. There are several ways in which the rhetorical self-presentation of populist politicians and geopolitical reasoning share an inherent narrative structure or grammar, thus making them typical bedfellows. The first part of the analysis is dedicated to a discussion of the general interlinkages, which relies predominantly on examples from the Visegrád Four (V4) (sub)regional grouping.

The second part zooms in on one V4 country, Slovakia, as a case study that illuminates the connection between a local form of identitarian populism and the geopolitics of what has been accurately identified as 'Pseudo-Pan-Slavism' (Marušiak, 2023). Slovakia is chosen as a case study both by virtue of its illustrative value and because, as of the time

of writing (2025), these are the most recent salient developments in the Visegrád Four as far as the populist erosion of democratic norms and institutions is concerned. While Slovakia, with its unique features, has also been generally understudied compared to some of the other countries in the grouping, the post-2023 political turn offers vast amounts of new material. While all of this is certainly impossible to cover in one article, mapping the trends that are likely to shape future developments is a necessary start. At the same time, the article does not focus exclusively on Slovak developments but places them in the context of shared (sub)regional trends, viewing V4 politics as sharing many common denominators. This includes both these countries' earlier post-1989 self-positioning as the most reformed and Westernized ones, best prepared to embrace the Western order (Vachudova, 2005), and the subsequent 2015 joint rebellion against some elements of the European order, combined with growing 'anti-systemic attitudes' (Poznar & Havlík, 2025). These shared trends and a keen sense of historical traumas and unresolved identity issues that are often instrumentalized in populist discursive strategies are thus something that brings the V4 together as a group of similar cases, despite the countries' significant and persisting differences.

The structure of the argument developed in the article is as follows. First, I highlight ways in which populist discursive strategies can form synergies with geopolitical reasoning by plugging into constructed images of the world as a dark and dangerous place of ruthless competition between powers. This is congruent both with Social Darwinist assumptions inherited from classical geopolitics and with the ideas about international anarchy and self-help promoted by representatives of the contemporary realist school of IR. In the identitarian strand of populism, this corresponds to negative othering and antagonistic frontier-drawing through which a populist narrative about a threatened and victimized people is usually sewn together.

I next discuss another point of intersection, which has to do with depoliticization strategies. Both realism and classical geopolitics have been characterized by a pretense of access to some pre-political reality, allegedly formed by the 'objective' facts of the distribution of power in space. Consequently, both the populist and the realist-geopolitical rhetorics profess the same inherent grammar of self-positioning. At its core is the pretense of having a monopoly on representation and truth, respectively. In the same vein, populism also offers itself as a depoliticizing 'commonsensicalism' and solutionism, supposedly based on simple truths that are ignored by the 'establishment' or the 'elites' (political, intellectual, media) either because of their ineptitude or deliberately, with a malign intent to deceive and keep the 'ordinary people' in the dark.

Finally, there is one more distinct aspect that brings together populism and the tradition of geopolitical realism (realist geopolitics). Whether drawing inspiration from Social Darwinist ideas or from the statesman's cynicism of *raison d'état,* the realist-geopolitical line of reasoning leaves little room for moral considerations, at least when it comes to international politics. Consequently, for populism, this becomes a convenient justification for its political transgressions of standard decorum. Thus, part of the appeal of populism can be seen as produced by the deliberate transgression of norms in favor of an opportunity to be openly cynical and shameless and to finally shed the shackles of morality, which, as the populists tend to suggest, has been largely hypocritical anyway.

The second part of the article zooms in on one V4 case, discussing the post-2023 developments in Slovakia. It shows how its particular articulation of identitarian populism

is connected to geopolitical discourse through essentialist-culturalist 'civilizational' ideas with roots in the 19th century. On the one hand, of course, the Slovak case is at best only partially idiosyncratic, and many similar points of intersection between the discourses can be easily found in other V4 countries and beyond. On the other hand, the broader survey of the region provided in Section 3 also shows that this is but one way in which populist and geopolitical discourses can form mutually legitimizing and reinforcing synergies, thus demonstrating that there is no fixed template concerning how the two may be married.

2 Concept and method

The article adopts a fairly broad definition of its key categories. Naturally, neither 'populism' nor 'geopolitics' is a fully stable term, with 'geopolitics' being a particularly fuzzy buzzword, so a brief terminological excursion is also in order here. One existing distinction that the discussion relies on is the one between identitarian (right-wing) and technocratic or 'centrist' populisms. The two are united by the common denominator of frontier-drawing (Laclau, 2005) but tend to use different 'host ideologies.' To some extent, the variety of possibilities through which populism allies with geopolitical reasoning hinges on the specific breeds of the geopolitical and populist discourse in question. Without pretending to give a comprehensive survey of the debate, I rely on some of the insights of previously published work. Thus, one way to approach populism is to see it as a distinct political style, characterized by the promise and performance of authenticity (Kazharski & Makarychev, 2020). This performance naturally includes strong elements of emotion and various forms of transgression, identified by some as the 'carnival culture' of populism (Gaufman, 2018). Antagonistic frontier-drawing, which is a distinctive trait of the populist style, can also be subsumed under the authenticity package. Thus, the distinction between the 'underdog' people and the elites bears the promise of both the 'real people' ('ordinary people,' 'simple people') and their 'real' representation coming from the populist. In fact, it is also implied to be the only real and authentic one, as in this respect the populist typically claims exclusive agency. Populists can thus exploit different themes and host ideologies: it is not a type of actor but a political style with an inherent grammar of frontier-drawing and a 'thin' rather than 'thick' ideology.

In turn, 'geopolitics', which is, arguably, a rather strong candidate for being an empty or floating signifier, can be understood in a variety of ways. The article distinguishes between geopolitics in a narrower sense and the discourse of geopolitical realism – alternatively, realist geopolitics or realist grand strategy. In a narrow sense, 'geopolitics' refers, historically, to the so-called classical geopolitical doctrines that strove to apply notions developed in natural sciences to understand human societies. Thus, states were conceived as 'geographical organisms' engaged in a struggle for so-called 'living space' (Dodds, 2005). The Social Darwinist logic underpinning them and their subsequent association with Nazism through the notorious figure of Karl Haushofer and the Nazi discourse of *Lebensraum* had made the word 'geopolitics' highly controversial. Yet, the term made a triumphal comeback through the discourses of realist statesmen like Henry Kissinger, who asserted the primacy of the 'geopolitical approach' understood in the realist terms of an 'equilibrium of power' (Bull, 1980; Kissinger, 1979). Realism and geopolitics have thus been long intertwined, often leading to their discursive conflation as the meaning of the

latter also became increasingly fuzzier As historians of geopolitical thought point out, the post-WWII use of the term crystallized during the decades of the Cold War in an environment shaped by the global rivalry between the US and the USSR and the ideas of containment policy that, in terms of strategic planning, had distinctly geographical global and regional dimensions (Dodds, 2005, pp. 35-41). These generations of authors would not be typically characterized by having 'a detailed appreciation of the term's tortured intellectual history,' and, to them, 'geopolitics' may rather have been 'a useful shorthand (and apparently self-evident) term to highlight the significance of territory and resources' or 'an apparently useful moniker to highlight the significance of geographical factors in shaping political and military developments' (Dodds 2005, pp. 35, 37). In sum, the term often came to refer to a realist mode of global strategic thinking epitomized by well-known pundits like Kissinger or Zbigniew Brzeziński. Finally, in a broader sense, the geopolitical discourse, as deconstructed by the critical geopolitics school, could mean any representation of spaces within which the relations of power were also typically embedded (Agnew and Corbridge, 1995). This can also include, for example, popular geopolitics, which takes an interest in spatial representations produced and promoted by mass culture (Dodds, 2005).

Theoretically and methodologically, the present paper sticks to this social constructivist understanding of geopolitics as developed by the critical geopolitics school. It discusses ways in which populist discourses co-opt both the biologizing and Social Darwinist tropes and those notions that are associated with the realist school of international relations theory, as well as the ways in which the two discourses can mutually reinforce each other. Here, it should naturally be acknowledged that the relationship between realism and 'geopolitics' understood in the narrow sense, i.e., as an assemblage of Social Darwinist concepts and doctrines, is, of course, a complex one. While from the historical and ontological points of view, the two should naturally not be conflated, there are at least two key points to be kept in mind here that ultimately do not allow us to decisively divorce them either.

First, as Specter (2022) argues, academic (neo)realism, which presents itself as an objective positivist theory, suffers from a 'broader amnesia' about its imperialist origins. Some of its key concepts (e.g., 'great power'), in fact, originate in the classical geopolitical discourse that used to underpin imperial expansion policies. Second, while academic texts enjoy a relatively narrow readership, it is the realist scholars' popular commentary, actively broadcast by the media, that tends to gain traction with the public. The genre of realist popular commentary typically presents particularly oversimplified explanations and analyses of global events, which do not always live up even to the methodological standards of realist academic theorizing itself. This popular discourse is subsequently co-opted by populist actors, and it then intermingles with other themes and tropes, including the biologizing and Social Darwinist geopolitical imaginaries.

Methodologically speaking, the article adopts a mixed approach. While its overarching methodology is an interpretivist one, Section 3 does not owe its contents to any original research design but is rather based on desk research into published scholarship on recent political developments in the Visegrád Four. The section thus draws on cases that have been previously analyzed in order to illustrate the different modalities in which populist strategies and geopolitical discourses become interlinked. Session 4, which zooms in closer on one V4 country, brings together both previously published scholarship on

Slovakia and new empirical material that reflects the post-2023 developments. In that latter point, the article relies on statements by leaders of the post-2023 coalition as reported by major Slovak media. Therefore, the main contribution of the study is, overall, not so much in processing large volumes of new empirical material but in bringing together different examples of discursive strategies from the V4 subregional grouping for illustrative purposes.

3 Populism and geopolitics: shared tropes and conceptual interlinkages

In this section, I explore the conceptual preconditions for the discursive synergies between populism and geopolitics that appear in their various guises. The pivotal point here is the appeal that geopolitical reasoning is capable of having vis-à-vis voters in democratic polities.

For instance, some of the most prominent representatives of contemporary realism have pointed out that, in terms of acceptance by the domestic public in democracies, realist foreign policy doctrines are what one may call a 'hard sell.' Thus, in his classic treatise, Mearsheimer (2001, p. 23) argues that Americans are 'hostile to realism because it clashes with their basic values.' As citizens of democratic polities are largely optimistic and moralistic about politics, the clever cynicism and immorality that realists preach as the basis of their worldview feel unsavory. They are at odds with the general democratic notion of both the international system and domestic politics, which is underpinned by the internalized belief that 'with time and effort, reasonable individuals can cooperate to solve important social problems' (Mearsheimer, 2001, pp. 24-25).

Schweller, in his comparative examination of the potential of different doctrines as political mobilizers, makes a similar observation. As he argues, fascism (aggressive expansionist nationalism) and its regular bedfellow, the classical racist geopolitics of the first half of the 20th century, were extremely powerful in terms of solidifying national support for the war effort. They 'posited an unrelentingly dangerous world and championed as a remedy for this intolerable condition wars of expansion to maximize the nation's power at the expense of others,' with 'brutality and ruthlessness' being portrayed as 'necessities for the victimized group's survival' (Schweller, 2006, p. 117). Fascist geopolitics thus turned out to be the perfect mobilizer, even if ultimately very poor political 'software' for clever balancing because of its highly irrational and imprudent character. In comparison, realism lacks such a powerful emotional appeal. Absent 'an ideology for whipping up nationalist sentiment,' 'there is there is nothing about the realist creed that would stir the passions of average citizens in support of the state, much less cause them to rise up as one without regard to hardship' (Schweller, 2006, p. 115).

To be sure, this self-portrayal of realist scholars as occupying a speaking position that tends to be marginalized in an environment where normative – liberal or other moral value-laden – language has a hegemonic position might have some truth to it. However, I would argue that this does not give us the full picture, in particular, as the relationship between realism and 'geopolitics' is also a complex one. For starters, the mobilizing effect of nationalism and strong negative othering, whether ethnic, religious, or gendered, is

naturally a central element of contemporary right-wing identitarian populism. This goes hand in hand with the geopolitical image of the world as an essentially dangerous place, cast in Social Darwinist terms, as outlined by Schweller and other realists.

However, there also seem to be very different modalities by which the 'dangerous world' could be framed, and some of them clearly invite a juxtaposition of (some forms of) realism and geopolitics understood as a primordialist approach that relies on biologizing analogies and a language that is reminiscent of the 19th century scholarship that projected concepts borrowed from natural sciences onto relations between human societies and culture. This type of populist discourse combines the primordialist language with an appeal to basic emotions, such as fear, that is invoked with the help of Social Darwinist categories. One vivid example here is the locally well-known case of Karla Maříková, a Czech MP for the right-wing populist Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD) who came under police investigation in 2020 following a comment about migration she left on her Facebook page. According to Maříková, it was 'forbidden to bring non-autochthonous, invasive species of animals and plants to the EU. Muslim migrants are also non-autochthonous, and as with other invasive species, this means that they will spread in an unpredicted manner and will gradually displace the autochthonous European population' (ČTK 2021).

Obviously, this version of geopolitical discourse that relies on a biologizing language stands world apart from the approaches practiced by the key authors of structural realism such as Kenneth Waltz (1979), whose image of the world is informed by the macroeconomic scientific paradigm with its assumptions of utilitarian rationality, or from neoclassical realists like Schweller (2006), who draw on a comparativist approach to dissect domestic politics in a systematic manner in order to account for the seeming irrationality of foreign policies vis-à-vis the stimuli generated by the structure of the international system. The Social Darwinist elements in the geopolitical discourse of the populists make this version of geopolitics border on biopolitics, an image of the world that reduces humans to their bare physical existence, placed outside the legal and sociopolitical frameworks and their complex rationalities. Thus, for theorists of biopolitical approaches, the category of 'zoe' or 'bare life' becomes paramount (see Makarychev's 2022 take on the geo- and biopolitics of populism). Incidentally, biopolitical images also resonate rather well with the drive for authenticity that is inherent in many populist strategies (Kazharski & Makarychev, 2020).

It may also be worthwhile noting here that this involves not merely a radical difference in ontologies between contemporary academic scientific realism, which relies on rational choice theory models to account for state behavior, on the one hand, and the biologizing or Social Darwinist discourse of the populists on the other. There is also the ensuing difference in approaches and end goals. 'Geopolitics' understood as geopolitical realism in the spirit of Kissinger implies a particular political style practiced by an apt statesman, who, while accepting the broadly pessimistic interpretation of the world as a dangerous place driven by conflict, works to minimize the negative effects of anarchy through clever even if cynical or morally dubious solutions, often seeking the 'lesser evil.'

To a significant extent, the intellectual project of the academic realists is also about actively rationalizing what Hans Morgenthau (1978) called the 'deficient reality' and about translating established political practice originating in the 19th century into 'scientific rules' (Guzzini, 1998, p. 11). Morgenthau's (1978) 'human nature' realism departs from an understanding of humans as driven primarily by fear and *animus dominandi* (the spirit of

domination), i.e., an essentialist anthropology that would certainly overlap with the basic techniques of the populist political style, with its constant appeals to the primordial and the emotional. Yet, in the end, the realist endeavor is, by and large, an attempt at rational and prudent management of the deeply imperfect world. On the contrary, populist and nationalist projects seem to have been very much about eagerly giving in to it. As Schweller (2006, p. 105) puts it, 'there are two very significant differences between fascism and realism, however: fascists did not believe in the balance of power and they activated realist principles with a racist ideology that, unfortunately for humankind, succeeded in mobilizing the passions of the multitudes.'

In the present-day context, one needs only to replace 'fascism' with 'right-wing populism' (or, in some cases, 'neofascism'), while the element of the emotional seduction of the masses obviously remains central. This has also motivated the recent 'emotional turn' in comparative politics, with researchers exploring the role of emotional appeal in populist rhetoric. Whilst it has been argued that right-wing populist forces can appeal to both negative and positive emotions (Gazarek & Uhrecký, 2023), issues pertaining to international politics and foreign policy are often framed in a negative way. A typical negative othering strategy here is directed at migrants and international migration, with fear being a powerful driver. For example, in Central and Eastern Europe, where migration from the Middle East is largely absent, right-wing populist othering is directed at the so-called 'imaginary migrant' (see Tabosa, 2020), and, consequently, as Kissová (2017) puts it, the Muslim Other can represent 'the essence of the unknown.'

Appeals to a fear of specific, even if practically unknown, others can be supplemented and reinforced by a more general collective anxiety triggered by the rapid dynamics of globalization. It is in this context that an ontological security scholar like Kinvall (2004, p. 747) discusses the idea of homesteading as 'a strategy for coping with homelessness,' which can involve falling back on the national community or the oftentimes largely imagined past (i.e., national Golden Age myths) serving as anchors of stability and certainty in a dangerous and unpredictable world. Thus, in line with the insights of ontological security theorists, populism can be understood as a (peculiar and unhealthy) anxiety management strategy. The local, the autochthonous, the traditional – whether real or invented – stands in juxtaposition to an image of the global that is largely hostile and threatening.

Anti-globalist conspiracy theories that are regular bedfellows of populist rhetoric (Castanho Silva et al., 2017) also naturally become part of this anxiety (mis)management strategy, joining the element of fear with the element of rationalization. Somewhat paradoxically, conspiracy theories also play a rationalizing role. They do so by providing their audiences with an (unfalsifiable) 'explanation' of dramatic and fearsome events, attributing them to a hidden malevolent grand plan, and thus performing an 'ontological security reconstruction' by offering people 'the sense of meaningfulness' (Lauzon Chiasson, 2021, p. 158; see also Fitzgerald, 2022). In the process, populist discourses construct a geopolitical image of the world that is obscure, dark, and dangerous, driven by only vaguely identifiable clandestine forces.

A notable example of such discourse is the political rhetoric of Hungary's prime minister Viktor Orbán. Orbán's so-called 'illiberal' political ideology, which copy-pastes many of its ideologuemes directly from Putin's Russia, combines copious othering of domestic 'liberals' with iterative references to 'globalists,' 'Eurofederalists,' or unnamed

global 'financiers,' who are then also frequently identified as George Soros, a global 'oligarch' in possession of a transnational 'empire.' All these vaguely named enemies are said to be in cahoots, working jointly to undermine Hungarian sovereignty (Enyedi, 2020; Lamour, 2023; Varga & Buzogány, 2020). If, as Fitzgerald (2022, p. 17) puts it, 'all conspiracy theories are applied chains of equivalence,' then Orbán's populist discourse is a remarkable specimen in this respect. Through overarching terms (nodal points) like 'empire' or 'liberalism', it manages to assert equivalence between events and entities as disparate, for example, as the Ottoman Empire and the European Union, weaving them into a single metahistorical narrative of the foreign oppression of the Hungarian nation.

The populist image of the world is thus 'geopolitical' in the sense that it relies on strong feelings of fear and individual and collective vulnerability. The world is a dangerous and hostile place, and the powerful populist leader is the people's best hope in it. This is also closely connected to another aspect of populist discourse, which binds together internal (domestic) and external (international) othering. As Cadier and Szulecki (2020) point out in their examination of Poland, the populist strategy hinges on drawing an antagonistic frontier, constructing 'the people' as the 'underdog' mistreated by the domestic elites ('the establishment') who are also portrayed as connected to foreign centers of power. At the same time, in terms of its 'memory politics,' populism often constructs the nation as a 'historical underdog,' a constant martyr suffering at the hands of its more powerful, predatory, and oppressive neighbors. This is particularly prominent in countries like Hungary or Poland, whose collective memory and memory politics are informed by a rich and dramatic tradition of self-victimization.

This internal-external underdog nexus is not only characterized by mutual reinforcement but also helps solve one practical problem faced by those populists who have already been voted into power. By externalizing the political locus of the purported 'elites' onto the regional or/and global level, they can continue to engage in anti-establishment rhetoric while remaining in government, simultaneously accusing their domestic opponents of being in cahoots with the alleged transnational adversaries.

The cultivated sense of collective victimhood and vulnerability thus logically needs to construct a Social Darwinist geopolitical image of a dog-eat-(under)dog world. The peculiar rationalization provided by conspiracy theories essentially hinges on irrational and emotional perceptions driven by fear; a feeling of uncertainty and confusion. Consequently, as pointed out above, this emotional driver seems to stand in distinct juxtaposition to the cold calculus of cynical rationalism preached by realist scholars and practitioners. However, the geopolitical appeal of the populist is also more complex: it is not limited to conspiratorial rationalizations stemming from fear and confusion, and the realist pretense of a rational grand strategy can also become part of it.

The cooptation of realist geopolitics runs along a different line but also parallels the populist authenticity drive with its promise of presenting a radical alternative to existing concepts, frameworks, and institutions. Here, it is developed into the trope of geopolitics as both a 'smart science' and a 'commonsensical' view of the world cleansed of the ideological delusions that were allegedly imposed on 'the people' by the various intellectual and political 'elites.' To some extent, this trope resonates with the internal grammar of the realists' own self-positioning within the academic discipline and the broader professional world.

Thus, the pretense of a supposedly non-ideological reading of politics seems to be as old as the realist school itself (cf. Morgenthau's [1978] concept of the 'fallacy of ideologies,' for example). As the prominent representatives of realism themselves acknowledge, the realist posture implies putting oneself in a privileged, authoritative position by drawing a frontier between the 'realists' and the 'idealists,' with the latter implying clearly negative connotations (Soomo, 2011). Hence, also the somewhat pejorative language of 'liberal illusions' or 'delusions' employed by some realists in their academic work and/or popular commentary. One characteristic example is a text by Götz (2015) entitled *It's geopolitics, stupid: explaining Russia's Ukraine policy*. The text, published shortly after the annexation of Crimea and the outbreak of the first Russo-Ukrainian War in 2014, delivers a standard structural realist narrative. The article juxtaposes this narrative with what 'we are told' about Putin's Russia and, along the way, makes claims about identifying its 'genuine national interest' (Götz, 2015, p. 5).

There is thus an element of intellectual 'populism', so to speak, inherent in the pretentious geopolitical-realist posture, especially when it comes to the popular commentary genre, which, in turn, tends to be less nuanced than the realists' own academic theories. Realists claim privileged access to a 'reality,' which, it is implied, others are either too inept to see or deliberately choose to ignore or even conceal. This inherent grammar of realist self-positioning clearly parallels one of the central features of political populism, which is its claim to the exceptional representation of the people, who are separated by the antagonistic frontier from the 'elites.' Thus, populism 'presumes the existence of a recognizable (and implicitly consensual) universal good, and on the other hand, it claims for itself the ability to identify and defend the good (monopoly on truth). There is something exclusive in the relationship between the people and the populist actor' (Havlík, 2019, p. 317).

Consequently, populist discourse and realist reasoning operate in parallel when it comes to the logics of 'commonsensicalization,' depoliticization, and naturalization. For instance, 'technocratic' entrepreneur populists like Andrej Babiš in the Czech Republic, who famously promised to 'run the state as a firm,' build their 'anti-political' and anti-party strategy on promises of 'a-political expert solutions that will benefit the "ordinary people"' (Buštíková & Guasti, 2018, p. 304). Depoliticization, performed through claims of exclusive expertise and a managerial rationale, thus works to suspend pluralism and democratic deliberation (Havlík, 2019).

Realist depoliticization operates through appeals to the purported objective – structural or 'natural' factors such as the distribution of material capabilities or geography, which, as classical geopoliticians posited, 'does not argue. It simply is' (Spykman, 1938, p. 236). This allows the realist reasoning to identify 'genuine national interests' (see above) that stem from the allegedly objective reality of geopolitics (stupid!) and not from political deliberation or political choices made, let us say, about international amities and enmities.

Technocratic populism largely parallels what Evgeny Morozov (2013, p. 5) calls solutionism, i.e., 'recasting all complex social situations either as neatly defined problems with definite, computable solutions or as transparent and self-evident processes that can be easily optimized.' Arguably, a distinctive trait of populism – both the technocratic and identitarian breeds – is the seduction of quick and seemingly smart solutions based on 'common sense.' This is the common sense that the populist typically claims to share with the ordinary people – but not with the 'elites' who are said to be lacking it or deliberately ignoring it in pursuit of their own agendas.

Similar to populism, realism typically positions itself as the voice of practical cleverness and common sense. However, the construction of 'common sense' in realism often also rests on simplifying the complex sociopolitical reality. This is how the realist commentary attracts criticism for its 'epistemic superimpositions' and a selective and inconsistent (pseudo)empiricism that is quick to overlook uncomfortable facts and avoids being exposed to the test of falsifiability (e.g., Dutkiewicz & Smoleński, 2023).

The overlaps between populism and realist geopolitics in terms of their solutionism and 'commonsensicalism' are clear, but the mutual appeal does not end there either. In parallel, there also operates the mystique trope of geopolitics as not only a 'smart' but somewhat sacred or esoteric science. This is closely connected to the visual and performative aspects of knowledge production and its popular portrayals. In this context, Kurowska (2024, p. 9) writes about 'magical realism' as a ritualized performance of international relations expertise which combines academic discourse with a 'ritual mastery' that involves depicting 'authoritative figures' wearing 'wise faces.'

For a proper example of how populism publicly co-opts realism, one can look to the mutual endorsement of John Mearsheimer and Viktor Orbán. The Hungarian P.M. does not merely revert to a geopolitical discourse, for example when he talks about different 'poles' or 'centers of power' in the European context or about his country being 'caught in the crossfire between major geopolitical players' because of 'NATO expansion' and the 'geopolitical significance of the war' (About Hungary, 2022). In 2022, Orbán also invited Mearsheimer, whom the pro-government websites solemnly introduced as 'world-renowned' and 'one of the most influential experts on international relations of our time' (MTI- Hungary Today, 2022), to join him in the Carmelite Monastery in Budapest for 'an informal discussion' on the Russo-Ukrainian war. The meeting was shown taking place in a room against the background of a bookshelf and a giant globe, performing the visual symbolism of geopolitics as a 'serious science.'[1]

Finally, there is yet another way in which populist and geopolitical discourses can mutually resonate. This aspect speaks back to the aforementioned complaints of the realists about the liberal democratic political culture not being particularly receptive to the realists' image of the world (e.g., Mearsheimer, 2001, pp. 24–25). It seems that, in this case, the realists might also be being unnecessarily modest about the outreach of their philosophy. The situation may, in fact, be more complex as, arguably, cynicism and immorality can also have a distinct mass appeal of their own. Thus, though technocratic populism is about drawing a moralistic frontier (Havlík, 2019, p. 370), paradoxically, as researchers have demonstrated, it also releases citizens from moral expectations about their leaders (Buštíková & Guasti, 2018, p. 322).

Being allowed to leave the iron cage of morality, at least for a minute, can, in itself, be psychologically comfortable, but it can also involve an additional element of seduction due to its transgressive nature. Immorality and even deliberate cynicism, understood as a form of transgression, parallel rudeness, obscenity, and other forms of coarse, unrefined behavior. These can be read as forms of populist authenticity, which is also profoundly anti-elitist. In this context, Gaufman (2018, p. 412) discusses 'carnival culture,' which allows

---

[1] I am grateful to Filip Ejdus for tipping me off about this moment of visual symbolism.

people 'for a short period of time, to experience the freedom an individual is usually deprived of.' The carnival culture of Trumpist populism thus becomes an anti-establishment, anti-official 'counter-culture.'

The geopolitical image of the world, with its international anarchy and dog-eat-dog behavior, sets the perfect stage on which the populist 'sage' can pose as a Nietzschean or Machiavellian figure, shedding the shackles of morality. This relationship has multiple aspects. On the one hand, geopolitics offers populism a transgressive 'freedom' from moral norms. On the other hand, as already discussed above, the geopolitical image of the hostile world is isomorphic to that antagonistic vision of the domestic political order which populism offers to its voters. This is where populists in democracies can have a lot to learn from authoritarian regimes that also employ populist rhetoric. Thus, Viktor Orbán has borrowed massively from the ideological arsenal of Putinism. Yet, arguably, Putinist discourse on international politics, which many are quick to identify as 'realist,' resonates with a particular Russian worldview. That negative, pessimistic worldview is itself informed by the citizens' domestic political experience, which is characterized by oppression, a statist hierarchy, weak rule of law, and the selective application of rules.

4 Slovakia in the Visegrád Four: the geopolitics of a Slavic underdog

This section discusses identitarian populism and Pseudo-Pan-Slavist geopolitical legacies in Slovakia. The case was chosen because of its rich empirics and the fact that Slovakia has, at times, been seen as an outlier in CEE, owing to its somewhat troubled post-Communist transition, which was complicated by nationalist populism in the 1990s. At the time of writing (2024-2025), concerns about Slovakia's democratic backsliding were re-emerging (Maďarová, 2024).

On the one hand, compared to other V4 states often discussed in the context of right-wing populism, Slovakia seems to be defined by the absence of both territorial traumas (Hungary) and historical traumas coupled with nationalistic messianism (Poland), i.e., those ideologies that easily serve as 'hosts' to populism. Arguably, the shared Czechoslovak legacy of the democratic First Republic (1918-1938) also plays a role in shaping the political culture. On the other hand, the comparison with the culturally and historically close Czechs also has its limits, as Slovaks have been known to be both more susceptible to pan-Slavist Russophilia and more socially conservative. This continued to be a central factor in the modus operandi of populist actors and informed the post-EU accession period trends, with a new collective subject – 'the conservative people' coming to life in Slovak politics – a subject constructed as being in a distinct juxtaposition to the 'liberal elites' (Maďarová & Hardoš, 2022).

Following the collapse of the communist dictatorship in 1989 and the 1993 Velvet Divorce that separated Czechoslovakia into two independent states, the Czech and Slovak polities had their own independent trajectories of transition. At the same time, they remained special neighbors, extremely close in cultural, linguistic, and societal terms, and their political systems were, to some extent, communicating vessels, with people, ideas, and discourses migrating frequently between countries. Symbolically, the technocratic

populist Andrej Babiš, mentioned in previous sections, one of the key political players in the Czech Republic from the 2010s onwards, was Slovak by origin, and his somewhat imperfect knowledge of Czech even became an object of public scrutiny and mockery.

Seen at a glance, the two cases may seem similar in virtue of their linguistic proximity, sharing the same Austro-Hungarian and Czechoslovak past, and being small CEE nations. Yet there have also been important differences in terms of their historical development and its lasting impact on the present-day Czech and Slovak political cultures. These differences translate into 'diverging patterns of illiberalism and anti-EU politics' (Guasti, 2021, p. 181). Different here have been the very ways in which the identity of a small country and its positioning in terms of the European core-periphery axis have been conceived in domestic narratives. This predictably impacts both the local populist strategies and ways in which they relate to geopolitical agendas and imaginaries.

Thus, researchers argue that the Czech tradition of the moral understanding of politics, shaped by presidents Václav Havel and Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, led to a certain 'anti-geopolitical' mood involving an aversion to geopolitics (see Drulák, 2006). Obviously, this did not mean a complete absence of geopolitics from politics. Populist parties and actors have co-opted geopolitical reasoning into their discourses of danger, often connected to the traditional theme of smallness and vulnerability that is also typical across the region. Thus, Tomio Okamura's Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD), which is known for its anti-globalist and 'sovereignist' stance, has explained its lenient approach to Russia by the wish to avoid dragging the small country into a great power rivalry from which it would inevitably suffer (Kroc, 2021).

This rhetoric has thus functioned much along the lines of the logic discussed above, i.e., connecting images of a dangerous geopolitical world to the notion of an 'underdog' people that the populists have championed domestically. This geopolitical reasoning is typically translated into the promotion of Euroscepticism and, following the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the promotion of neutrality and immediate peace negotiations.

The Slovak case naturally exhibits similarities with the Czech one insofar as its smallness is concerned. Among other things, this allowed the local populists to exploit the post-2022 fear of being dragged into war, with some of the discursive strategies in this respect being visibly copied and pasted from the arsenal of the Czech populists (Hopková, 2024). There are important differences, however, that are rooted deeply in history and long-term patterns of identity formation that date back to the 19th century. In comparison to the Czechs, the Slovaks have been much more susceptible to anti-Westernist (pseudo-) pan-Slavist Russophilia, which successfully survived into the 21st century (see Marušiak, 2023). The 19th-century national movement leaders had a tendency to define Slovak identity in juxtaposition to the West. As Bátora (2017, p. 139) puts it, they 'constituted the Slovak nation around an erroneous narrative placing Slovakia on the intersection between "the East" represented by an imaginary Slavic community led by Russia and the West with its feudal and later liberal democratic institutions.' The lasting ambiguity about Slovakia's geopolitical self-positioning manifested itself in the all too well-known words of the populist authoritarian prime minister Vladmír Mečiar, who, in the 1990s, (in)famously responded to international criticism by declaring: 'if they do not want us in the West, we will turn to the East' (Duleba 2005, p. 331).

Consequently, right-wing populists and neofascists in Slovakia repeatedly questioned its Western orientation. Thus, the Slovak National Party (SNS) has presented itself as 'an antiestablishment nationalist party' whose approach has been characterized 'by skepticism toward foreign policy elites and Slovakia's established mainstream foreign policy agenda' as well as by Russia-friendliness and an adherence to 'pan-Slavism.' SNS castigated the EU for exerting 'excessive influence to the detriment of nation-states, contributing to a loss of autonomy, security, and cultural identity and putting Slovakia in a "subservient" position' (Kudzko, 2024).

For the sake of objectivity, it should be noted here that not all actors that have been labeled by researchers as populist in Slovakia embraced anti-Western Russophilia, and the possibilities of a pro-Western populism remained open (see Pažma & Hardoš, 2023). However, the most radical identitarian populism does tend to adhere to this pattern (see Gyárfášová, 2018; Paulovičová & Gyárfášová, 2024). Thus, People's Party Our Slovakia (ĽSNS), a party with distinctly neofascist origins, launched petitions to organize referenda on leaving the EU and NATO, which the party called 'a criminal organization.' ĽSNS propaganda materials were particularly rich in conspiracy geopolitics, drawing antagonistic frontiers between Slovakia and the rest of the world, which was said to be ruled by 'financiers,' 'Zionists,' and other 'global elites' (Kazharski, 2019, p. 400).

Furthermore, starting from the 2015 European migration crisis, which served as a trigger (Braun, 2021), mainstream parties in Slovakia and other countries of the region started coopting identitarian agendas that were traditionally the bread and butter of far-right political forces. This also applied to those parties that officially declared themselves to be left-wing. Thus, Robert Fico's Direction-Social Democracy, which was long characterized by a 'misalignment between its proclaimed social democratic orientation and the significant conservative orientation of its political practice,' shifted drastically in the direction of 'the agendas of conservative and right-wing populist parties' (Marušiak, 2021, pp. 39, 43), relying increasingly on nationalism, anti-liberal and anti-progressivist rhetoric, and strengthening its pro-Moscow position (Marušiak, 2023, p. 345). Its vice-chairman, a self-proclaimed leftist and anti-globalist philosopher, Ľuboš Blaha, was well known for his strong anti-US and pro-Russian public statements (Marušiak, 2023, p. 343). Fico himself, now frequenting obscure disinformation media platforms, laid blame on the West and Ukraine for starting the war, co-opting Kremlin propaganda tropes about 'Ukrainian Neo-Nazis' and 'the murder of the Russians in the Donbas' being the causes of the war (Čorej & Hrivňak, 2024).

Following its victory in the 2023 parliamentary elections, the winning coalition halted Slovakia's military assistance to Ukraine. SMER-SD and their allies capitalized on the fear of war and mimicked the strategy of the Czech populists in terms of presenting their rivals as 'candidates of war' while using peacenik rhetoric and promises 'not to send a single Slovak soldier to Ukraine' (TASR 2024). SMER-SD also predictably embraced the Mearsheimerite narrative that normalized and rationalized Russia's aggression by talking about Moscow's 'legitimate' security concerns in the face of 'NATO expansion.' According to Fico, as a Slav himself he felt sad that 'Slavs were being slaughtered (*kántria sa*) because of some geopolitical interests' (TA3, 2024). On the second anniversary of the full-scale invasion, the prime minister reiterated that military victory over Russia was impossible and that 'Slavs were killing Slavs' while 'the West was supporting that' (Rusnáková, 2024).

There is a recurrent trope in the Slovak discourse, typically picked up by the anti-Western far-right, about the EU and NATO striving to victimize Slavs, to impoverish and 'enslave' them (Krekó et al., 2015, p. 39). It can refer to Slovakia or Russia, but also to Serbia, presented as another victim of the West. In 1999, NATO's Operation Allied Force became the subject of domestic political debate in Slovakia owing to the incumbent government's decision to provide Slovak airspace for the strikes. Some parties actively played 'the Slavic card' (Mesežnikov, 2001, p. 26), with 'the nationalist-populist forces speaking about the values of Slavic solidarity and preventing Islam from infiltrating Europe' (Sláviková cit. in Marušiak & Gniazdowski, 2015, p. 108).

The ghost of pan-Slavism thus continues to haunt Slovak politics into the 21st century. However, its peculiar nature stems from its 19th-century origins. Firstly, the 'Slavic community,' as envisioned by the national revivalists, was most certainly 'an imaginary one' (Bátora, 2017, p. 139), as it grouped the Slovaks together with the Russians based on the linguistic criterion and set them apart from their immediate neighbors, such as the Austrian Germans or Hungarians, with whom they had more in common in cultural and political terms in comparison to the more distant Russians. Secondly, it was also predominantly Russo-centric. As Marušiak (2023, p. 331) has put it, 'Slovakia is an example of a country in which Slavophilic discourse has amalgamated with pro-Russian discourse.' Consequently, he is most accurate in identifying it as pseudo-Pan-Slavism (PPS) as, in its imagination, it overlooks other Slavic-speaking nations that may not necessarily be historically on good terms with Russia and thus do not fit into the Russophile imaginary (e.g., Poland). In some cases, this pseudo-pan-Slavist discourse can even deny other nations that speak other Slavic languages the right to an independent existence separately from Russia (e.g., Belarus or Ukraine).

Finally, the PPS imaginary preserves a visible continuity between the 19th and the 21st century in terms of the self-victimization mentioned above. The 19th-century Slovak Russophiles looked up to Russia as 'a protector of the interests of the oppressed Slavic nations in Central and Southeastern Europe' (Marušiak, 2013, p. 44). In a sense, not much has changed: 21st-century identitarian populism presents 'the Slavs' as victimized underdogs who are threatened by the West – either through direct military aggression or indirectly, through undesirable cultural influences such as 'gender ideology' (Maďarová & Hardoš, 2022). Therefore, PPS becomes not only a 'geopolitical doctrine the essence of which is a programme of cooperation between Slavic states' but also 'very much part of the protest mood.' It amounts to 'an identitarian and civilisationist response to the liberal version of globalisation and European integration, appealing to tradition and belonging on the basis of the linguistic and constructed cultural proximity of Slavic peoples in opposition to Western, non-Slavic peoples' (Marušiak, 2023, pp. 330, 335).

On the one hand, this situates the populist PPS geopolitics within the broader trend of identitarian ethnopopulism, characterized by its multiple new others (Vachudova, 2020), and on the other, places it in the context of so-called 'civilizationism' and 'civilizational geopolitics.' These discourses have also been popular in Russia in different forms since the 19th century (see Neumann, 2017). In the post-Soviet period, they developed into the doctrines of the 'Russian world,' used to legitimize Moscow's neo-imperial policies (see Laruelle, 2008; Kazharski, 2019). In line with the general 'ethnopopulist' trend, the traditional othering of neighboring nations is complemented or partially substituted here by

new others, e.g., gendered ones (see Gaufman, 2022). While it is true that much of PPS geopolitics in Slovakia is a development of the autochthonous 'political culture of "Slavic nationalism"' that is not necessarily directly sponsored by Moscow (Krekó et al., 2015, p. 39), multiple intimate connections do exist, both in terms of the historic origins and the more recent development of these discourses, which, in turn, facilitates the borrowing of Russian-originating pro-Kremlin narratives by the respective Slovak cultural and political milieus, sometimes even at the level of state-funded institutions (see Golianová & Kazharski, 2020).

5 Conclusion

One purpose of this article was to demonstrate that the connection between populist and geopolitical discourses in their various guises is far from accidental. They have multiple overlaps and points of attachment because they often share an inherent grammar. These points, however, cannot be reduced to one conceptual link. Thus, for example, conspiracy-theory-bred fear and identitarian othering, on which right-wing populism capitalizes, plug into the geopolitical discourse in a way that is distinct from the depoliticizing managerial rationale and 'solutionism' of technocratic populisms. The latter, in turn, overlaps with the self-presentation of geopolitics as an 'objective' science with a practical application, which many allegedly ignore to their own detriment. At the same time, it can be argued that these strategies also have a common denominator. They hinge on anti-establishment and anti-elitist frontier-drawing, as the ultimate villain in these strategies is the 'elites' – those domestic and 'global' elites who allegedly ignore or even actively try to mask geopolitical logics while pursuing their own selfish agendas.

The Slovak case study in the second part of the article demonstrates one way in which identitarian populism can be rooted in a 'civilizationist' geopolitical discourse. In Slovakia, the Russocentric nature of its pseudo-Pan-Slavism has resulted in it being repeatedly used to justify the country's connection to the 'East' and to Russia, framed as the authoritarian or 'illiberal' alternative to the liberal-democratic 'West.' This lingering pseudo-Pan-Slavist discourse is akin to the Russian civilizationist discourses, with their nativist, biologizing, and racist 19th-century origins. This, in turn, situates the Slovak case within the broader trend that some classify as 'ethnopopulist,' with links between identitarian populism and geopolitics remaining strong.

At the same time, the regional survey provided in the first part demonstrates that identitarian-civilizationist populism is but one possible way in which populist and geopolitical discourses can synergize. In this sense, we cannot speak of a uniform template, and the attachment between the two is likely but not always necessary – and nor does that attachment exhaustively characterize populism as such. Being a 'thin' ideology or a political style with an inherent grammar but lacking a consistent doctrine, populism can naturally avail itself of a broader repertoire of tropes and ideas, and can, of course, also be infused with moralistic (as opposed to realist, technocratic, or transactionalist) rhetorics. One can also fairly easily imagine an anti-geopolitical populism. A broader survey of the interplay between these varying attachments seems to be a promising agenda for future research.

References

About Hungary. (2022, March 2). *Interview with Prime Minister Viktor Orbán in the political weekly "Mandiner." About Hungary.* https://abouthungary.hu/speeches-and-remarks/interview-with-prime-minister-viktor-orban-in-the-political-weekly-mandiner (Accessed January 16, 2026.)

Braun, M. (2021). *The politics of regional cooperation and the impact on the European Union. A study of Nordic Cooperation and the Visegrad Group.* Edward Elgar Publishing.

Bull, H. (1980). Kissinger: The primacy of geopolitics. *International Affairs, 56*(3), 484–487. https://doi.org/10.2307/2617394

Buštíková, L., & Guasti, P. (2018). The state as a firm: Understanding the autocratic roots of technocratic populism. *East European Politics and Societies: And Cultures, 33*(2), 302–330. https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325418791723

Castanho Silva, B., Vegetti, F., & Littvay, L. (2017). The elite is up to something: Exploring the relation between populism and belief in conspiracy theories. *Swiss Political Science Review, 23*(4), 423–443. https://doi.org/10.1111/spsr.12270

Čorej, T. & Hrivňak T. (2024, March 20). *Od Maďarska sme to čakali, od vás nie. Čo hovoria na Ukrajine o slovenskej vláde.* [We expected this from Hungary, but not from you]. Denník N. https://dennikn.sk/3891143/spravanie-fica-je-ako-dyka-do-chrbta-no-na-pomoc-nezabudneme-co-hovoria-na-ukrajine-o-slovensku/ (Accessed: 30-6-2024.)

ČTK (2021, April 5). *Nazvala migranty invazivním druhem.* [She said migrants were invasive species]. iDNES.cz. https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/policie-vydani-marikova-spd-migranti-trestni-stihani.A200305_192856_domaci_zaz. (Accessed: 30-6-2024.)

Dodds, K. (2005). *Global Geopolitics. A Critical Introduction.* Pearson Education Limited.

Drulák, P. (2006). Between geopolitics and anti-geopolitics: Czech political thought. *Geopolitics, 11*(3), 420–438. https://doi.org/10.1080/14650040600767883

Duleba, A. (2005). Slovakia's relations with Russia. *Studia Politicae Universitatis Silesiensis, 1,* 325–340.

Dutkiewicz, J., & Smolenski, J. (2023). Epistemic superimposition: The war in Ukraine and the poverty of expertise in international relations theory. *Journal of International Relations and Development, 26*(4), 619–631. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41268-023-00314-1

Enyedi, Z. (2020). Right-wing authoritarian innovations in Central and Eastern Europe. *East European Politics, 36*(3), 363–377. https://doi.org/10.1080/21599165.2020.1787162

Fitzgerald, J. (2022). Conspiracy, anxiety, ontology: Theorising QAnon. *First Monday, 27*(5), 1–43. https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v27i5.12618

Gazarek, A. & Uhrecký, B. (2023). Populist Radical Right Parties and the Rhetoric of Emotions. The Slovak Case Study. *Slovak Journal of Political Sciences, 23*(1), 56–84. https://doi.org/10.34135/sjps.230103

Gaufman, E. (2018). The Trump Carnival: Popular Appeal in the age of misinformation. *International Relations, 32*(4), 410–429. https://doi.org/10.1177/0047117818773130

Gaufman, E. (2022). Damsels in distress: Fragile Masculinity in Digital War. *Media, War & Conflict, 16*(4), 516–533. https://doi.org/10.1177/17506352221130271

Golianová, V., & Kazharski, A. (2020). 'The Unsolid'. Pro-Kremlin Narratives in Slovak Cultural and Educational Institutions. *The RUSI Journal, 165*(4), 10–21. https://doi.org/10.1080/03071 847.2020.1796521

Gyárfášová, O. (2018). The Fourth Generation: From Anti-Establishment to Anti-System Parties in Slovakia. *New Perspectives, 26*(1), 109–133. https://doi.org/10.1177/2336825x1802600111

Guasti, P. (2021). Same Same, but Different: Domestic Conditions of Illiberal Backlash Against Universal Rights in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. In A. Lorenz & L.H. Anders (Eds.), *Illiberal Trends and Anti-EU Politics in East Central Europe* (pp. 179–206). Palgrave Macmillan.

Havlík, V. (2019). Technocratic Populism and Political Illiberalism in Central Europe. *Problems of Post-Communism, 66*(6), 369–384. https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2019.1580590

Hopková, D. (2024, March 26). *Voľby 2024: Inšpiroval sa Pellegrini Babišom?* [Election 2024: Did Pellegrini take inspiration from Babiš?] In Aktuality. https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/ EDQEfNV/volby-2024-inspiroval-sa-pellegrini-babisom-kym-jemu-to-so-strasenim-vojnou-nevyslo-pellegrinimu-moze-podcast/

Kazharski, A. (2019). Frontiers of hatred? A study of right-wing populist strategies in Slovakia. *European Politics and Society, 20*(4), 393–405. https://doi.org/10.1080/23745118.2019.1569337

Kazharski, A., & Makarychev, A. (2020). Populism in Estonia and Slovakia: Performances, trans-gressions, and communicative styles. *Populism, 3*(2), 165–185. https://doi.org/10.1163/25888 072-bja10005

Kinnvall, C. (2004). Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity, And The Search For Ontological Security. *Political Psychology, 25*(5), 741–767.

Krekó, P. Győri, L., Milo, D., Marušiak, J. Széky & J. Lencsés, A. (2015) *Marching towards Eurasia. The Kremlin connections of the Slovak far-right.* Political Capital. https://politicalcapital.hu/ wp-content/uploads/PC_Study_Russian_Influence_Slovakia_ENG.pdf (Accessed: 30-6-2024.)

Kroc, V. (Host). (2021, April 30). *Tomio Okamura: Proti homosexuálům vůbec nic nemám.* [I have absolutely nothing against homosexuals] [Audio podcast episode]. Český rozhlas Radio-žurnál. https://www.irozhlas.cz/zpravy-domov/okamura-proti-homosexualum-nic-nemam-rodina-je-zena-muz_2104302000_btk

Kudzko, A. (2024). *Slovakia: An Established Pro-Russia Party With a Disparate Caucus.* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2024/04/ charting-the-radical-rights-influence-on-eu-foreign-policy#slovakia-an-established-prorussia-party-with-a-disparate-caucus Accessed: 30-6-2024.

Kurowska, X. (2024). Epistemic security and the redemptive hegemony of magical realism. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs, 37*(4), 440–460. https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.20 23.2276343

Lamour, C. (2023). Orbán placed in Europe: Ukraine, Russia and the radical-right populist Heartland. *Geopolitics, 29*(4), 1297–1323. https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2023.2241825

Lauzon Chiasson, J. (2021). Meaningfulness and meaninglessness in ontological security: Understanding information warfare's fundamental principles. *Études Canadiennes / Canadian Studies, 91,* 141–163. https://doi.org/10.4000/eccs.5250

Maďarová, Z. (2024, May 2024). *Slovakia's Presidential Election: An Opportunity to Rethink Civic Mobilization and the Security Agenda.* Illiberalism Studies Program. https://www.illiberalism.org/slovakias-presidential-election-an-opportunity-to-rethink-civic-mobilization-and-the-security-agenda/ Accessed: 30-6-2024.

Maďarová, Z., & Hardoš, P. (2022). In the name of the Conservative people: Slovakia's gendered illiberal transformation. *Politics and Governance, 10*(4). https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v10i4.5538

Makarychev, A. (2022). *Popular Biopolitics and Populism at Europe's Eastern Margins.* Brill.

Marušiak, J. (2013). Slovakia's Eastern policy – from the Trojan horse of Russia to "Eastern multivectoralism." *International Issues & Slovak Foreign Policy Affairs, XXI*(1–2), 42–70.

Marušiak, J. (2021). 'Slovak, not Brussels Social Democracy'. Europeanization/De-Europeanization and the Ideological Development of Smer-SD Before 2020 Parliamentary Elections in Slovakia. *Politologický Časopis – Czech Journal of Political Science, 28*(1), 37–58. https://doi.org/10.5817/pc2021-1-37

Marušiak, J. (2023). Slovakia: Emergence of an Old-New Pseudo-Pan-Slavism in the Context of the Conflict Between Russia and Ukraine After 2014. In M. Suslov, M. Čejka & V. Đorđević (Eds.), *Pan-Slavism and Slavophilia in Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe,* (pp. 329–355). Palgrave Macmillan.

MTI-Hungary Today. (2022, September 11). P*M Orbán Meets Well-known US Geopolitical Expert.* Hungary Today. https://hungarytoday.hu/pm-orban-meets-well-known-us-geopolitical-expert (Accessed January 16, 2026.)

Neumann, I.B. (2017). *Russia and the Idea of Europe. A Study in Identity and International Relations* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Paulovičová, N., & Gyárfášová, O. (2023). The Far-Right's Mnemonic Alliance with Putin's Russia: Ľ SNS's Mastering of a Disruptive Past. *Nationalities Papers, 52*(6), 1255–1272. https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2023.30

Pažma, M., & Hardoš, P. (2023). Capturing populist elements in mediated discourse. *Intersections. East European Journal of Society and Politics, 9*(1), 23–41. https://doi.org/10.17356/ieejsp.v9i1.993

Poznar, A. & Havlík V. (2025). From complementary and opportunistic sub-regionalism to anti-systemic attitudes? Exploring the post-2022 attitudes of visegrad member states to cooperation. *European Politics and Society, 26*(4), 937–954. https://doi.org/10.1080/23745118.2024.2446813

Pravda (2024, January 16). Fico o pomoci Ukrajine: Kántria sa tam Slovania. [Fico about aiding Ukraine: Slavs are being slaughtered there]. *Pravda,* https://tv.pravda.sk/relacie/spravodajstvo/epizoda/13731-fico-o-pomoci-ukrajine-kantria-sa-tam-slovania Accessed: 30-6-2024

Rusnáková, V. (2024, February 24). *Slovania sa zabíjajú a Západ to podporuje, konflikt na Ukrajine podľa Fica nemá vojenské riešenie.* [The Slavs are being killed and the West supports that.

The conflict in Ukraine has no military solution according to Fico]. SITA, https://sita.sk/slovania-sa-zabijaju-a-zapad-to-podporuje-podla-fica-konflikt-na-ukrajine-nema-vojenske-riesenie Accessed: 30-6-2024

Soomo (Host) (2011, May 4). *Theory in Action: Realism.* [Video podcast episode] https://youtu.be/UnKEFSVAiNQ

Specter, M. (2022). Realism after Ukraine: A Critique of Geopolitical Reason from Monroe to Mearsheimer. *Analyse & Kritik, 44*(2), 243–267. https://doi.org/10.1515/auk-2022-2033

Spykman, N.J. (1938). Geography and Foreign Policy, II. *The American Political Science Review, 32*(2), 213–236.

Tabosa, C. (2020). Constructing Foreign Policy vis-à-vis the Migration Crisis: The Czech and Slovak Cases. Czech *Journal of International Relations, 55*(2), 5–23, https://doi.org/10.32422/mv.1687

TASR (2024, February 26). Slovensko nepošle na Ukrajinu ani jedného slovenského vojaka, vyhlásil Fico po bezpečnostnej rade. [Slovakia will not send a single soldier to Ukraine, Fico declares following the security council meeting]. *Hospodárske Noviny,* https://hnonline.sk/slovensko/96133107-slovensko-neposle-na-ukrajinu-ani-jedneho-slovenskeho-vojaka-vyhlasil-fico-po-bezpecnostnej-rade Accessed: 30-6-2024

Vachudova, M.A. (2005). *Europe Undivided: Democracy, Leverage, Integration After Communism.* Oxford University Press.

Vachudova, M.A. (2020). Ethnopopulism and democratic backsliding in Central Europe. *East European Politics, 36*(3), 318-340. https://doi.org/10.1080/21599165.2020.1787163

Varga, M., & Buzogány, A. (2020). The foreign policy of Populists in power: Contesting liberalism in Poland and Hungary. *Geopolitics, 26*(5), 1442–1463. https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2020.1734564