



INSTRUMENTS OF HYBRID WARFARE: DISSEMINATION OF PRO-RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA NARRATIVES THROUGH POPULIST POLITICIANS IN THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

Martin Solik¹ Dalibor Velký² Jan Graf³
University of Ostrava

Abstract:

This article uses thematic discursive analysis to examine selected pro-Kremlin populist politicians in Slovakia. The enforcement of one-sided propagandist thoughts and opinions, primarily through radical anti-system politicians and 'alternative' media outlets freely available on the internet, has become one of the most important aspects of hybrid warfare in today's world. This paper aims to identify the specific goals of Russian propaganda and clarify how populist politicians spread propaganda on social media through language resources. The results of the analysis are presented at the end of the paper, along with the word resources used by these politicians. The results prove that pro-Kremlin populist politicians use word and language manipulation to help spread unilaterally focused and distorted information in Slovakia. This article aims to build on and complement existing research on pro-Kremlin anti-system politicians and their role in Russia's hybrid warfare in Europe.

Keywords: Hybrid war, propaganda, media discourse, Russian federation, Slovakia

Titulo en Español: Instrumentos de la guerra híbrida: difusión de narrativas propagandísticas prorrusas a través de políticos populistas en la República Eslovaca.

Resumen:

Este artículo utiliza el análisis discursivo temático para examinar a determinados políticos populistas pro-Kremlin en Eslovaquia. La imposición de pensamientos y opiniones propagandísticas unilaterales, principalmente a través de políticos antisistema radicales y medios de comunicación «alternativos» de libre acceso en Internet, se ha convertido en uno de los aspectos más importantes de la guerra híbrida en el mundo actual. El objetivo de este artículo es identificar los objetivos específicos de la propaganda rusa y aclarar cómo los políticos populistas difunden la propaganda en las redes sociales a través de recursos lingüísticos. Los resultados del análisis se presentan al final del artículo, junto con los recursos léxicos utilizados por estos políticos. Demuestran que los políticos populistas pro-Kremlin utilizan la manipulación del lenguaje y de las palabras para difundir información unilateral y distorsionada en Eslovaquia. El presente artículo pretende ampliar y complementar las investigaciones existentes sobre los políticos antisistema pro-Kremlin y su papel en la guerra híbrida de Rusia en Europa.

Palabras Clave: Guerra híbrida, propaganda, discurso mediático, Federación Rusa, Eslovaquia

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¹ Martin Solik, is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Human Geography and Regional Development, Faculty of Science, University of Ostrava, Czech Republic. E-mail: <martin.solik@osu.cz>.

² Mgr. Dalibor Velký is a Ph.D. student at the Department of Human Geography and Regional Development, Faculty of Science, University of Ostrava, Czech Republic. E-mail: <velkda68@osu.cz>.

³ Mgr. Jan Graf is a Ph.D. student at the Department of Human Geography and Regional Development, Faculty of Science, University of Ostrava, Czech Republic E-mail: <jan.graf@osu.cz>.

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1. Introduction

The present study focuses on the principal representatives of the extreme right or nationalist populism⁴ and the extreme left in the Slovak context, and their positions on issues that are fundamental and highly topical in contemporary Slovak society. The objective of this study is to illustrate the deployment of one of the most sophisticated mechanisms of the complex hybrid warfare strategy employed by the Russian Federation (RF) against the West, or more specifically, against the main Western integration organizations – the North Atlantic Alliance (NATO) and the European Union (EU) – of which the Slovak Republic (SR) is a full member. This strategy is conveyed through the elected political representatives and their speeches on social media.

This is a political influence strategy employed by the Kremlin to target specific segments of the international political landscape, particularly those that align with Russian positions. In the context of political influence as one of the tools of hybrid warfare, Christopher S. Chivvis posits that Russian leaders also utilise traditional diplomacy to support their preferred political parties and candidates. This is evidenced by the offering of high-level visits in Moscow and the otherwise attempting to champion their claims, while deriding the positions of political leaders who are more critical of Moscow.⁵

By employing populist and anti-Western rhetoric, the Russian ruling elite seeks to influence public opinion in their favour using political leaders in Europe and the Western environment who are perceived as influential and high-ranking. This entails justifying Russia's decisions and actions at the domestic level (defending the Vladimir Putin regime itself in Russian society) and at the foreign level, particularly in the wake of the unprecedented Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and the subsequent ongoing aggression on Ukrainian territory. Additionally, there is an objective to discredit the policies of pro-Western politicians and Western states and organisations, including the EU and NATO.⁶

The principal rationale for the selection of this topic is the marked increase in the Slovak population's affinity for political leaders and activists who deliberately employ populist and pro-Russian rhetoric, disinformation, and manipulation campaigns. Additionally, these interconnected components have resulted in pro-Russian forces gaining substantial support from a considerable proportion of Slovak citizens, who view them as “brave” and a reliable “source of truth,” in contrast to the “compromised and corrupt politicians” of the mainstream. It is important to acknowledge that the popularity of these politicians and activists in Slovakia is facilitated by the fact that, according to several surveys, Slovak society has long been one of the most vulnerable EU member states to disinformation, propaganda and conspiracy theories. Additionally, there has been a notable increase in pro-Russian sentiment in Slovakia, while pro-Western attitudes have concurrently diminished. Since 2014, the Kremlin, its media apparatus, and a number of domestic actors have engaged in a systematic campaign to disseminate disinformation in Slovakia and the broader region. The outbreak of war has resulted in a significant increase in the dissemination of Russian propaganda and disinformation about

⁴ The label “national populism” is a relatively new term that has only recently entered the consciousness of the professional and lay public, during 2018. It was during this period that British political scientists Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin published a ground-breaking publication entitled “National Populism. The Revolt Against Liberal Democracy”. In it, they refuse to label politicians like Marine Le Pen or Donald Trump and their voters as “far-right” or “fascists”, but as “national populists” (see more Eatwell, Roger; Goodwin, Matthew (2018): *National populism: The revolt against liberal democracy*. Penguin UK, 2018.

⁵ Chivvis, Christopher S.: “Understanding Russian “Hybrid Warfare” – And What Can Be Done About It“, *Rand Corporation*, (2017) at

https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/testimonies/CT400/CT468/RAND_CT468.pdf

⁶ Solik, Martin; Graf, Jan: "Russia as a hybrid threat to Moldova in the context of the Russian–Ukrainian war", *International Politics*, (October 2023), pp. 1-27.



Ukraine. The alarming increase in the number of populist politicians and the proliferation of disinformation and propaganda represent a significant and pressing issue that warrants attention from scholars and researchers across a range of disciplines.

The present study is comprised of several distinct sections. The theoretical framework of the entire study is initially presented. This section presents a thematic discourse analysis, with a particular focus on the relationship between discourse and propaganda. This is an essential component of complex hybrid warfare. As previously stated, the study is situated within the overarching concept of hybrid warfare, wherein the researchers seek to ascertain whether the status of politicians can be conceptualised as a tool of Russian hybrid warfare. The empirical section of the study is primarily informed by the insights of Van Dijk, who examines the relationship between propaganda and discourse. The empirical section of the study is based on an analysis of the online postings of two influential Slovak politicians, Ľuboš Blaha and Milan Uhrík, who were selected for examination.⁷

The theoretical framework of this study is based on the concepts of propaganda and information warfare as tools of hybrid warfare. This section will clarify how these concepts will be defined and used throughout the study. This will prevent any potential inconsistencies, given that all three terms are somewhat vague in terms of definition. As previously stated, this study primarily focuses on propaganda, which is, however, one aspect of information warfare. The latter, in turn, constitutes one of the instruments of complex hybrid warfare. The concepts are therefore closely interrelated.

2.Theoretical Framework – Hybrid Warfare, Propaganda and Discourse

In the Western literature on the subject, the term hybrid warfare is most often associated with Hoffman's "Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Warfare". Hoffmann defines hybrid warfare as "a wide range of different modes of warfare, including conventional methods, irregular tactics and methods⁸, acts of terrorism, including arbitrary violence, coercion, and criminal insurgency – with the various elements complementing, intersecting, or merging".⁹This author posits that the conduct of hybrid warfare is coordinated at both the tactical and operational levels, with the objective of achieving synergistic effects through the contribution of the various lines of warfare.

In the context of information warfare, the primary objective of the adversary is to gain control of information, given the significant role that information plays in such conflicts. Information has consistently held significant importance in the context of warfare. The objective has been twofold: firstly, to gain information superiority over the adversary to facilitate more effective decision-making in the context of warfare; secondly, to influence the behaviour of adversaries, allies or the population. The instruments employed have evolved over time, yet information has consistently played a role in warfare. Those in positions of authority, whether rulers, governments or warlords, have on occasion issued statements with the specific intention of deceiving the adversary, undermining their morale and that of their population. Such tools were employed with the intention of deceiving and intimidating. In the contemporary era of globalisation, the efficacy of the information component of hybrid warfare cannot be underestimated, particularly in light of the ongoing advancement of computer technology and

⁷ Van Dijk, Teun A.: "Discourse and Manipulation", *SAGE Journals*, vol. 17, n° 3 (2006), pp. 359-383.

⁸ Conventional is most often understood as "a clash of state-uniformed, centrally controlled armies seeking decisive victories by predominantly military means". Unconventional methods, on the other hand, refer to unusual, non-standard operations involving more deception, indirect approaches or original solutions. In reality, however, the above conventional approach in its pure form has long been the exception" (Řehka, Karel. (2017): *Informační válka*. Praha, Academia.).

⁹ Hoffman, Frank G. (2007): *Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars*, Arlington, Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, p. 14.



information networks. The significance of information has increased exponentially. It is important to recognise that in the contemporary era, information has become a formidable instrument of confrontation, on a par with military might.

The term “information warfare” is defined in various ways by researchers. The most general and probably the most commonly used definition is that of Haeni, who defines information warfare as “actions taken to achieve information superiority by influencing adversaries' information-based processes, information systems, and computer networks to defend their own information, information-based processes, information systems, and computer networks”.¹⁰ In other words, Haeni defines information warfare as a struggle to control the information activities of an adversary and an attempt to preserve one's own information infrastructure. The principal instruments of information warfare include psychological manipulation, disinformation campaigns and, most importantly, the dissemination of propaganda. According to a 2010 NATO strategy document, the Bi-SC NATO Information Operations Reference Book, propaganda is defined as “deliberate and systematic attempts to shape perceptions and behaviours to achieve the propagandist's desired intent” It creates danger by “selectively presenting facts (...) and deliberately eliciting emotional rather than rational responses to the information received”.¹¹

In the context of the stated objective, this study is based on the theory of propaganda by the French philosopher and sociologist Jacques Ellul, who published his seminal work in 1962 in the original French, *Propagandes*, which was translated into English three years later as “*Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*”. In fact, Ellul's concept of propaganda most closely resembles today's sophisticated pro-Russian propaganda (through the media and political representatives), although Ellul had already shaped the concept in the 1960s. Ellul is unique in that he views propaganda from a much broader sociological perspective as a sociological phenomenon, rather than something that is the result of the actions of a particular person for a particular purpose. He sees propaganda as “a set of methods used by an organised group to obtain active or passive participation in its activities from the masses (composed) of individuals psychologically united by psychological manipulation and incorporated into an organisation”.¹²

According to Ellul, propaganda “attempts to manipulate social consciousness by constructing and perpetuating certain myths. A myth may be described as a narrative, story, or event that may or may not be true and whose truthfulness the recipient may or may not believe. This narrative clarifies the key values that the propaganda wishes to inculcate in the target audience and imposes on the audience a complete register of intuitive knowledge that allows for only one interpretation. In order to produce the desired effect on the target audience, the myths are constantly repeated and replayed”.¹³ The myth invades every part of the recipient's consciousness, leaving no faculty or motivation untouched, and once accepted it controls the whole individual, who becomes immune to any other influences.

The highly developed propaganda promoted in the social networks of some influential Slovak political leaders forms a coherent and sophisticated system aimed at manipulating the recipients. This study focuses on the essence of how propaganda works, i.e. the mechanism by which it is constructed. In this case, discourse is used as an instrument of power. This is a very specific use of discourse; language is used as an instrument of power to enforce certain social

¹⁰ Haeni, Reto E. (1997): *Information Warfare: An Introduction*, Washington DC, The George Washington University.

¹¹ *Bi-SC NATO Information Operations Reference Book*, NATO, (March 5, 2010), at <https://info.publicintelligence.net/NATO-IO-Reference.pdf>.

¹² Ellul, Jacques (1973): *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*, New York, Vintage Books, p. 61.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 11.



changes. Since the subject of this paper is the study of text, discourse is presented in this contribution as “an interrelated set of texts and the practices of their production, circulation and reception that bring an object into being”.¹⁴

Van Dijk, in his study “Discourse and Manipulation” (2006), mentions the attempt of these actors to control the recipients' already partially automated process of understanding the discourse, and thus the process of its production and dissemination. The author discusses the relationship between discourse and propaganda. He describes manipulative discourse as appearing in the sphere of public communication controlled by elites. It consists of positive self-representation, unusual descriptions of facts in one's own favour and, on the contrary, negative representations of opponents and others (terrorists, immigrants, youth...).¹⁵

As Burman and Parker state, thematic discourse analysis “builds on the fact that meanings are not only reflected in discourse but are directly constructed by it”.¹⁶ The practical approach of thematic analysis is based on repeated readings of a sample of data with the aim of uncovering patterns of intertextuality on the basis of which categories are constituted as units of analysis. These themes may be relationships between terms, phrases, metaphors or whole texts that are contextually related to the phenomenon under study. A fragment of a pro-Russian text will be established as a supporting unit of discursive analysis. These extracts will be arranged on the basis of abstraction into higher thematic areas. They will be extracted from the data sample on the basis of category membership. The approach to analysis will be interpretive.

3. Study design

The study is based on a thematic discourse analysis of pro-Russian propaganda based on a sample of attitudes and speeches obtained from the social networks of two selected populist pro-Russian politicians active in the SR. The assumption for the success of the analysis is that in the course of the analysis it will be possible to abstract from the corpus of data the recurring patterns and regularities on which the discourse of pro-Russian propaganda among populist politicians in the SR is built. The aim of the study is to identify these patterns, place them in a relevant context and then interpret them. The overall effort is to provide a basic background for the study and further research of pro-Russian propaganda in the Slovak environment.

The present study is based on qualitative research. The method chosen for the study is discourse analysis. Given the stated aim of the study, thematic discourse analysis was chosen to focus on how propaganda is created through language in the social networks of populist politicians in the SR. Thus, the implementation part of the research will require that analytical categories are created and then operationalised, thus linking the theoretical and practical parts. Regarding the data collection technique, it should be emphasised that since the main carrier of propaganda in the social networks of pro-Russian politicians is text, it is important to focus on this content. Therefore, the visual or audiovisual content of these social media accounts is not examined. The technique used to evaluate and interpret the data is discourse analysis.

The aim of this article is therefore to evaluate the political attitudes of selected pro-Russian populist representatives of the extreme right and left in Slovak social networks, to identify the patterns on which the discourse of pro-Russian propaganda is based, and to find out which discursive themes dominate it. The research question that follows from this aim is: How do pro-Russian populist political forces in Slovakia use discourse to influence public opinion?

¹⁴ Phillips, Nelson; Hardy, Cynthia (2002): *Discourse Analysis: Investigating Processes of Social Construction*, Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications, p. 3.

¹⁵ Van Dijk, Teun A.: "Discourse and Manipulation", *SAGE Journals*, vol. 17, n° 3 (2006), pp. 359–383.

¹⁶ Burman, Erica; Parker, Ian (eds.) (1993): *Discourse Analytic Research: Repertoires and Readings of Texts in Action*, London, Routledge, p. 114.



Is there a difference of opinion on fundamental issues between representatives of the extreme right and the extreme left in Slovakia? These are the questions that this study attempts to answer.

3.1. Selection of data for analysis: pro-Russian populist politicians in Slovakia

Within the needs of this study, it is necessary to select relevant data for research. In general, pro-Russian¹⁷ radical narratives in the SR have long been elaborated through several channels:

1. Through “alternative” web portals. For example, the Slovak website “Hlavné správy” (“Main News”) or “InfoVojna” (“InfoWar”). The full list can be found either on the websites of the Slovak project Konšpirátori.sk.¹⁸

2. Through social networking sites. When it comes to social media, Facebook clearly dominates in the SR. Not surprisingly, disinformation actors use it to promote their activities. The public pages “Brat za Brata” (“Brother for Brother”), “Milujeme Rusko” (“We Love Russia”), “Armáda Ruskej Federácie” (“Army of the Russian Federation”), “Priatel'ia Ruska a národov ZSSR” (“Friends of Russia and the Peoples of the USSR”), “Slovenské hnutie obrody” (“Slovak Revival Movement”) are some examples, which are primarily linked by the long-term communication of pro-Kremlin narratives based on the sharing of common content, the glorification of Russia and Slavism, or an anti-system and anti-Western attitude.¹⁹

3. Through printed periodicals – especially a very popular print magazine among the Slovak “alternative” community “Zem & Vek” (“Earth & Age”) and (“EXTRA plus”).

4. Activists and bloggers (e.g. popular figures of the Slovak “alternative” scene Ľuboš Hrica, Tomáš Špaček or Eduard Chmelár)

5. Finally, some local politicians also serve as pro-Kremlin disinformation disseminators. Due to the personalisation of politics, individual politicians - rather than political parties – reach large audiences and generate massive amounts of interaction. Interestingly, both far-right and far-left politicians spread identical pro-Kremlin disinformation claims²⁰ These include, for example, Slovakia's unsuccessful presidential candidate (in 2019 and 2024) Štefan Harabín, the deputy leader of Slovakia's ruling left-nationalist Direction – Social Democracy party and newly elected MEP Ľuboš Blaha, the leader of the ruling far-right nationalist Slovak National Party Andrej Danko, or prominent politicians from the equally far-right nationalist The Republic Movement, Milan Uhrík (leader) and Milan Mazurek (deputy leader). Both politicians also became MEPs in the most recent European Parliament (EP) elections (June 2024).

To prepare the analytical part of this study, it was necessary to thoroughly research the contributions of both politicians on social networks. The first step was to read and prepare about 200 contributions, which had to be subjected to a detailed analysis and subsequent selection in accordance with the individual topics that were the subject of the study.

This process involved a careful reading of each status to identify the key themes and narratives that Blaha and Uhrík used in their speeches. As many of the contributions were similar in content and structure, it was important to select those that best represented the overall discourse of the two politicians. This selection was based on several criteria:

¹⁷ In this article the term “pro-Russian narratives” refer any statements or views that, as a result, suit the interests of the RF in foreign country (in this case in the SR). These may be misleading claims, but they may also be true information poorly placed in context (Gerulata: Exposing Russian propaganda network in Slovakia, *Gerulata* (2025), at <https://www.gerulata.com/exposaing-russian-propaganda-network-in-slovakia>).

¹⁸ See: List of sites on “Konšpirátori.sk” at <https://konspiratori.sk/zoznam-stranok>.

¹⁹ Yeliseyev, Andrei; Veronika Laput'ska: “Major pro-Kremlin disinformation narratives and their transmitters in Poland, Czechia and Slovakia”, *Adapt Institute*, (June 2023), at https://www.amo.cz/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/AMO_Pro-Russian-Narratives-in-Czech-Republic-Slovakia-and-Poland.pdf

²⁰ *Ibid.*



- **Representativeness of the topic:** the contributions were selected to cover a wide range of topics frequently mentioned by Blaha and Uhrík, such as criticism of NATO, relativisation of Russian actions in Ukraine, and support for pro-Russian narratives.
- **Intensity and clarity of the message:** priority was given to those contributions that most clearly and forcefully expressed the positions and opinions of both politicians, thus providing a deeper insight into their propaganda techniques.
- **Variety of arguments:** the selected contributions should demonstrate the variety of argumentative strategies used by Blaha and Uhrík to promote their views, including comparing Western politicians to Putin, relativising facts and urging people to read alternative sources.

After this analysis and selection, the posts that best illustrated the key elements of their discourse remained. These selected posts were then subjected to deeper analysis to uncover the specific techniques and strategies used by Blaha and Uhrík to influence public opinion.

As mentioned above, the study focuses on Slovak populist politicians who spread pro-Russian narratives on social networks. The conditions for the selection of politicians were the rich and dynamic frequency of posts on social networks. In addition, the main source of disinformation should be text rather than audio or visual content. After careful consideration and selection, the data for analysis was chosen from the social media accounts of two politicians, Ľuboš Blaha and Milan Uhrík.

The extreme political left is represented by the Slovak philosopher, political scientist and politician Ľuboš Blaha. Blaha is one of the most radical and controversial classical leftists on the Slovak political scene. He is openly Marxist, socialist, anti-capitalist and anti-globalist. He despises the West. Blaha was a bland young moderate leftist politician more than a decade ago, who participated in the 2014 Pride march in Bratislava (a march expressing support for the LGBTI+ community). His political career began in 2012. Even though he ran from the 85th position and received only 1195 preferential votes, he entered the Slovak Parliament (The National Council of SR) thanks to the excellent result of the Direction – Social Democracy party.

During the election period (2016-2020), Blaha began to radicalise more and more, openly promoting Russian positions and actively appearing on social networks – especially Facebook. As Filip Struhárik of the Slovak magazine Dennik N reports, by the end of this election period in February 2020, Blaha was not only “the most powerful Slovak politician on Facebook, he also beat all Slovak disinformation websites and pages with problematic content in terms of popularity on this social network”.²¹

In 2019, Blaha's Facebook account had more than 3 million interactions, making him a hegemon on the Slovak political scene. His paid promotion of 14,000 euros also helped him to raise his profile.²² This change of strategy and the resulting growing support of the Slovak public helped Blaha and in the 2020 parliamentary elections he ran as the 11th candidate of Direction – Social Democracy and after taking into account the 60,263 preferential votes he came in 6th place. However, Blaha's posts on Facebook were so controversial (indiscriminate vocabulary, conspiracies, attacks on political opponents, use of negative emotions) that he was

²¹ Struhárik, Filip: "Blaha has dominated the disinformation scene, no conspiracy site can match him", Dennik N, February 2020, at <https://dennikn.sk/1774122/blaha-ovladol-dezinformacnu-scenu-ziadna-konspiracna-stranka-sa-mu-nevyrovna/>.

²² *Ibid.*



the first politician in Slovakia to have his account,²³ which was followed by almost 175,000 users of the social network, closed in June 2022.

Despite this fact and other circumstances that could have had a negative impact on Blaha in 2020-2023 (Direction – Social Democracy being in opposition; the blocking of Blaha's nomination to several parliamentary delegations and committees in the National Council of SR by the then ruling coalition; Ľuboš Blaha not being invited to most mainstream media), Blaha's position paradoxically strengthened and he gained further and more massive support from the Slovak public. His home political party Direction – Social Democracy (more than 160,000 people follow this Facebook page) continued to present and share his views and statuses on Facebook even after the account was closed. Moreover, Blaha himself moved to the Russian social network Telegram (more than 40,000 followers) and V Kontakte, where he became even more radical and began to appear regularly as a guest in various disinformation and conspiracy “alternative” Czech-Slovak media.

The second group of the extreme right in Slovakia is represented by the leader of the Republic Movement, Milan Uhrík. Uhrík began his political career in 2010, paradoxically, as a member of the pro-Western centre-right liberal “New Generation”, a youth organisation of the Slovak Democratic and Christian Union – Democratic Party.²⁴ In 2014 he became active in the structures of the anti-system, ultra-nationalist and far-right Kotleba People's Party Our Slovakia, which has been led by Marián Kotleba since its foundation (in 2010). It was Kotleba who saw in Uhrík the potential of a young, educated,²⁵ rhetorically skilled and ambitious politician, and who promoted him to the highest levels of the party.

Uhrík's popularity among the recipients of nationalist politics – along with the main face of Slovak right-wing extremism, Marián Kotleba – has grown in recent years. Tensions within Kotleba's People's Party Our Slovakia grew between Kotleba and some of its members, leading to the departure of Uhrík and several other politicians (including 5 MPs) from the party in early 2021.²⁶

Milan Uhrík presents and supports clearly pro-Russian and anti-Western positions in the EP and justifies them either during debates in the EP plenary sessions or in public articles, videos or posts. He combines pro-Russian views with verbal attacks on the US and the West, including the EU. In December 2019, Uhrík condemned the EP for adopting three resolutions critical of Russia already in the first months of its new term. He also suggested that the EU, NATO, NGOs linked to the US and financial speculators were also responsible for spreading disinformation.²⁷

²³ The official reason for the removal of the account was given by the US company Meta (owner of Facebook) in its justification that there were repeated violations of the rules regarding “hate speech, bullying and harassment, incitement to violence, as well as disinformation and damage regarding Covid-19” (Hodás, Martin: Blaha je prvým slovenským politikom, ktorý bol zablokovaný na FB za nenávistné prejavy, *Živě.sk*, (15 April 2022), at <https://zive.aktuality.sk/clanok/6xFJw0A/blaha-je-prvym-slovenskym-politikom-ktory-bol-zablokovany-na-fb-za-nenavistne-prejavy/>).

²⁴ Kysel, Tomáš: “Milan Uhrík concealed that he had been among the young men from pro-Western SDKÚ for two years. Only then he turned around and joined the ĽSNS”, *Aktuality*, 24 August 2023, at <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/tuamxYK/milan-uhrik-zatajil-ze-bol-dva-roky-medzi-prozapadnymi-mladenzikmi-sdku-az-potom-otocil-a-presiel-k-lsns/>.

²⁵ Uhrík studied technical and economic disciplines at the Slovak University of Technology in Bratislava and obtained a doctoral degree. He worked at the university as a manager of projects supported by EU funds (2011-2014) and as a university teacher (2010-2015).

²⁶ Krekó (ed.): “Authoritarian Shadows in the European Union”, *Political Capital*, 2020, at https://politicalcapital.hu/pc-admin/source/documents/authoritarian_shadows_in_the_eu_2020_09.pdf. See different references to Milan Uhrík.

²⁷ *Ibid.*



At the same time, Uhrík skilfully uses the Internet – social networks or a YouTube channel – to present his views, pro-Russian narratives and anti-Western positions. According to Slovak web portal Aktuality.sk, Uhrík ranks third in the ranking of Facebook interactions of politicians and political parties in Slovakia last year (as of 17 October 2023) – with 275,000 interactions. Uhrík's position on the far right of the political spectrum was therefore obvious.

The research period was defined as from 24 March 2022, to 26 September 2023. In the selected period, around 200 contributions were identified on social networks – In the case of both Ľuboš Blaha and Milan Uhrík, the social network Telegram. From this number of contributions, 44 contributions (25 of Ľuboš Blaha and 19 of Milan Uhrík) were selected by repeated reading, which were of a pro-Russian propaganda narrative nature. This left an equal number of contributions for the analysis of the discourse in this study. The contributions that did not touch the defined categories were excluded. Examples of excluded contributions are comments on the mainstream media in Slovakia, uncritical support for the leader of the Direction – Social Democracy party, Róbert Fico, etc. A key landmark is the date of 22 February 2022, the beginning of Russia's unprecedented invasion of Ukraine, which has caused immense human suffering.²⁸

Therefore, the object of interest will be to reveal how the pro-Russian propaganda of the elected political representatives of the extreme right and left in Slovakia has changed or modified after the aforementioned event – the Russian intervention in Ukraine. The attitudes of both Blaha and Uhrík were well known before the invasion.

Blaha has long been an open and uncritical supporter (both in European institutions and directly in the Slovak parliament) of Russian positions in domestic and foreign policy, as well as of President Putin's actions.

Uhrík's support for Russian positions was much more sophisticated before Russia's aggression against Ukraine, but nevertheless the prominent representative of the far right in Slovakia believed until the last moment that Russia was the embodiment of peace and that he could not commit himself to such a step. The proof of this assertion is the fact that as late as 15 February 2022, he wrote on his Telegram account: “Russia announced on Tuesday that it had begun to withdraw some of its troops stationed near the Ukrainian border. We are waiting for the USA (NATO) to do the same. After all, aren't they the ones who keep talking about the need to de-escalate tensions?”²⁹ This only illustrates the attitude of this politician towards Moscow before the Russian invasion.

4. Empirical part – definition of analytical categories and their operationalisation

Since this research uses thematic analysis (see above), it is necessary to establish an analytical framework. Inductive analytical categories form the basis. Within them, themes are assigned to identify specific status fragments that will be used in the analysis presented. The social media accounts of Ľuboš Blaha and Milan Uhrík contain a variety of pro-Russian narratives that build on each other and are interconnected in various ways. However, based on propaganda theory (see above) and by monitoring these statuses, it is possible to identify certain common features. Based on these findings, it was possible to define the following analytical categories: 1. Russia

²⁸Thousands of people, including hundreds of children, have been killed, injured or maimed. Throughout 2023, fighting and hostilities continued to ravage parts of Ukraine, causing enormous damage to civilian infrastructure. Houses, schools, hospitals and water, gas and energy systems were repeatedly hit and, in some cases, directly targeted. This has compounded the widespread destruction that has already decimated basic services throughout the country, particularly in the east, where people have been living through 10 years of war caused by the Russian invasion.

²⁹ Uhrík, Milan: "Russia announced on Tuesday that it had begun to withdraw some of its troops stationed near the Ukrainian border", *Telegram*, 15 February 2022, at https://t.me/milan_uhrik/150.



as a victim and a state in need of self-defence vs. the West as an aggressor and initiator of conflicts; 2. Russia as a defender of traditional values vs. the West as a decadent underminer of traditional identity and morality.

The term “West” here means the EU, NATO and the United States (U.S.). These three categories are united by the ideological polarisation that is often present in Russian propaganda. Polarisation also enables the creation of myths, which Ellul argues are an important aspect of propaganda itself. Ideological polarisation is linked to the post-bipolar struggle over values. The Kremlin understands this struggle as one between good (Russia) and evil (the West). The West is the enemy that threatens the whole world, and Russia must fight this evil and establish peace.

In the first category, then, the discursive theme is the portrayal of Russia as a state that is merely a victim that must defend itself against aggression, expansionism and provocation from the West. Through aggressive policies, the West seeks to expand its sphere of influence, which encroaches on Russia's geopolitical space. Even the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine is presented in this way. The propaganda narrative that Russia is at war with the West, provoked by the West, is widespread. Ukraine is just a NATO tool and a battleground. So, Russia is defending itself against an aggressor in Ukraine.

The second category focuses on the decline of traditional values and morality in the West, such as support for the LGBT community and migration. Migration is one of the key issues currently dividing society, both in Europe and the US. This is linked to the increase in anti-immigration sentiment in Europe since 2015, when the continent was hit by a major refugee crisis. The EU and governments' inability to address the situation effectively resulted in the strengthening of anti-establishment populist parties, which exploited fears surrounding the influx of migrants to gain political power. As Kattago points out in her study, these political parties have been gradually growing in popularity since 2008, with migration being one of the key issues on which they focus.³⁰ The ongoing migration crisis since 2015 has further reinforced this trend, with parties such as the Northern League (Italy), Alternative for Germany (Germany), National Front (France), and UKIP (UK) increasingly making their voices heard on the domestic political scene. According to Dennison and Geddes, these countries have particularly had to deal with the rise in popularity of these populist parties. However, this is not a new trend in international politics.³¹ According to Lewis and Deole, parties sceptical of migration began to strengthen their position at the beginning of the new millennium.³²

The 2016 US presidential election saw Donald Trump adopt a harsh stance against immigrants from Latin America, blaming them for the country's economic decline and rise in crime.³³ He continues to uphold this ethos today,³⁴ and also employed anti-immigration rhetoric during his pre-election debates with Kamala Harris.³⁵

³⁰ Kattago, Alice: "The Rise of Right-Wing Populism in Contemporary Europe", *Geopolitics Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (Winter 2023), pp. 47–70.

³¹ Dennison, James; Geddes, Andrew: A rising tide? “The salience of immigration and the rise of anti-immigration political parties in Western Europe,” *The political quarterly*, Vol, 90, No. 1 (2019), pp. 107-116.

³² Lewis Davis; Deole, Sumit S.: "Immigration and the rise of far-right parties in Europe. *Ifo DICE Report*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (2017), pp. 10-15.

³³ Gonzalez, Eudoardo: Stereotypical depictions of Latino criminality: US Latinos in the media during the MAGA campaign. *Democratic Communiqué*, 2019, 28.1.

³⁴ Caroline Nagel: Immigration policy in the second Trump administration: Restriction, removal, and the limits of MAGA nativism. *The Geographical Journal*, 2025.

³⁵ Salam Mahmood Darwish; Irshaid Al-Khawaida, Mohammad: “A Critical Analysis of Harris's and Trump's Discourse in the US Presidential Election-2024,” *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation*, Vol. 8, No. 7 (2025), pp. 75-85.



Given the above changes, it is unsurprising that Russia is exploiting divisions in Western society to its advantage by using illegal migration to create hybrid threats. The refugee crisis of 2015 served this purpose well. According to Veebel, the Kremlin exploited the influx of Syrian refugees into Europe to strengthen its own influence by intervening deliberately in the Middle East, thereby contributing to the outbreak of the refugee crisis.³⁶

Although there were initially some doubts about Russia's use of migration flows to EU countries as a form of destabilisation and hybrid warfare³⁷, this Russian policy is now beyond question.³⁸ Berzins (2022) offers a similar view of current migration to Europe, viewing the uncontrolled passage of migrants from the Middle East across the Belarusian border through the prism of hybrid warfare. He suggests that the Belarusian government is using these migration flows to stir up conflicts in the EU.³⁹

Clearly, the influx of large numbers of people is causing social tensions in destination countries and forcing European politicians to respond. This is also the case in Slovakia, where politicians openly criticising the European political elite's stance on migration have emerged. According to the authors of this study, it is therefore necessary to analyse how selected Slovak politicians approach illegal migration in their rhetoric, highlighting any contradictions.

While Russia claims to stand for traditional Christian values and moral conservatism, seeking to protect these values while criticising the ambivalence of Western politicians towards the long-term migration crisis — a crisis which is expected to lead to the extinction of indigenous Europeans and force them to adapt to migrants — its weaponisation of migration contradicts this propaganda. Consequently, Russia is portrayed on pro-Kremlin disinformation websites and in the social media statuses of pro-Russian activists and politicians as contrasting with the demoralising West. But this propaganda lacks credibility.

In the context of the thematic analysis itself, it should be noted that after selection (choosing those contributions that fit the parameters of pro-Russian propaganda narratives), the selected contributions were divided into the following two categories. Often there were combinations where one contribution could be included in more than one category. If a contribution met the parameters of both categories, it was placed in these categories simultaneously. As mentioned above, only text was analysed – a social media status written directly by one or the other politician. Thus, interviews and/or direct quotes from other people were not included.

4.1 Russia as a victim and a state in need of self-defence versus the West as an aggressor and initiator of conflicts

This analytical section will show how Ľuboš Blaha and Milan Uhrík approach the RF and the West, in particular the U.S. and NATO. Although these politicians represent different sides of the political spectrum, their views on these issues are almost identical. They share the belief that the West is the main culprit not only in the war in Ukraine, but also in the complex turmoil

³⁶ Veebel, Viljar: “Is the European Migration Crisis Caused by Russian Hybrid Warfare?”, *Journal on Politics and Law*, vol. 13, n° 2 (2020), pp. 13: 44.

³⁷ Punda Yurii; Shevchuk Vitalii; Veebel, Viljar: “Is the European Migrant Crisis Another Stage of Hybrid War?”, *Sõjateadlane. The Estonian Journal of Military Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (2019), pp. 116-135.

³⁸ “Weaponisation of migration by Russia and implications for EU security and border policy“, European Parliament, Question for written answer E-001633/2025 to the Commission, 23 April 2025. Answer given by Mr Brunner on behalf of the European Commission, 7 July 2025, at https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-10-2025-001633-ASW_EN.html.

³⁹ Berzins, Viesturs: “Hybrid warfare: weaponized migration on the eastern border of the EU?“, *The Interdisciplinary Journal of International Studies*, vol. 12, n° 1 (2022), pp. 1-19.



in the world, which has long escalated tensions through the military organisation NATO. This analysis will shed light on how both politicians present their positions.

Both politicians agree that the gradual enlargement of NATO's membership is provoking Russia, but above all it is threatening Russia's security. However, they do not address the issue of the security of the countries affected by enlargement. In their one-sided account, only Russia is threatened:

- "The strange thing is that you (former Slovak President Zuzana Čaputová) cannot understand that the RF feels threatened by NATO's expansion towards its borders. You say that no one has threatened Russia".⁴⁰

- "...If it wasn't for the expansion of NATO, no one would have to die today... Yes, Pope Francis spoke the truth. NATO is to blame for the war in Ukraine. They barked and provoked. And they threatened Russia, which warned that it would defend itself".⁴¹

- "...What moral right do they (Western states) have to accuse the Russians of anything in Ukraine...".⁴²

- "The U.S. military organisation NATO is a relic of the Cold War. Its constant expansion is one of the main causes of the current conflicts in Europe. NATO hawks are part of the problem, not the solution that leads to peace".⁴³

- "Western leaders lied about not expanding NATO, they lied about the Minsk agreements, they lied about Iraq. Who believes them anymore?".⁴⁴

- "One of the main reasons for the war in Ukraine was the expansion of NATO. The Georgian Prime Minister told the truth at Globsec".⁴⁵ Blaha tries to cast Russia in the role of a threatened state that must defend its interests against the imperialist West. In effect, he propagandistically places Russia in the role of victim rather than aggressor. Uhrík also criticises the expansion of NATO and even uses the word "hawks" to refer to warmongers who do not want peace but, on the contrary, military conflict in Europe. Both politicians accuse NATO of pursuing an aggressive policy towards Russia and blame the West, or rather the Western military alliance, for the war in Ukraine. The key turning point in the rejection of NATO by pro-Russian political forces in general (not only in Slovakia) is the intervention of NATO forces in the former Yugoslavia in 1999. Basically, it can be said that for both Blaha and Uhrík, NATO became the main threat to global and regional security in the world after this military act. This event helps these politicians to portray NATO in a completely negative, even demonic way. It thus confirms the elements which, according to van Dijk, are manifested in the manipulative discourse of a totally negative portrayal of the adversary. An analysis of the statuses shows that pro-Western politicians associated with NATO are also described in pejorative terms and as aggressors:

- "I want to believe that when Albright breathed her last, she heard the screams of all those hundreds of children who died because of NATO bombs. Because of her! Because of the

⁴⁰ Blaha, Luboš: "Dear Ms. Čaputová", *Telegram*, 26 April 2022, at <https://t.me/LubosBlahaSmer/40>.

⁴¹ Blaha, Luboš: "So This Is the Joke of the Year – Even the Pope Is Allegedly Spreading Russian Propaganda", *Telegram*, 3 May 2022, at <https://t.me/LubosBlahaSmer/50>.

⁴² Blaha, Luboš: "Čaputová and Korčok celebrate a mass murderer – Sorry, Serbian brothers!", *Telegram*, 24 March 2022, at <https://t.me/LubosBlahaSmer/20>.

⁴³ Uhrík, Milan: "We voted against NATO expansion in Europe!", *Telegram*, 27 September 2022, at https://t.me/milan_uhrik/551.

⁴⁴ Uhrík, Milan: "Western leaders lied about not expanding NATO, they lied about the Minsk agreements, they lied about Iraq. Who believes them anymore!?", *Telegram*, 27 February 2023, at https://t.me/milan_uhrik/934.

⁴⁵ Uhrík, Milan: "One of the main reasons for the war in Ukraine was the expansion of NATO. The Georgian Prime Minister told the truth at Globsec.", *Telegram*, 31 May 2023, at https://t.me/milan_uhrik/1205.



Americans! They're war criminals. Biden, Albright, Dzurinda, Havel⁴⁶ ... All those who participated in the massacre of thousands of innocent Serbs. If Čaputová and Korčok⁴⁷ glorify them today, they are the same criminals".

- "I guess that's how you could describe the comeback of Mikuláš Dzurinda, the bloody butcher who was responsible for the deaths of Serbian children when NATO bombed Yugoslavia in 1999".⁴⁸

- "War is evil. All war. Even the American one in Iraq, where more than a million people died. Even the Nazi one in Yugoslavia, where they killed little children so that Kosovo could secede from Serbia".⁴⁹

- "Several times in its history, NATO has proved that it is not a stabilising element in the world's security architecture, but rather the opposite".⁵⁰ Blaha creates an image of the smaller states (especially the Baltic states) that are members of NATO as mere lackeys. The main source of this organisation's overall aggression is first and foremost the U.S. This gives the impression that NATO members fight primarily for the U.S. interests. This view corresponds in principle to the manipulative technique used by pro-Russian disinformation websites in the SR, i.e. the unification of the actions and positions of the U.S. and NATO.

- Lithuania has over 2.5 million inhabitants, but it also provokes Russia as a nuclear power. If the European powers care about peace, they should clean up Lithuania and Latvia immediately... Is Latvia becoming an official fascist state? Marches for Nazi soldiers are regularly organised in Latvia. As in Ukraine, where the supporters of Stepan Bandera organised torch marches... The Baltic states are completely in the hands of NATO or the Americans militarily. Logically, I ask – Is America using the Baltic States to start World War III?.⁵¹ The link between NATO and the U.S. is a way to get to Blaha and Uhrík's arch-enemy in the SR, the U.S. They are portrayed in a similar way to NATO. However, given the greater number of contributions devoted to them, it is possible to find many sources suitable for analysis. The U.S. is portrayed as a declining state that has to come to terms with the fact that the world is no longer unipolar and not led by a hegemon, which the U.S. still considers itself to be. Pro-Russian politicians in the SR portray the world as a just world – a multipolar world in which China and Russia are becoming increasingly dominant.

- "BRICS is expanding, and Asia is growing. The EU is drowning in recession and inflation because of its own stupid energy and green policies; the U.S. is successfully going into debt to the point of bankruptcy (its debt has already exceeded 31 thousand billion dollars)".⁵²

⁴⁶ Mikuláš Dzurinda is a former Prime Minister of Slovakia from 1998 to 2006. Mr. Dzurinda led the government when SR became a member of the EU and NATO in 2004, a process which he actively took part in from the beginning. Václav Havel was a Czech playwright, poet, and political dissident who, after the fall of communism, was president of Czechoslovakia (1989-92) and of the Czech Republic (1993-2003). Under his presidency, the Czech Republic joined the NATO in 1999.

⁴⁷ Ivan Korčok is a Slovak pro-western politician and retired executive diplomat who was Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of SR from 2020 to 2022 and unsuccessful presidential candidate in 2024.

⁴⁸ Blaha, Ľuboš: "Short News from Home and Abroad", *Telegram*, 27 January 2023, at <https://t.me/LubosBlahaSmer/641>.

⁴⁹ Blaha, Ľuboš: "Peace Challenge – Slovakia First!", *Telegram*, 24 February 2023, at <https://t.me/LubosBlahaSmer/711>.

⁵⁰ Uhrík, Milan: "Several times in its history, NATO has proved that it is not a stabilising element in the world's security architecture, but rather the opposite.", *Telegram*, 25 October 2022, at https://t.me/milan_uhrik/620.

⁵¹ Blaha, Ľuboš: "Will We Let the Baltic States Provoke a Nuclear War?", *Telegram*, 3 July 2022, at <https://t.me/LubosBlahaSmer/200>.

⁵² Uhrík, Milan: "Leyen is making trip to China. What do you think, will she choose conflict or cooperation", *Telegram*, 5 April 2023, at https://t.me/milan_uhrik/1036.



- “The world domination of the U.S. is coming to an end. Today Brazil has sided with Russia and China... It is time to prepare Slovakia for a multipolar world”.⁵³

- “The West is gradually declining, America is dismembered, its economy is collapsing, its influence is declining, Biden is completely out of touch... The alliance of Russia, China and India is deepening, soon to be joined by Brazil, led by (president) Lula. Soon... Everywhere you look, the strength of American liberalism is waning. The era of neo-liberal globalisation and American hegemony is coming to an end”.⁵⁴

- “Chinese leader Xi Jinping has arrived in Russia for a historic breakthrough visit – a powerful bloc is forming between Russia and China against American imperialism. This is where the West has pushed it with its arrogance”.⁵⁵ Blaha also sharply criticises the U.S. for its alleged plans to wage war against Russia on European territory. He argues that the U.S. is deliberately escalating tensions between the West and Russia in order to weaken Russia and strengthen its influence in Europe. According to him, the U.S. is supporting military and political initiatives that destabilise the region and increase the risk of conflict. Blaha also criticises the presence of U.S. armed forces on Slovak territory:

- “The U.S. needs Slovak territory because of the war against Russia. They need the American military bases here and a submissive government that will send arms to (Ukrainian president) Zelensky”.⁵⁶ The perspective of both politicians on international law in the context of the RF and the U.S. is also interesting. Before the Russian invasion, not only pro-Russian politicians, but also the propaganda media in the SR deliberately shaped the narrative that the U.S. represented a state that constantly disregarded international law, while it was Russia that was often referred to in the mainstream media as a state that disregarded international law. The intention of the pro-Russian propagandists was thus to clearly demonstrate that this was primarily an American problem, not a Russian problem. No one thought of Russia, which, according to this line of reasoning, was the guarantor of peace and security in the world. After the brutal Russian invasion of Ukraine, however, the situation changed, and “alternative” disinformation media and politicians began to justify and downplay Russia's actions in various ways. Including through international law. Under the pressure of facts and evidence, they admitted that Russia had seriously violated the principles of international law with its complex invasion of Ukraine, but at the same time they began to subtly present the fact that the West (the U.S. and its allies) had violated international law many times in the past and in much more serious cases. At the same time, they have begun to emphasise that Russia is being severely punished in isolation and that the Western powers are basically unscathed after violating international law.

- “When the Americans violated international law and invaded sovereign Iraq, they received a standing ovation, and Dzurinda sent our soldiers there too. When the Russians violate international law, there should be adopted two tons of sanctions, banning them from hockey and banning Tchaikovsky as well”.⁵⁷

- “The U.S. army has been illegally occupying parts of Syria for years. They came uninvited, they took over territory, they stole oil. When will we accept an embargo on American oil

⁵³ Uhrík, Milan: "The world domination of the USA is coming to an end. Today Brazil has sided with Russia and China... It is time to prepare Slovakia for a multipolar world.", *Telegram*, 19 April 2023, at https://t.me/milan_uhrik/1062.

⁵⁴ Blaha, Luboš: "The World at a Turning Point", *Telegram*, 20 June 2022, at <https://t.me/LubosBlahaSmer/154>

⁵⁵ Blaha, Luboš: "Are American War Criminals Really Going to Moralize about the War in Ukraine Today?", *Telegram*, 20 March 2023, at <https://t.me/LubosBlahaSmer/809>.

⁵⁶ Blaha, Luboš: "We Are Not Afraid of You", *Telegram*, 3 May 2022, at <https://t.me/LubosBlahaSmer/48>.

⁵⁷ Blaha, Luboš: "It Is Delightful to See the Double Standard That Prevails in Slovakia. It's Not a Meter, Not Even a Kilometer, It's a Double Light Year", *Telegram*, 20 May 2022, at <https://t.me/LubosBlahaSmer/92>.



products? When will we impose sanctions on officials of the U.S.? Can America...? I stand by what I said to the Syrian news agency. If the world is to be a more peaceful place, we have to start applying international law and the same standards to everyone. If to the Russians, then to the Americans”.⁵⁸

Not only Blaha and Uhrík, but also other pro-Russian politicians in Slovakia are basically using “whataboutism”⁵⁹, i.e. an argumentative tool of Putin's apologists to divert attention from the Russian aggression in Ukraine. The strategy of “whataboutism” was characteristic of Soviet propaganda during the Cold War,⁶⁰ and it is still one of the most common manipulative tactics used by pro-Kremlin propagandists, especially in the SR. After the Cold War, the tactic of “whataboutism” faded into the background, but under Putin's rule it has made a comeback in the communication discourse. Using this strategy, a significant part of the information scene is trying to divert attention from the Russian aggression in Ukraine and to weaken legitimate criticism of it. Disinformation actors point to the West's alleged hypocrisy or double standards, which has long been part of Russia's strategy to delegitimise the international liberal order. They point, for example, to NATO's intervention in Kosovo or the Iraq war to justify Russia's violations of international law.

A key issue for both Blaha and Uhrík in the first category during the period under review was, of course, their view of Ukraine, which has been facing an unprecedented full-scale Russian invasion for more than two years. Even though this action was condemned by the entire democratic spectrum, Blaha and Uhrík took a different stance and have a fundamentally negative view of Ukraine or its ruling elites. The difference between them in this respect is only in the form of presentation. Shortly after the outbreak of the major Russian offensive in Ukraine, the radical left politician temporarily stopped tactically commenting on the situation in Ukraine. However, it did not take long for Blaha to resume his usual aggressive rhetoric, this time directed at Ukraine and the Ukrainian political leadership. In his speeches and statements, Blaha began to point out, for example, that Ukraine was becoming an openly fascist state, that there was a war being waged by Russia against the U.S. on Ukrainian territory, that the Ukrainian leadership (which he said was controlled by the U.S.) was pursuing a radical nationalist policy. This strategy of the Ukrainian elites discriminates against minorities, has no interest in peaceful solutions (which in practice would mean the voluntary withdrawal of a significant part of Ukrainian territory or the surrender of Ukraine itself) and therefore threatens the stability of the region. This view is in line with Russian propaganda rhetoric, which seeks to portray the Ukrainian regime as illegitimate and extremist, which will only deepen the conflict and lead to its death. Uhrík, on the other hand, chose a more cautious vocabulary, focusing his criticism of Ukraine on three main points: criticism of the ruling Ukrainian regime; strict rejection of Ukraine's EU candidate status; and opposition to calls by leading Ukrainian officials to “cut off” gas supplies from Russia to Europe:

⁵⁸ Uhrík, Milan: "The U.S. army has been illegally occupying parts of Syria for years.", *Telegram*, 16 January 2023, at https://t.me/milan_uhrik/809.

⁵⁹ “Whataboutism” is a logical fallacy in which an accusation is answered by a counter-accusation or by raising another issue. It is based on the false notion that evil can be justified by the existence of another evil, and its main aim is to discredit the other side without responding to their arguments (Aikin, Scott F.; Casey, John: What about whataboutism? *Social Epistemology*, (2024), pp. 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02691728.2024.2343729>).

⁶⁰ Negative statements on behalf of the USSR were deflected by propagandists by pointing out some shortcoming of the West. The legendary response to any criticism, whether it was the suppression of free speech or the arrest of critics of the regime, was “but they lynch negroes in the USA” (Srdanovic, Aleksandra: 2 Decades of Russian ‘Whataboutism’: A Partial Rundown, *Harvard Kennedy School Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs*, (October 2021), at <https://www.russiamatters.org/blog/2-decades-russian-whataboutism-partial-rundown>).



- “All this is clear evidence that fascism is rampant in Ukraine, and this is not Russian propaganda. Let's stop this double standard – If fascism is evil in Slovakia, let's condemn it in Ukraine too”.⁶¹

- “The Americans are using Ukraine to fight a proxy war against Russia, and you (former Slovak president Zuzana Čaputová) are helping them in this cynical theatre”.⁶²

- “Ukraine is an ungovernable American colony”.⁶³

- “Zelensky sacrificed his nation, and the Americans cynically let Ukrainians die for American interests. They will fight Russia to the last Ukrainian – because it doesn't hurt them”.⁶⁴

- “Nevertheless, some voices from Ukraine have even threatened us (Slovakia). They say that Ukraine should cut us (Slovakia) off from gas because Europe needs to be pushed into tougher anti-Russian sanctions”.⁶⁵

- “The EU is about to grant the disintegrated Ukraine immediate candidate status for the Union. I do not agree with this, which is why I voted against it in the EU... Zelensky is fighting for the interests of himself, the West and America. Zelensky's regime is far from European democracy”.⁶⁶

According to van Dijk, the appeal to (negative) emotions is important in manipulative discourse:

- “Let's pour ourselves some clear wine: The Western liberal-fascist establishment wants war. At any cost. It wants to destroy Russia”.⁶⁷

- “All of you who heckled the nationalist regime in Kiev, all of you who advocated NATO expansion, all of you who provoked Russia, all of you who supported Ukrainian neo-Nazis”.⁶⁸

- “Ukraine is a broken state in a state of civil war led by the corrupt regime of President Zelensky and his oligarchs”.⁶⁹

4.2 Russia as a defender of traditional values vs. the West as a decadent “underminer” of traditional identity and morality

This analytical section illustrates the means by which pro-Russian politicians try to portray the West, whose moral values they see as declining, and try to subvert traditional identity in contrast to Russia and its allies. The attitudes of Uhrík and Blaha are also almost identical in this category. Both Blaha's and Uhrík's Telegrams contain contributions that address the decline and

⁶¹ Blaha, Luboš: "Ukraine Is Becoming Dangerously Fascist – Three Quarters of the Nation Sympathize with Bandera!", *Telegram*, 12 May 2022, at <https://t.me/LubosBlahaSmer/75>.

⁶² Blaha, Luboš: "Dear Ms. Čaputová", *Telegram*, 26 April 2022, at <https://t.me/LubosBlahaSmer/40>.

⁶³ Blaha, Luboš: "Robert Fico Said It Exactly Today – Heger Is a Servile Fool and They Wiped Their Backsides with Him in Brussels", *Telegram*, 30 September 2022, at <https://t.me/LubosBlahaSmer/366>.

⁶⁴ Blaha, Luboš: "The Slovak Government Has Transformed into a Totalitarian Junta", *Telegram*, 18 May 2022, at <https://t.me/LubosBlahaSmer/85>.

⁶⁵ Uhrík, Milan: "I don't care about the rebukes and wet dreams of the European Commissioners about immediate disconnection from Russian energy. Even in Brussels, I am mainly interested in Slovakia.", *Telegram*, 19 May 2022, at https://t.me/milan_uhrik/311.

⁶⁶ Uhrík, Milan: "The EU plans to grant the disintegrated Ukraine immediate candidate status to the Union. I do not agree with this, that's why I voted against it in the EU.", *Telegram*, 15 June 2022, at https://t.me/milan_uhrik/357.

⁶⁷ Blaha, Luboš: "If There Were Not the Western Powers, There Would Already Be Peace in Ukraine!", *Telegram*, 26 September 2022, at <https://t.me/LubosBlahaSmer/357>.

⁶⁸ Blaha, Luboš: "So This Is the Joke of the Year – Even the Pope Is Allegedly Spreading Russian Propaganda", *Telegram*, 3 May 2022, at <https://t.me/LubosBlahaSmer/50>.

⁶⁹ Uhrík, Milan: "M. Uhrík from Izvestia: EU leaders have given Ukraine false hopes about its early membership in the union", *Telegram*, 24 June 2022, at https://t.me/milan_uhrik/373.



degradation of the West during the period under review. In line with Kremlin propaganda rhetoric, both politicians often emphasised the historical and cultural context in which the West found itself in their positions. They argued that the loss of traditional values was a consequence of the long-term effects of liberalism and globalisation, which they claimed were leading to the homogenisation and disintegration of national cultures. Both Blaha and Uhrík argue for the protection of traditional values and the “traditional family”, which are under particular threat from Brussels:

- “Let's cherish our freedom, our values, our faith and our traditions”.⁷⁰

- “We do not want Slovakia to end up like the dying countries of Western Europe, whose labour markets depend on receiving immigrants. We consider it a priority in this area (social policy) to stop the negative demographic trend and create conditions for increasing the birth rate of decent families”.⁷¹

- “Slovakia must protect its national traditions so that we as a nation do not dissolve in Coca-Cola...”.⁷²

- “We value our national traditions, we don't want Slovakia to be dissolved in Coca-Cola, we reject Americanisation, we reject the import of Western individualistic culture”.⁷³ In the long term, both politicians also portray their opponents as trying to destroy traditional family values. In their speeches and social media posts, they often emphasise that the other side, the liberals and progressives, are trying to undermine traditional family and cultural identity. In this way, they seek to polarise public debate and mobilise support among those who share concerns about rapid social change and its impact on traditional structures. A strong theme is the status of the LGBT community. Propagandists point out how strong this community is in the West and what a pernicious influence it has on society. They also show how the LGBT agenda is cleverly promoted by the EU (Uhrík uses the term “LGBT ideology”). The aim is to portray the West as overly liberal, 'effeminate' and trying to inculcate these non-traditional values in all people from childhood, thus undermining the traditional family. This form of narrative thus corresponds to the above-mentioned thesis of Russian civilisationalism, which has long been propagandised by the Russian political leadership through various channels at home and abroad:

- “Yes, even in the liberal cafes of Brussels they often talk about the future – they imagine 50 genders, scented toilets for transsexuals and rainbows every Saturday. They call it progress. And they flaunt the future”.⁷⁴

- “Together against immigration, against LGBT ideology, against nonsense from Brussels”.⁷⁵

- “Folks, instead of welcoming immigrants, putting rainbow flags on football shirts and cutting children's organs as part of a ‘sex change’, we need to wake up to the real world! The West is degenerating, and the world's geopolitical and economic centre of gravity is shifting to the Euro-

⁷⁰ Uhrík, Milan: "The main message from today's Cyril and Methodius Holy Mass", *Telegram*, 5 July 2023, at https://t.me/milan_uhrik/1332.

⁷¹ Uhrík, Milan: "We introduce another team of great experts within our movement. The agenda for families and social policy is one of our priorities", *Telegram*, 1 March 2023, at https://t.me/milan_uhrik/939.

⁷² Blaha, Euboš: "Cyril and Methodius Are a Symbol of the Depth of Our National History – Both Historical and Spiritual. Yes, Slovakia Has a Deep Soul and No One Can Take That Away from Us", *Telegram*, 5 July 2022, at <https://t.me/LubosBlahaSmer/204>.

⁷³ Blaha, Euboš: "I Don't Know if You've Seen the Video of Matovič Frantically Screaming ‘Fico in Jail,’ but I Highly Recommend It to Every Psychology Student – This Surreal Scene Should Be in Psychiatry Textbooks", *Telegram*, 28 April 2023, at <https://t.me/LubosBlahaSmer/901>.

⁷⁴ Blaha, Euboš: "Peter Pellegrini Has Allegedly Declared Today That Direction Is the Party of the Past and Voice Is the Party of the Future", *Telegram*, 1 October 2022, at <https://t.me/LubosBlahaSmer/367>.

⁷⁵ Uhrík, Milan: "We are going to fight not only for the future of Slovakia, but also together for the survival of the whole of Europe", *Telegram*, 22 July 2023, at https://t.me/milan_uhrik/1389.



Asian region. Progressives see enemies there. We see them as partners for future prosperity".⁷⁶

Pro-Russian politicians have warned of the danger of spreading the ideas of "LGBT ideology" in Slovakia through the EU, Western NGOs and pro-Western politicians (such as former president Zuzana Čaputová). They clearly define themselves against these efforts:

- "Nobody here (in Slovakia) wants rainbow experiments, drugs or 76 genders. Really not!".⁷⁷

- "And in our country (Slovakia) they are dealing with homosexuals. The economy is falling, companies are going under one by one, people are losing their jobs... and the (Slovak) government is dealing with gays. Because now is the best time to fight culture wars and fly rainbow flags over the presidential palace. Let's open the toilets for transsexuals as an issue, we don't need anything else here. I understand that Zuzana Čaputová hates most Slovaks. She is only interested in sexual minorities and Ukrainians".⁷⁸

A significant part of the articles read, but also of those included in the final analysis (about 30 %), is devoted to the gradual (moral and social) decline of the EU. The aim is to convince the readers of the degradation of this institution. The statuses are devoted to the lack of respect for democratic principles, the decline of freedom, the corruption of censorship, the absence of "real" leaders:

- "...The EU has lost all vision. Europe lacks real leaders. Most of its leaders are puppets and buffoons. And so, the West lurches from crisis to crisis – corruption, war, repression, censorship, price gouging... The patriots and conservatives of European countries must unite to resist this moral and economic decline...".⁷⁹

- "...In recent years, however, the EU has moved away from these goals and is changing its face into a political force that seeks to suppress our sovereignty and freedoms and to change our culture and way of life. Instead of serving citizens, European leaders have begun to defend foreign, global and corporate interests. This EU is not Europe!".⁸⁰

- "They (people in Slovakia) see that the EU is sinking deeper and deeper into the mud. The European Parliament is corrupt, hundreds of thousands of euros in bribes are carried around in plastic bags".⁸¹

The migration crisis is an important issue in this subchapter, which pro-Russian politicians in Slovakia are also focusing on, intensively avoiding mentioning the Russian weaponization of migration as we previously explained. They try to make people feel threatened. They point to the problems that EU countries have to deal with. At the time, Blaha and Uhrík also accused the previous (2020-2023) Slovak government of encouraging illegal migration or the arrival of illegal migrants in the SR. When presenting the migration crisis, we can find many different linguistic means by which they try to induce fear in the recipient of the propaganda in the first place.:

⁷⁶ Uhrík, Milan: "The West is in decline and degeneration, China and Russia have been rising. It is time to start seeing reality!", *Telegram*, 23 November 2022, at https://t.me/milan_uhrik/689.

⁷⁷ Blaha, Euboš: "Slovakia Is Our Home", *Telegram*, 26 September 2023, at <https://t.me/LubosBlahaSmer/1307>.

⁷⁸ Blaha, Euboš: "Germans Will Provide 5.2 % of GDP to Help German Companies – And We in Slovakia Deal with Gay People", *Telegram*, 19 October 2022, at <https://t.me/LubosBlahaSmer/409>.

⁷⁹ Uhrík, Milan: "View from the inside. The European Union is doing everything to collapse like a house of cards", *Telegram*, 1 December 2022, at https://t.me/milan_uhrik/706.

⁸⁰ Uhrík, Milan: "Extraordinary: MPs from 7 states in Slovakia – This EU is not Europe", *Telegram*, 30 May 2023, at https://t.me/milan_uhrik/1200.

⁸¹ Blaha, Euboš: "Slovak Lives Don't Matter?", *Telegram*, 18 January 2023, at <https://t.me/LubosBlahaSmer/609>.



- “Because of Minister Mikulec's⁸² inaction, Slovakia is perceived as a threat by neighbouring countries. Illegal migrants move around here like on a pier and it is only a matter of time before a tragedy occurs – an assault, a rape or a murder”.⁸³

- “We reject the migration pact and we have said so hundreds of times. I do not like many votes in the European Parliament either, but nobody should spread lies about the Direction party. We (the Direction party) have always been at the forefront of opposition to migration, and we are not going to blame ourselves. We don't have to. We (the Direction party) have always protected Slovakia, and we will always do so. Both from unregulated migration and from American soldiers”.⁸⁴

- “There is hell on the border with the Czech Republic. Illegal migrants from the Arab world are gathering there and they can't get enough of the Slovak police – We (Slovakia) are the only country where they can move freely without a residence permit...The migrants are increasing, and we are just waiting for a tragedy to happen in Záhorie.”⁸⁵ The Slovaks are suffering”.⁸⁶

- “Masses of illegal immigrants are a threat to every Slovak. It cannot go on like this! The safety of our citizens is our top priority”.⁸⁷

- “Illegal immigrants should be chased away, not borders opened and weapons given to them!”⁸⁸

Both Blaha and Uhrík agree that illegal migration poses a serious risk. They point to cases of migrants arriving in Europe without proper documents and permits, which they say increases the risk of crime and terrorism. They argue that a mass influx of migrants can lead to the destabilisation of social systems and a threat to public order. Both politicians use these arguments to support stricter migration policies and border controls. This line of propaganda is more effective and credible given the very important changes experienced in the migration policies of many European Union countries, starting with countries with social democratic governments. The EU's failure to offer solutions to the increasing irregular/illegal migration problem since the beginning of this century, its inability to combat irregular/illegal emigration and the people-smuggling organisations- fundamental agents- as well as the growing use of migration as an instrument of hybrid warfare by numerous states, are crucial issues that have not been dealt with in a satisfactory manner.⁸⁹

⁸² Roman Mikulec is a Slovak politician and former soldier who served as the Interior Minister of Slovakia from 2020 to 2023.

⁸³ Uhrík, Milan: "Mr. Mikulec, are you waiting for the moment when migrants start raping and murdering in Slovakia!? Act now", *Telegram*, 28 October 2022, at https://t.me/milan_uhrik/628.

⁸⁴ Blaha, Luboš: "Together with Richard Takáč, We Are on Our Way to Košice – We Look Forward to Seeing You, Friends, at Café Chilli", *Telegram*, 26 April 2023, at <https://t.me/LubosBlahaSmer/881>.

⁸⁵ Záhorie is a region in western Slovakia between the Little Carpathians to the east and the Morava River to the west.

⁸⁶ Blaha, Luboš: "They Are Disintegrating Everything They Put Hands On. Aimless Migrants Are Hanging Around, a Collapse of Hospitals Is Coming, and Agent Káčer Is Demolishing Our Good Relations with Hungary", *Telegram*, 9 November 2022, at <https://t.me/LubosBlahaSmer/460>.

⁸⁷ Uhrík, Milan: "View from the inside. The European Union is doing everything to collapse like a house of cards", *Telegram*, 1 December 2022, at https://t.me/milan_uhrik/706.

⁸⁸ Uhrík, Milan: "Illegal immigrants should be chased away, not borders opened and weapons given to them!", *Telegram*, 7 September 2023, at https://t.me/milan_uhrik/1545.

⁸⁹ See Marquina Antonio (ed) (2025): *Global Migration: Mafias, States and Hybrid Warfare*, Singapore, London, World Scientific.



5. Conclusion

This study attempts to capture, through discursive analysis, how representatives of the far left and far right in Slovakia attempt to influence public opinion in the country by promoting pro-Russian narratives. This study can serve as an imaginary springboard for examining the public opinion in the Central European region, which, given its historical context, is perhaps the most vulnerable to Russian disinformation campaigns of any part of the European continent.

Based on the data presented, the researchers come to the following conclusions. First of all, the analysis confirmed a trend that has been visible not only in the political environment of Slovakia, but also in Europe for several years – the rapprochement and cooperation of the far right and the far left. This collaboration and agreement in value orientation and key aspects of international politics between two political extremes have deepened even more after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The political positions of the representative of the radical political left in Slovakia, Ľuboš Blaha, and the radical political right in Slovakia, Milan Uhrík, are essentially identical on fundamental issues too.

On the issue of values, both politicians speak out strongly against the LGBT community and “Western decadence”. They demand “normality”, the preservation of tradition and classical values. In this regard, it is interesting that Blaha – despite his radical inclination towards the political left – is extremely conservative (as well as adherents of the far right not only in Slovakia). Blaha (as a follower of classical Marxism) refers in this regard to Slovak communists from the times of Czechoslovakia – Gustav Husák, Vladimír Clementis, or Laco Novomeský. According to him, these political figures managed to “combine Marxism and patriotism. In other words, it is a kind of “patriotic socialism”.

Both politicians also hold the same positions on the foreign level. The common enemies are the EU, or rather the “dictate of Brussels”, pro-Western politicians in Slovakia (especially former President Zuzana Čaputová, or unsuccessful presidential candidate Ivan Korčok), NATO and the U.S. On the contrary, both politicians support illiberal regimes – China, Iran, or Russia. Blaha and Uhrík, as well as representatives of the far right and far left in Europe, essentially profess the well-known proverb “the enemy of my enemy is my friend”. In practice, this means that extreme opponents and critics of globalism, progressive liberalism, economic neoliberalism, the U.S. and the West, concentrated primarily in far-left and far-right political parties and movements, have become natural allies of Russia and its geopolitical partners. Indeed, this illiberal bloc represents an alternative to the West. The very anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist ideological essence predetermines these political antisystem forces to support and cooperate with Russia (and its allies) in order to achieve a multipolar world, without U.S. dominance.

Secondly, the analysis showed that Blaha and Uhrík can be considered (in the context of political influence) as one of the most important instruments of Russian hybrid influence in Slovakia. Russia has conducted extensive influence activities also through these politicians, their activities and reach in Slovakia, but also in the EP. And this is extremely important and useful for Russian maneuvering during the ongoing Russian Ukrainian conflict. Blaha and Uhrík have been spreading Russian propaganda for a long time. This is contained especially in their contributions on social media. Both politicians target various, mainly anti-liberal (social conservative, patriotic, communist) groups of the population. They use simplistic and striking language. This style is used by populists in general because they need to be understood by the “ordinary” citizen. They are able to adapt and adjust to the current situation and trend. A typical example in this regard was the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. After the initial shock, both Blaha and Uhrík have gradually returned to their rhetoric before February 2022. Blaha in a more radical form and Uhrík in a more sophisticated version. In various ways, they



have begun to defend Russia (as the initiator of the conflict) and, conversely, they have assigned guilt for provoking the conflict to the West and the Ukrainian political leadership, led by President Zelensky.

It is possible to conclude that both politicians have been influencing tens of thousands of people in Slovakia through their populist posts on social networks. Blaha became a central political figure in the 2023 Slovak parliamentary election and contributed to victory of Direction – Social Democracy. He also achieved a significant success in the 2024 European Parliament election. Blaha received 187,020 votes (the second largest number in Slovakia). Although Uhrík's party did not succeed in the 2023 Slovak parliamentary election,⁹⁰ the party celebrated success in the next key election. Republic Movement mobilized its forces and in the 2024 European Parliament election Milan Uhrík and his fellow party member Milan Mazurek received more than 200,000 votes and they became MEPs. In addition to their enormous reach and influence in Slovak society, the ideological and value convictions of both politicians and their contacts with Russian political leaders all indicate that Blaha and Uhrík play a crucial role in Russia's hybrid operation.

From a comprehensive perspective, it is clear that, pro-Russian propaganda narratives spread by Slovak populist politicians from the far right and far left, massive and uncontrolled activity of pro-Russian disinformation media, national-conservative thinking in most of Slovakia and “socialist nostalgia” from the period of communist Czechoslovakia persisting especially among the older generation, all of this has gradually created a dangerous mixture of chaos, instability and polarization in Slovak society. This situation of Slovak society is associated with the “national-social” government of the Slovak Republic led by the Prime Minister Robert Fico, which openly supports Russian positions and escalates relations with neighboring Ukraine.

As a result of complex Russian hybrid activities, the political situation in Slovakia (in January 2025) is complicated and unstable. Indeed, as numerous opinion polls show, there is a relatively broad group of people in Slovakia who want the Kremlin to win the war in Ukraine and reorient Slovakia's foreign policy, which could have a destabilising effect on the whole region. According to the authors of the study, this scenario would be a victory for Moscow, which is eager to divide Europe over the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

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⁹⁰ In the SR, the electoral system is based on a proportional representation system with a 5% threshold for entering parliament. Republic Movement received 4,75 % of the votes.



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