

Grigorij Mesežnikov  
Radovan Bránik



# **HATRED, VIOLENCE AND COMPREHENSIVE MILITARY TRAINING**

The violent radicalisation and Kremlin connections of Slovak  
paramilitary, extremist and neo-Nazi groups

Edited by Lóránt Gyóri  
April, 2017  
A study by Political Capital



**POLITICAL CAPITAL**  
POLICY RESEARCH & CONSULTING INSTITUTE

**Hatred, violence and comprehensive military training - The violent radicalisation and Kremlin connections of Slovak paramilitary, extremist and neo-Nazi groups**

Commissioned by Political Capital  
Budapest 2017

Authors: Grigorij Mesežnikov (Institute for Public Affairs), Radovan Bránik  
Editor: Lóránt Gyóri (Political Capital)  
Publisher: Political Capital  
Copy editing: Zea Szebeni, Veszna Wessenauer (Political Capital)  
Proofreading: Patrik Szicherle (Political Capital), Joseph Foss  
Facebook data scraping and quantitative analysis: Csaba Molnár (Political Capital)

This publication and research was supported by the National Endowment for Democracy.



**INSTITUTE FOR  
PUBLIC AFFAIRS**



**POLITICAL CAPITAL**  
POLICY RESEARCH & CONSULTING INSTITUTE



**National Endowment  
for Democracy**

*Supporting freedom around the world*

# CONTENTS

---

Contents .....	3
Foreword.....	5
Methodology.....	7
Main findings .....	8
Policy recommendations .....	10
Sectoral recommendations .....	10
Security Considerations regarding Russia .....	12
Context of radicalisation.....	14
Pro-Russian actors of the extremist/paramilitary scene in Slovakia .....	16
People’s Party Our Slovakia (Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko – ĽSNS).....	16
Paramilitary patrols and militia .....	17
Anti-Western ideology.....	17
Slovak Revival Movement (Slovenské hnutie obrody – SHO).....	19
Healthy worldview and patriotic feelings .....	19
Russian partners.....	20
Slovak Conscripts (Slovenskí branci – SB) .....	21
Comprehensive military training.....	21
Pan-Slavic solidarity .....	23
Action Group Resistance Kysuce (Akčná skupina Vzdor Kysuce – VK) .....	26
Ideology: fight better for Slovakia.....	26
International neo-Nazi contacts .....	27
Turning point in Prague .....	29
Hierarchy and discipline - zero tolerance.....	29
Course of success: split in the Slovak extreme right.....	31
Infiltrating power .....	31
Geopolitical implications .....	32
Pro-Russian institutional environment .....	33
Private Secondary Professional School for the Protection of Persons and Properties.....	33
Association of the Slovak Soldiers (Asociácia slovenských vojakov – ASV).....	36
History.....	36

Present.....	38
Resist transnational fascist corporatist.....	39
Media Analysis .....	42
Mainstream media .....	42
Pro-Russian fringe media .....	43
Analysis of Slovak pro-Russian Facebook pages.....	45
Summary .....	46
General statistics .....	47
Page activity .....	47
Issues and narratives.....	53

## FOREWORD

---

This paper is the summary of the results of a one-year-long research project covering five countries and exploring the connections between a wide range of pro-Kremlin stakeholders and Central-Eastern European countries' political forces in general and the violent, fringe extreme-right movements in particular. Political Capital has already published Europe-wide research<sup>1,2</sup> and country-specific case studies on the connections between (far-right) political players in Slovakia<sup>3</sup> and Hungary,<sup>4</sup> and published a report on the „export” of ultraconservative, illiberal values by pro-Kremlin players to Central-Eastern Europe.<sup>5</sup> Others have done important research on this topic as well.<sup>6,7,8,9,10</sup> However, this is the first research project that focuses mainly on the *violent* ramifications of the strategy of the Russian state and its proxies to support fringe, extremist organizations in order to undermine bilateral ties with Ukraine and the United States, and destabilise the region. The five countries that we are focusing on are Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. Most of our findings are indicative of the trends in the broader region.

The war in Eastern Ukraine and the migration crisis have acted as a catalyst to not only re-legitimize these extremist organizations' sine qua non for paramilitary activities, but to pit against each other organisations harbouring ancient chauvinistic and revisionist historical sentiments between their respective Central-Eastern European. The Kremlin's aim is undeniable as part of this process. Through reaching out to or supporting paramilitary organisations, it successfully destabilizes Ukraine and the surrounding European region to keep Ukraine's legitimacy, territorial sovereignty, minority issues in constant limbo.

---

<sup>1</sup> Krisztián Szabados and Péter Krekó, “Russia's Far-Right Friends” (Political Capital, 2009), [http://www.riskandforecast.com/post/in-depth-analysis/russia-s-far-right-friends\\_349.html](http://www.riskandforecast.com/post/in-depth-analysis/russia-s-far-right-friends_349.html).

<sup>2</sup> Political Capital, “The Russian Connection The Spread of pro-Russian Policies on the European Far Right,” 2014, [http://www.riskandforecast.com/useruploads/files/pc\\_flash\\_report\\_russian\\_connection.pdf](http://www.riskandforecast.com/useruploads/files/pc_flash_report_russian_connection.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Péter Krekó et al., “The Weaponization of Culture: Kremlin's Traditional Agenda and the Export of Values to Central Europe” (Political Capital, 2016), [http://www.politicalcapital.hu/wp-content/uploads/PC\\_reactionary\\_values\\_CEE\\_20160727.pdf](http://www.politicalcapital.hu/wp-content/uploads/PC_reactionary_values_CEE_20160727.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> Attila Juhász et al., “‘I Am Eurasian’ - the Kremlin Connections of the Hungarian Far-Right,” 2015, [http://www.politicalcapital.hu/wp-content/uploads/PC\\_SDI\\_Boll\\_study\\_IamEurasian.pdf](http://www.politicalcapital.hu/wp-content/uploads/PC_SDI_Boll_study_IamEurasian.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> Krekó et al., “The Weaponization of Culture: Kremlin's Traditional Agenda and the Export of Values to Central Europe.”

<sup>6</sup> Anton Shekhovtsov, *Tango Noir: Russia and the Western Far Right: Tango Noir* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017).

<sup>7</sup> Cas Mudde, “Russia's Trojan Horse,” *openDemocracy*, 2014, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/cas-mudde/russia%27s-trojan-horse>.

<sup>8</sup> Alina Polyakova and Atlantic Council, “Putinism and the European Far Right,” *Institute of Modern Russia*, 2016, [http://imrussia.org/images/stories/Russia\\_and\\_the\\_World/Putin-Far-Right/alina-polyakova\\_putinism-european-far-right.pdf](http://imrussia.org/images/stories/Russia_and_the_World/Putin-Far-Right/alina-polyakova_putinism-european-far-right.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> Emel Akçali et al., *Eurasianism and the European Far Right: Reshaping the Europe–Russia Relationship*, ed. Marlene Laruelle (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015).

<sup>10</sup> Mitchell A. Orenstein, “Putin's Western Allies,” *Foreign Affairs*, 2014, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2014-03-25/putins-western-allies>.

Slovakia is one of the prime targets of the Kremlin's influence in this respect, since its population not only exhibits a Russophile attitude, but also history-based cultural and political exchanges. The real danger of the Slovak paramilitary situation stems from the fact that neo-Nazi and extremist movements and organizations are on the rise in the country and pose a systemic threat to the democratic Slovak state, as well as society at large.

The authors would like to thank the National Endowment for Democracy for their support and Joanna Rohozinska for her insightful comments and help throughout the project.

All errors and omissions are our own.

## METHODOLOGY

---

During the study, we often refer to the terms “Russian influence” or the “Kremlin’s influence”. These notions are connected by the term “Russian influence through power,” by which we mean explicit and implicit actions by the Russian state and related actors (including intellectuals, businessmen, journalists, etc.) or organizations aiming to create political changes in the behaviour and/or political agenda of certain political actors through political means and/or financial instruments. The “soft power” of the Kremlin mainly concerns Moscow’s ability to persuade others to do what it wants without direct force or coercion, but with attraction (Nye, 2004) mainly through the means of Russian or pro-Russian media.<sup>11</sup>

This analysis of Russian influence on far-right or paramilitary extremists in Slovakia is based on investigations involving the media, press releases from politicians, political parties and scientific evidence.

The main goals of the research are the following:

- 1.) Describe the basic social, political, economic frameworks of Russia’s presence in Slovakia in order to understand the nature and modus operandi of Russian direct or indirect influence on the fringes.
- 2.) Reveal personal, organizational, media and other links between pro-Russian, fringe political actors and the Kremlin or Kremlin stakeholders.
- 3.) Collect and analyse the most important pro-Russian declarations and actions of the relevant radical political players in Slovakia.

We used the following research methods:

- 1.) Desktop research to collect the necessary information, map out the order of developments and events, and gather statements.
- 2.) Analysis of Slovak pro-Russian media outlets and Facebook pages.
- 3.) Primary research with the aim of gaining confidential information from actors within or close to the political fringes, and used directly or indirectly to exert influence. In order to protect their identity, sources of such information remain anonymous in the study.
- 4.) In-depth interviews with experts from academia, politics and the media to gather background information and provide a broader view of certain actors and events.

---

<sup>11</sup> Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, 1st ed (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).

## MAIN FINDINGS

---

- Radicalism in Slovakia is not confined to paramilitary/extremist circles, as the ruling leftist “social democratic” Smer-SD, and its main coalition partner, the nationalist SNS, and even the opposition libertarian SaS use extremely heated rhetoric against migrants and ethnic, religious, and sexual minorities. Thus, the more radical public discourse of mainstream political actors serves as a pretext for the continuing radicalisation of the Slovak extremist subculture.
- Extremist forces are represented on the highest ideological level, as well as organizationally through the openly anti-Semitic, anti-Roma, neo-fascist People’s Party Our Slovakia (ĽSNS) entering the Slovak parliament with 8% of the vote in 2016. The ĽSNS’ leader, Marian Kotleba, has a close, albeit ambiguous relationship with the most radical, neo-Nazi paramilitary organization, the Action Group Resistance (VK) dating back to 2008. Moreover, the party has organized its own quasi-paramilitary “patrols” against the Roma.
- Consequently, an analysis of the People’s Party Our Slovakia is essential to understand the role and modus operandi of the Slovak paramilitary subculture in Slovak political life. This extremist conglomerate is multi-coloured in regards to politics or ideology, but one shared element is a pro-Russian stance, which has loomed over Slovak culture since its inception in the form of pan-Slavism.
- The national security risk posed by pro-Kremlin paramilitary radicalisation in Slovakia is among the highest in the region. The relations between Slovak extremists and the Kremlin encompass not only the well-known anti-Western or anti-liberal narratives and the demand to leave the EU or NATO, but long-term organizational or military cooperation with Russian officials or extremists. For example, the ultra-nationalist Slovak Revival Movement (SHO) keeps contacts with the Russian Stiaġ Association. The Slovak Conscripts’ (SB) leader, Peter Švrček, received training from the Stiaġ and the Russian Cossacks. SB cooperates with ex-Spetsnaz instructors and the organization’s former member Martin Keprta is fighting alongside the separatists in Eastern Ukraine.
- There is an even more troubling mutual radicalisation occurring between the extremist paramilitary organisations and associations of retired professional soldiers from the Slovak army. The Slovak Conscripts enlisted currently active or former members of the Slovak armed forces. Furthermore, the Action Group Resistance is currently undergoing a “normalization” process by which the organization tries to turn itself into a more potent political player, whilst strategically and explicitly trying to infiltrate the ranks of the Slovak army.

- The Crimea and the European migration crisis has catalysed the Slovak extremist subculture's more prevalent pro-Kremlin turn, and has been aided by a pro-Russian educational and civic background. The Association of the Slovak Soldiers (ASV) was miraculously revived in 2014, and encompasses all pro-Russian former military personnel. It has directly challenged Slovak Transatlantic relations by attacking the Ministry of Defence, the General Staff, MFA, NATO, etc.
- Thus, pro-Russian paramilitary radicalisation poses a systemic national security threat on three distinct levels in Slovakia through: 1) Marian Kotleba's party and the civic association SHO on the political level; 2) the Action Group Resistance's infiltration of the political, military ranks and the Slovak Conscripts' spectacular training sessions accompanied by pan-Slavic ideological messages; 3) and the ASV's efforts to erode Transatlantic, democratic and defence structures from within.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

---

Taking into consideration the diversity of political and ideological influences in the respective countries, there can be no “one size fits all” strategy to repulse the increasingly frequent and intense attempts of the Kremlin’s efforts to gain influence through the political fringes. The major difference is that while Russia is actively interfering with European politics and societies, the political will to repulse the soft and hard power tactics, such as ideological export, is mostly lacking in Europe and in the respective member states.

In Slovakia, the actors of Russian influence/radicalisation mainly include the LSNS, various paramilitary groups, civic associations and fringe media outlets. A comprehensive approach needs to address the “four R's”: revealing the ways and means of pro-Russian activities; reacting to the Russian influence or radicalisation; ridiculing or deconstructing pro-Russian stances; and repeating the process faced with a continuous effort on the side of the Kremlin. In this respect, different layers of society have different tasks to fulfil.

### **Sectoral recommendations**

#### **State actors: reveal & react & repeat**

- Slovak law enforcement authorities, intelligence, and the defence community should monitor and counter destabilization attempts through pro-Russian paramilitary groups and disinformation outlets by specific measures designed to counter extremism and armed anti-establishment activities. Monitoring results should be published on at least a yearly basis and made accessible to civic stakeholders, and the media.
- National authorities should apply the principle of zero tolerance against manifestations of extremism in all its forms. They should uncompromisingly penalize all cases of violence with an extremist motive and enforce the law against anyone who challenges the monopoly of the use of force in an organized form.
- The Slovak state should establish a special unit to defend the country and the population from the real threat posed by information warfare and pernicious ideological indoctrination coming from undemocratic actors abroad (foreign countries and their clients).
- The Slovak state should make resources available to civic actors and media outlets engaged in fighting violent radicalisation, thus ensuring repeated efforts to repeal Russian radicalisation.
- Slovak authorities should create and apply specific national security screening methods to the defence community and the military to avoid infiltration by extremist activists.

- Programs of de-radicalisation sponsored by the Slovak national and local authorities would provide vital resources to members of paramilitary groups, civilians, and media stakeholders.

#### **Civil society organisations: react & ridicule**

- Human rights organisations should enhance cooperation against pro-Russian fringe organizations to curb their ideological influence, recruitment and resource management activities.
- HRAWs should directly engage vulnerable groups prone to radicalisation by starting pre-emptive or post-factum de-radicalisation programs and lectures.

#### **Media: reveal & ridicule**

- Slovak media should take the lead in revealing the extent of Russian influence over paramilitary groups, movements, civic organizations and investigative journalism in order to raise awareness among the wider public, decision-makers and NGOs.
- Russian influence must be publicised and hidden motives revealed in order to discredit those who exert illiberal influence, and to provide information to inform the actions of state and civic actors.
- Media should cooperate with NGOs to ridicule the conspiracy theory-based, anti-progressive, anti-gender messages of neo-Nazi, paramilitary organizations.

## SECURITY CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING RUSSIA

---

The Slovak Information Service (SIS) included in the publicly accessible section of its 2015 report one sentence about the Russian Federation's (RF) activities in Slovakia: "In the context of continued tensions between the RF and the West SIS paid attention to the issue of the RF's efforts to influence public opinion in Slovakia as well as to the entities which actively participated in these efforts". The report does not separately comment (directly) on the issue of Russian influence on paramilitary organizations. However, a hint of effective impact on right-wing extremists can be detected indirectly in the section of the report related to extremist groups, where the effect of the current migration crisis was described as follows: "in this regard, the criticism of the EU and NATO became the most significantly factor".<sup>12</sup>

The publicly released section of the 2015 report on the activities of Military Intelligence (VS) observed that the Russian Federation is considered to be a major power that is attempting to gain influence over paramilitary associations: "A trend has been observed where the establishment of private security and business entities with foreign participation, which can be used in the framework of a hybrid approach to conducting combat operations or to support terrorist, extremist and criminal activities in the medium- to long-term". In the broader context, the report hints at changes in the strategies of unspecified foreign powers: "The foreign intelligence services actively carry out information and psychological operations with the purpose of supporting their foreign policy interests and to spread disinformation. Their aim is to support the efforts of foreign powers to change the system of security architecture in Europe, to diminish its credibility and to cast doubts on the merits of the EU and NATO, to discredit the activities of Western countries, to further polarize society and to deepen contradictions in it and to reduce the credibility of state representatives and state authorities".<sup>13</sup>

The army's intelligence service avoided naming the enemy in its report. However, Chief of General Staff of the Slovak Armed Forces Milan Maxim, after having been asked by a moderator on a Slovak public TV channel about the „enemy” said: "We are talking about Russia." Later he clarified that "the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic are ready to defend the Slovak Republic against any attack from an external, foreign power... We, the military planners, we proceed at the moment from the NATO assessment, which evaluates the security situation and assesses who might be the presumed attackers. We proceed from this."<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Slovenská informačná služba, "Slovenská Informačná Služba | Pre Vás | Správa O Činnosti SIS v Roku 2015," June 2016, <http://www.sis.gov.sk/pre-vas/sprava-o-cinnosti.html#bezpecnostna-oblast>.

<sup>13</sup> Vojenské spravodajstvo - Ministerstvo obrany Slovenskej republiky, "Správa O Činnosti VS 2015 | Vojenské Spravodajstvo," June 30, 2016, <http://vs.mosr.sk/sprava-o-cinnosti-vs-2015/>.

<sup>14</sup> rtvs, "Večera S Havranom," *Rtvs.sk*, January 31, 2017, <http://www.rtvs.sk/televizia/archiv/11690/117142#79>.

An assessment of relevant political forces reveals that among the current opposition there are no professionals with sufficient erudition in this area. Opposition leaders who have expressed their views on the issue merely paraphrase publicly available sources. Government officials do not present their views in a proactive manner and refuse to clearly label the Russian Federation as an aggressor. However, in response to the growing strength of right-wing extremism, they have proposed the establishment of a national unit to combat extremism and terrorism, and its scope should also cover the activities of paramilitary associations.<sup>15</sup> In March 2017, the Slovak Ministry of Interior announced that the Slovak police will employ 12 new experts to counter Russian disinformation and hybrid threats, which is probably also a reaction to the Slovak President Andrej Kiska's criticism directed at the Slovak state's unpreparedness to fend off such threats.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> Úrad vlády Slovenskej republiky, "Na Slovensku Začína Pôsobiť Národná Jednotka Boja Proti Terorizmu a Extrémizmu | Úrad Vlády SR," *Http://Www.vlada.gov.sk/*, February 1, 2017, <http://www.vlada.gov.sk/na-slovensku-zacina-posobit-narodna-jednotka-boja-proti-terorizmu-a-extremizmu/>.

<sup>16</sup> Márk Finta, "Szlovákia Az Orosz Propaganda Egyik Fontos Célországá," *Ujszo.com*, March 21, 2017, <http://ujso.com/online/kozelet/2017/03/21/szlovakia-az-orosz-propaganda-egyik-fontos-celorszaga>.

## CONTEXT OF RADICALISATION

---

Recent years have seen a trend of radicalisation in the political life of Slovakia. It manifests itself in several fields and contexts due to the contribution of various internal and external factors.

First, mainstream political forces such as the “social-democratic” Smer-SD, the nationalist SNS, and even the libertarian SaS have radicalised their rhetoric and policies in regards to minority communities (ethnic, religious and sexual minorities, migrants, refugees).

Second, the radical, extremist and anti-establishment political forces have been consolidating their positions. In 2016, they were successfully elected into Parliament after beginning their careers as marginal, fringe actors. It has given them a stable platform for the dissemination of their agenda and its more violent elements.

Third, there are an array of active paramilitary groups which complement their public representations inside the country with expeditions of their members to other states (for instance to Ukraine’s Eastern territories) to participate in military efforts.

Fourth, there is evidence of deeper penetration of public discourse as well as fringe media outlets that support extremist opinion and political radicalisation through modern information technology (internet, social networks, “alternative” media).

Fifth, the specific external factors acting in favour of political radicalisation are more prevalent than before, particularly the arrival of a large number of Northern African and Middle Eastern refugees to Europe, the military conflict in Eastern Ukraine, Russia’s de facto hybrid war against the West (including support for building armed clubs and paramilitary organizations, carrying out hacker attacks, and financing far-right formations), information warfare, and the efforts of Russian state to strengthen its influence in the public and political life of the country.

The so-called Russian factor plays an increasingly important role in the process of political and ideological radicalisation in Central Europe, including Slovakia. It is obvious that the current leadership of the Russian state, headed by Vladimir Putin, seeks as its strategic aim to weaken or destroy liberal democracy as a system. Based on an analysis of the practical activities and propaganda of the current Russian regime it seems that every enemy of liberal democracy in Europe, and the world, is considered by the Russian state as a de facto ally (strategic or situational). Russia uses a variety of methods and tools (including corruption, disinformation campaigns, cyber-attacks, incitement of internal disturbances etc.) against those actors (or those states) that the Russian leadership considers to be its enemies in order to undermine them from the inside and to attain its objectives by establishing an appropriate internal environment that would be receptive to Russia’s policies. The aim is to create a political environment consistent with the approach of the current leadership of the Russian Federation on several issues in international relations (for example the Crimean secession, Russian intervention in Syria).

One prime example for this is Ján Čarnogurský, a former anti-Communist dissident, the former chairman of the Christian Democratic Movement, a former Slovak prime minister and the former minister of justice who voiced a very positive opinion about Slovak extremists facing NATO:

*“Luckily, we still have forests, mountains. The Slovak Conscripts are already training there. There are not many of them, but for God’s sake, thousands of other patriots can unite around them. And then, albeit again with Russian help, they will be able to expel those who by their stealthy hands restrict our freedom. But before, maybe Sophie’s choice will be awaiting us. I look to our politicians in the constitutional positions and question who among them would be able to fulfill promises given to voters not to allow foreign military bases on our territory. I think only one exists. Perhaps Marián Kotleba.”<sup>17</sup>*

In practical terms, Russia today is in particular trying to weaken – from inside and outside –the European Union. This strategic objective aligns with the basic goals of Eurosceptic and populist forces within EU member states, including the most radical components of these forces: radical, extremist parties and paramilitary organizations. The actions and attitudes of the above mentioned forces, which support Russia’s stances on international relations and foreign policy, serve as confirmation.

---

<sup>17</sup> Hlavné správy - Konzervatívny denník, “Ján Čarnogurský: Pán Premiér, Ohláste Referendum, Alebo Odstúpte!,” *Hlavné Správy*, March 15, 2017, <http://www.hlavnespravy.sk/jan-carnogursky-pan-premier-ohlaste-referendum-alebo-odstupte/931940>.

## PRO-RUSSIAN ACTORS OF THE EXTREMIST/PARAMILITARY SCENE IN SLOVAKIA

---

The constituent parts of the extremist and/or paramilitary network in Slovakia which support Russia's policies include political formations, social organizations, paramilitary groups, media and individuals. The degree of their radicalism differs in each case. These groups do not form a coherent political or ideological bloc, but rather represent a conglomeration of actors connected by common elements. One of them is their shared pro-Russian orientation. Not every actor subscribes to right-wing extremist values. For instance, alongside these groups there are also self-declared opponents of fascism and Nazism. All of them, however, are illiberal and antidemocratic in substance.

### **People's Party Our Slovakia (Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko – ĽSNS)**

The People's Party Our Slovakia (ĽSNS) is an entity symbolizing the political ambitions of Slovak right-wing extremism. It bears the message of an entire generation of Slovak right-wing extremists who, due to wide range of circumstances, have been gathering under an association called *Slovenská pospolitosť* (Slovak Togetherness) led by secondary school teacher Marian Kotleba since the beginning of the 21st century. The group's first attempt to establish an anti-establishment party was terminated shortly after its inception due to the intervention of state authorities. *Slovenská pospolitosť – Národná strana* (Slovak Togetherness – National Party) was dissolved by the Supreme Court in March 2006. The second attempt to establish a fascist-influenced party by the same group of persons, however, has been successful. The founders of the new party used the legal loophole of a pre-negotiated and agreed "friendly takeover" of an already existing party (Party of Wine Lovers) which they then renamed People's Party Our Slovakia. This legal trick enabled the right-wing extremists to avoid collecting 10,000 signatures and a requirement to file an application for the registration of a new political entity. In the parliamentary election held in March 2016 ĽSNS gained 8.04% of the vote (209,799 persons voted for the party) and became a parliamentary party.

The personal characteristics of some the leading representatives, officials, members and candidates placed on party's candidate list in the 2016 parliamentary elections are indicative of the nature of ĽSNS's. Along with established and well-known radical nationalist activists, the list includes people who have broken the law. Some have committed acts of racially motivated violence, clashed with police, spread racial hatred, condoned acts of violence against the Roma and migrants, praised Nazism and Adolf Hitler, and denied or approved of the Holocaust. Among those elected to parliament on the candidate list of ĽSNS were persons charged by prosecutors or investigated by the police for their criminal offences (including violent ones) with extremist or racist motives.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> aktuality.sk, "Skončí Kotlebov Poslanec v Base? Súdia Ho Aj Za Útok Na Cudzince," *Aktuality.sk*, accessed April 5, 2017, <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/320519/kotlebovho-poslanca-sudia-za-ublizenie-na-zdravi-a-vytrznictvo/>.

### *Paramilitary patrols and militia*

After the election in 2016, LSNS tried to implement their ideas of “social justice” in practice and began to send its “public order” patrols using “citizen soldiers” aboard trains in order to protect the decent passengers from assailants (ergo from “violent” Roma). These patrols were formed by people dressed in T-shirts with the LSNS logo. Despite the statements made by representatives of state authorities that such patrols in trains contravene the law, LSNS continued organizing them. In October 2016 parliament amended the law, introducing an explicit ban of such activities on railways.<sup>19</sup> LSNS then announced it would continue these “successful” activities and would not stop sending “patrols” aboard the trains. It did so despite the fact that the continuation of such “patrols” carries the risk of the party being dissolved by the Supreme Court after the proposal of the prosecutor general.

LSNS’s inclination to establish paramilitary structures is illustrated by the fact that in its political program the LSNS proposes the creation of the so-called *Domobrana* (“Militia”)<sup>20</sup>. In December 2012, the party’s leader Kotleba applied to the Ministry of Interior for the registration of the civil society organization “Guards of LSNS” (later he changed its name to the “People’s Guard”).<sup>21</sup> It seemed to be an attempt to establish the armed (paramilitary) wing of the party. The proposed names (designations) of the institutions and functions in the association – the General Command, the Commander in Chief, Units, the Unit Commanders, the Regional Commanders, the Districts Commanders, and the Local Commanders - are symbolic of the organizations’ intentions. The Ministry of Interior refused to register the association, and in June 2016 the Supreme Court confirmed that the decision of the ministry was legal.<sup>22</sup>

### *Anti-Western ideology*

The anti-Western orientation of LSNS most clearly manifests itself in its relation to the EU and NATO. The party only attributes negative characteristics to the two international organizations. It demands Slovakia’s secession from both the EU and NATO. According to LSNS, the country’s membership in the EU means a “complete submission to” and the “renunciation of the basic pillars and symbols of statehood”. The EU allegedly imposes same-sex partnerships and policies in favor of “antisocial parasites” (ergo Roma, homosexuals) on Slovakia. The representatives of LSNS exhibit a negative attitude to the EU at every available opportunity.

---

<sup>19</sup> Národná rada Slovenskej republiky, “Zákony : Vyhľadávanie v Návrhoch Zákonov : Detaily Návrhu Zákona - Národná Rada Slovenskej Republiky,” [Http://Www.nrsr.sk](http://www.nrsr.sk), August 19, 2016, <http://www.nrsr.sk/web/Default.aspx?sid=zakony/zakon&MasterID=6007>.

<sup>20</sup> Naše Slovensko – noviny politickej strany Mariana Kotlebu, “10 Bodov Za Naše Slovensko. Predstavujeme Volebný Program Ludovej Strany Naše Slovensko – Bezpečnosť,” February 2016, <http://www.naseslovensko.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/nase-slovensko-februar-2016.pdf>.

<sup>21</sup> tvnoviny.sk, “Kotleba Chcel Ludovú Stráž Aj Pre 12-Ročné Deti: Ministerstvo Ho Odmietlo, Súd to Potvrdil,” *Tvnoviny.sk*, June 1, 2016, [http://www.tvnoviny.sk/domace/1829727\\_kotleba-chcel-ludovu-straz-aj-pre-12-rocne-deti-ministerstvo-ho-odmietlo-sud-to-potvrdil?\\_\\_TUU7NTQxPDA2PD0gcXFzYDhlNTYyXndhZHE=-A1-v3](http://www.tvnoviny.sk/domace/1829727_kotleba-chcel-ludovu-straz-aj-pre-12-rocne-deti-ministerstvo-ho-odmietlo-sud-to-potvrdil?__TUU7NTQxPDA2PD0gcXFzYDhlNTYyXndhZHE=-A1-v3).

<sup>22</sup> aktuality.sk, “Kotlebovu Ludovú Stráž Povolit Skutočne Nemali, Rozhodol Najvyšší Súd,” *Aktuality.sk*, June 1, 2016, <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/343486/kotlebovu-ludovu-straz-povolit-skutocne-nemali-rozhodol-najvyssi-sud/>.

In March 2014, on the occasion of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the creation of wartime fascist Slovak state, Kotleba, who in November 2013 was elected governor of the Banská Bystrica self-governing region, ordered the EU flag on his headquarters to be removed, which was labelled a “European occupation rag” by the party paper *Our Slovakia*.<sup>23</sup>

In its 2016 election program entitled *10 points for Our Slovakia*, LSNS labelled NATO a “criminal pact, which serves to promote the power interests of the USA”, pointed out “American war crimes” and promised that it would “replace the one-sided orientation to the West by balanced cooperation with all countries in the world”.<sup>24</sup> The authentic manifestation of how LSNS representatives perceive developments in individual countries and in international relations is an open letter which Kotleba sent in January 2014 to incumbent Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich as the acting governor of the Banská Bystrica self-governing region. In this letter he asked Yanukovich not to yield to demonstrators that protested against his rule in Kiev. According to Kotleba, the background of the events in Ukraine was a “struggle for new EU markets” and “efforts by the terrorist organization NATO” to inch closer to the borders of the Russian Federation. In his letter Kotleba called the demonstrating Ukrainian citizens “terrorists” and in the name of “the interests of Slavic peoples’ future” he turned to the acting Ukrainian head of state with the message that “there are no negotiations with terrorists”.<sup>25,26</sup> In May 2016, honouring the visit of the pro-Putin Russian motorcycle gang “Night Wolves” to Banská Bystrica, Kotleba hung the Russian flag at the headquarters of the Banská Bystrica regional assembly.

In October 2016, the party’s paper published the signature sheets for the LSNS-organised petition for a referendum on Slovakia’s secession from NATO and the EU.<sup>27</sup> In the accompanying article the newspaper reported:

*“At present, NATO is trying to occupy Ukraine and Russia. American soldiers are going closer and closer to the Russian borders. And our treacherous politicians help them with this”.*<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> Naše Slovensko – noviny politickej strany Mariana Kotlebu, “14. Marca Sme Oslávili 75. Výročie Štátnosti,” March 2014, [http://www.naseslovensko.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/naseslovensko\\_2014\\_marec.pdf](http://www.naseslovensko.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/naseslovensko_2014_marec.pdf).

<sup>24</sup> Naše Slovensko – noviny politickej strany Mariana Kotlebu, “10 Bodov Za Naše Slovensko. Predstavujeme Volebný Program Ludovej Strany Naše Slovensko – Bezpečnosť.”

<sup>25</sup> In this context he warned about the “fate of the Serbian national hero Slobodan Milošević

<sup>26</sup> webnoviny.sk, “Kotleba v Liste Vyzval Janukovyča, Aby Ochránil Ukrajinu,” *Webnoviny.sk*, January 31, 2014, <http://www.webnoviny.sk/slovensko/clanok/785081-kotleba-v-liste-vyzval-janukovyca-aby-ochranil-ukrajinu/>.

<sup>27</sup> Naše Slovensko – noviny politickej strany Mariana Kotlebu, “Petícia Za Referendum O Vystúpení Slovenskej Republiky Z Európskej Únie; Petícia Za Referendum O Vystúpení Slovenskej Republiky Z NATO,” October 2016, <http://www.naseslovensko.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/nase-slovensko-oktober-2016.pdf>.

<sup>28</sup> Naše Slovensko – noviny politickej strany Mariana Kotlebu, “V NATO Sme Bábkou Amerických Zločincov! NATO Vzniklo Preto, Aby Nás Zničilo Teroristov Ochráňujú, Nevinných Zabíjajú,” October 2016, <http://www.naseslovensko.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/nase-slovensko-oktober-2016.pdf>.

In 2016, ĽSNS entered the APF (Alliance for Peace and Freedom), a European political party, which is an association of the most extreme nationalist parties with a pro-Russian orientation, for example, the Golden Dawn in Greece or the neo-Nazi National Democratic Party of Germany.<sup>29</sup> The contact person who visited Banská Bystrica and met with Kotleba was Jens Pühse, a member of the APF board.<sup>30</sup> In international affairs the APF is conducting activities corresponding with Russia's stances by supporting Vladimir Putin's policies in Ukraine or Syria.<sup>31</sup>

## **Slovak Revival Movement (Slovenské hnutie obrody – SHO)**

A major player in radical right-wing nationalism in Slovakia is the Slovak Revival Movement (SHO). SHO has existed since 2004. Legally a civil society organization, in June 2016 it decided to register as a political movement with the aim of participating in the elections. Its members started collecting the required 10.000 signatures for a petition in favour of the establishment of the new political party. In its program, SHO states that it “seeks to awake and to deepen the national consciousness and patriotism of Slovaks”, it wants to “contribute to the defence of statehood and sovereignty of the Slovak Republic” and that party's program “continues the work and legacy of Ľudovít Štúr”.<sup>32,33</sup>

### *Healthy worldview and patriotic feelings*

SHO reiterates its support for “traditional values (family, culture, honor, faith)”, “healthy worldview and patriotic feelings”, fighting against “moral decay in society” in line with the Kremlin's reformulated ultra-conservative ideology against the West.<sup>34</sup> The organization condemns multiculturalism and speaks out against globalization. In relation to national history in the 20<sup>th</sup> century SHO takes a revisionist stance and openly claims the legacy of the wartime Slovak state's President Jozef Tiso. SHO representatives justify the Slovak state's policy towards Jews, including their deportations, by pointing out that “it was a historical development”. On the website of SHO references to publications with openly anti-Semitic content can be found.

SHO opposes Slovakia's membership in the EU and NATO, underlines its commitment to ideas of pan-Slavic solidarity, and expresses its sympathies to the current policy of Russia, which – as it is claimed by SHO officials – has its legitimate interests in Central Europe.

---

<sup>29</sup> Stefan Jacobsson, “Huge Success for The People's Party Our Slovakia,” *APF*, March 7, 2016, <https://apfeurope.com/2016/03/huge-success-for-the-peoples-party-our-slovakia/>.

<sup>30</sup> apfeurope.com, “Our Board,” *Alliance for Peace & Freedom*, accessed April 5, 2017, <https://apfeurope.com/our-members/>.

<sup>31</sup> Andrew Foxall, “Putin's Useful Idiots: Britain's Left, Right and Russia,” *The Henry Jackson Society*, October 2016, <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Putins-Useful-Idiots.pdf>.

<sup>32</sup> Štúr was the leader of the Slovak national revival in the 19th century, founder of the Slovak literary language.

<sup>33</sup> Slovenské Hnutie Obrody, “Kto Sme,” *Slovenské Hnutie Obrody (SHO)*, accessed April 5, 2017, <http://www.sho.sk/kto-sme>.

<sup>34</sup> See more: Political Capital Institute, “The Weaponization of Culture: Kremlin's Traditional Agenda and the Export of Values to Central Europe,” August 4, 2016, [http://www.politicalcapital.hu/wp-content/uploads/PC\\_reactionary\\_values\\_CEE\\_20160727.pdf](http://www.politicalcapital.hu/wp-content/uploads/PC_reactionary_values_CEE_20160727.pdf).

SHO states on its website that the community of Slavic nations has always been close to us and it will be close to us linguistically, culturally and spiritually”. SHO established contacts with partners in Poland, Serbia, Russia and the Czech Republic. It signed special agreements on cooperation with several partner organizations in Russia and Serbia. SHO is working with two Russian organizations – the *Narodnyi Sobor – People’s Cathedral/Council* of Russia and Stiaĝ (Flag).<sup>35</sup> Robert Švec, the SHO chairman, said the latter organization has the same or similar value-orientation.<sup>36</sup> People’s Sobor and Stiaĝ conduct regular paramilitary trainings. Some SHO members attended a training in Russia, including Peter Švrček, at that time a member of SHO, and later the founder of the paramilitary association called Slovak Conscripts.

### *Russian partners*

SHO's website states that the Russian Orthodox military-patriotic club *Dobrovolec* (Volunteer), which is assisting in the recruitment of fighters for the Donbass in Russia, the Polish organization Camp of Great Poland, which ideologically follows the line of pre-war politician Roman Dmowski, and two Serb nationalist associations are among those partnering with the organization.

Personal ties between SHO and foreign organizations are provided by Marek Rusyniak, the head of the external relations cabinet in SHO (in some sources he is mentioned as the secretary of SHO). In addition to being a signatory to the agreement with the National Sobor on behalf of SHO, he is also administering the Slovakian-language Facebook page of the “Russian fighting style”, a Russian close combat fighting method.<sup>37</sup>

SHO does not have any partners in the West. In the section on the main objectives of the organization, the SHO website uses a statement of Ivan Ilyin as its motto, a Russian monarchist-conservative philosopher whose ideological legacy is praised by incumbent Russian President Vladimir Putin: “Never complain about the time because you were born just to make it better”.<sup>38</sup>

SHO indicates as its “media partners” the magazines *Zem a Vek* (Earth and Age) and *Extra Plus* as well as the online Radio Free Broadcaster. These are media outlets that spread anti-Western, mostly pro-Russian and conspiratorial messages in previous years, SHO maintained contacts with members of the Slovak Conscripts, which is a nationalist paramilitary organization.

---

<sup>35</sup> *Narodnyi Sobor* (People's Cathedral/Council) is Russian radical nationalist and Orthodox fundamentalist movement supporting the current political regime. It was established in 2005. The organization defines itself as a „public movement, community of public associations and citizens whose goal is to transform Russia on the basis of traditional spiritual and moral values of the Russian civilization”, an „organization that is continuously struggling against those who undermine the spiritual and cultural foundations of Russia“. The movement includes more than 250 different organizations in dozens of Russian regions – Orthodox, cultural-historical, literary, artistic, scientific, veteran, military, patriotic, information, analytical, sport, etc. (see more: <http://www.narodsobor.ru/about>).

*Stiaĝ* (Flag) is a paramilitary organization of a radical nationalist orientation providing regular military trainings for its members. It includes dozens of local units in numerous regions of Russian Federation. The organization supports the current Russian political regime and cooperates with Spetsnaz (see more: <http://www.stjag.ru/>).

<sup>36</sup> sho.sk, “Priatelja,” *Slovenské Hnutie Obrody* (SHO), accessed April 5, 2017, <http://www.sho.sk/priatelja>.

<sup>37</sup> Stenka - Ruský Štýl Boja, “Stenka - Ruský Štýl Boja - Facebook Post,” facebook page, accessed April 5, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/ruskystyl/>.

<sup>38</sup> Obrody, “Kto Sme.”

## Slovak Conscripts (Slovenskí branci – SB)

Slovak Conscripts [*Slovenskí branci* – SB] is a paramilitary group providing military training combined with pan-Slavic and pro-Russian ideological indoctrination.

SB was founded in 2012<sup>39</sup>, it calls itself a *domobrana* (“militia”). Formally, it is an unregistered sports military club. It states that it is a “non-political, non-profit organization that fulfils the task of developing young people's love for their country, nature and national cultural heritage through a variety of voluntary and charitable events such as ecological actions, assistance to people in natural disasters, and the provision of military exercises to children ... We are trying to teach and to prepare young people to deal with various crises, how to protect ourselves, our families and relatives and our country.”

The unmistakable Russian footprint in the establishment and activities of SB can be found in the article published on the website of the Temple of Christmas in Mitino (Moscow) which is patronizing military-patriotic education among local young people. As the article puts it: “In 2010, suddenly Slovaks began to show interest in the Russian experience. Slovak Marek Rusyniak,<sup>40</sup> who studied in one of the Russian universities, expressed his interest in the Russian experience of military-patriotic education. He found contacts with the heads of some Russian clubs; he began to attend classes, meetings, workshops, competitions, camps, trips in order to get the most complete picture of all aspects of the process. Over time his skillset has improved so much that he started to be a trainer in the Russian military-patriotic clubs. After graduating and returning home Marek immediately proceeded to establish the first Slovak military-patriotic club with his friends, which received the name “Slovenskí branci”. The club was created according to the image and likeness of Russian military-patriotic clubs. Classes held at this club mirror the Russian system. They are based on lessons of Russian combat, survival, tactical training. The main motivation of the participants of the club is a sincere love of their Motherland and the willingness to defend it.”<sup>41</sup>

### *Comprehensive military training*

The group has 17 territorial units with approximately 150 members all around Slovakia. The core of the association consists of 50 persons. The Trnava unit is the largest at 40 members, and also the most prepared of the organization. Along with the Nitra unit, they cooperate with professional soldiers. In addition, several other groups that do not have the status of “unit”, but lower rank of “guard” fulfil secondary roles within the SB. In autumn 2016 the so-called “Reserves of the Slovak Conscripts” formed, which caters to members who cannot regularly attend the trainings. They now have their own organization with less frequent training proceeding at a slower pace.

---

<sup>39</sup> Slovenskí branci came into existence in early 2012 and quickly became important paramilitary group with a patriotic and nationalist character. The group was set up by Peter Švrček (at that time 17 years old) after his attendance at a three-week-long training course organized by Russian organization Narodnyi Sobor with ex-Spetsnaz instructors. See more: Political Capital Institute, “Marching Towards Eurasia,” 2015, [http://www.politicalcapital.hu/wp-content/uploads/PC\\_Study\\_Russian\\_Influence\\_Slovakia\\_ENG.pdf](http://www.politicalcapital.hu/wp-content/uploads/PC_Study_Russian_Influence_Slovakia_ENG.pdf).

<sup>40</sup> This person was also mentioned in the section on Slovak Revival Movement (SHO).

<sup>41</sup> <http://hrammitino.ru>, “Славянские Сборы В Рождествено,” August 18, 2012, <http://hrammitino.ru/?p=2152>.

These persons remain close to SB and can join their training sessions when they wish. The organization clearly states its paramilitary purposes:

*We want to achieve it through periodically organized armed trainings, in which we learn at a glance: the outdoor survival, first aid, hygiene, and military tactics (both conventional and guerrilla fighting style), also the handling of weapons, the close combat, topography, radiation, chemical, and biological protection”.*<sup>42</sup>

Today the group has more instructors, and six of them agreed to be mentioned on the organization’s website – namely Peter Švrček, Martin Vrbiak, Ján Dovál, Michal Feling, Filip Rázga, and Erik Kubík.<sup>43</sup> Three of them are currently university students and one is working as a senior researcher at the Slovak Academy of Science. Two instructors (Švrček and Feling) passed a comprehensive military training course offered by the Russian organization *Stiag*. SB’s website details the expertise of each instructor in certain types of combat activities. The organization invites occasional visiting instructors – both domestic and foreign – for its trainings. The foreigners are usually Russians, including the instructors of Spetsnaz and OMON.

SB’s leader (chairman) is Peter Švrček, the founder and commander of the First unit. He graduated the “comprehensive military training” provided by the Russian associations *Stiag* (Flag) as well as parachute training in an aviation club in Prievidza, Slovakia. Currently he studies archaeology at the Comenius University in Bratislava. In August 2016 the organization reaffirmed Švrček in his leading position by re-electing him chairman. Among the instructors mentioned above, Feling, a soldier on active duty in the army, was elected SB’s vice-chairman. In the ranks of the association there are reportedly four other soldiers in active service and one policeman. SB established its “civilian wing” called *Naša Vlasť – Naša Budúcnosť* (Our Homeland – Our Future), which was registered in April 2016 by the Ministry of Interior as a civil society organization. Consequently, it is available for 2% income tax donations as any other NGO in Slovakia. SB has 8.5 thousand sympathizers on FB.

Members of SB are paid for their participation in so-called work brigades at events where they assist as security guards or provide services for others. SB has earned revenue from a fee paid by HBO, which was filming a documentary movie about the association’s activities for almost a year. SB has sympathizers in local public administrations, including mayors and facility managers, who enable them to use these facilities or their surroundings for their activities. These relations are further developed when SB members assist with environmental issues (cleaning up what is left behind natural disasters, floods, picking up the trash) or participate in public events organized by the municipalities.

---

<sup>42</sup> Slovenskí Branci, “Kto Sme? | Slovenskí Branci,” accessed April 5, 2017, <http://www.slovenski-branci.sk/kdo-sme/>.

<sup>43</sup> “Inštruktori | Slovenskí Branci,” accessed April 5, 2017, <http://www.slovenski-branci.sk/instruktori/>.

On its website and FB page the organization informs its followers in detail (and with photographic illustrations) about its activities (primarily military trainings and environmental actions). The members of the association claim in interviews with the media that they are using legally owned weapons during the trainings, however, on the official SB sites posts appeared portraying training with “live ammunition”. It is unknown how state authorities reacted to this information. In addition to the fact that SB members use legally owned weapons and live ammunition during the training sessions, they also use military-grade material that they most likely received through their members in the military or contacts in the army. Reportedly, they have recently acquired an old military truck originating from the former Czechoslovak People’s Army (probably a Tatra 148).

As a professional soldier, Feling successfully standardized the so-called tactical guidelines used to train SB units. Additionally, specialized courses are available for members who complete a full year of training. They are subsequently posted to a combat unit, known as either the “explorers” or the “sappers” and continue to improve their skills in these specializations. Sappers, for example, learn to deal with explosives and how to place mines correctly.

### *Pan-Slavic solidarity*

Direct information concerning the ideological foundations of the organization is absent on the group’s official website. SB here emphasizes its “apolitical” nature. From published reports and communications with participants of discussions on the SB’s FB page it can be, however, concluded that SB claims to follow the legacy of the anti-fascist Slovak National Uprising (SNP) and its “fight against fascism”. The group’s members take part in the commemorations of World War II, which they perceive as a historical struggle against fascism and Nazism. SB pays its respect for the monuments and memorial places dedicated to war victims and the fallen soldiers of the Red Army. It distances itself from the wartime Slovak state led by Jozef Tiso and refuses “Nazism and fascism”. In the past, some SB members (for example Švrček himself), however, participated in commemorative events organized by far-right organizations, such as SHO’s commemoration of Tiso. Later Švrček attributed this fact to his “young age” and “stupidity.”<sup>44</sup>

SB leaders regularly protest against the media associating the organization with “right-wing extremists” or against being called “extremists.” They refer to the opinion of Minister of Interior Robert Kaliňák, who allegedly said that SB does not belong to the group of extremist organizations. The report of the Ministry of Interior in 2012, however, described SB as a “military-oriented group” and categorized it as a “formation with extremist elements.”<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> Dušan Mikušovič, “Rozhovor s Brancami: Čo Je Zlé Na Cvičení so Zbraňou v Lese?,” *Denník N*, February 25, 2015, <https://dennikn.sk/57900/rozhovor-s-brancami-co-je-zle-na-tom-cvicit-v-lese-zbranou/>.

<sup>45</sup> The ministry’s report also states that in 2012 SB supported the public activities of the Slovak Revival Movement, the ultranationalist right-wing group that follows Pan-Slavic ideas alongside with the adoration of the fascist regime of the wartime Slovak state. rokovanie vlády SR, “Správa O Plnení Úloh Vyplyvajúcich Z Koncepcie Boja Proti Extrémizmu Na Roky 2011 – 2014 Za Rok 2012,” n.d., [www.rokovania.sk/File.aspx/Index/Mater-Dokum-159091](http://www.rokovania.sk/File.aspx/Index/Mater-Dokum-159091).

In 2013, Thomas Bičkoš, the commander of the Second unit, wrote an article about SB's mission, stating that:

*“Membership in the pro-terrorist aggressive organization NATO, under the imperial US's influence, or membership in the overly bureaucratic European Union, which is gradually changing into the Pan-European super-state does not absolutely give a guarantee or assurance of liberty and preserving the sovereignty of the Slovak Republic. The highest threat is lurking from our southern borders. Hungary, which has systematically been destroying ethnic minorities on its territory in the last century attacked our state several times!”<sup>46</sup>*

SB's chairman Švrček later distanced himself from the content of this article and allegedly demanded that the portal publishing it, Meapatria, delete it.

From the communication of SB members on the organization's FB and from published reports it follows that the association appeals to the concept of pan-Slavic solidarity and is inclined to support Russia in issues of international politics. One of the original members of the SB, Martin Kepřta, left Slovakia in 2014 to fight in Eastern Ukraine on the side of Russia and pro-Russian separatists. According to the organization's leadership, Kepřta's membership in SB was terminated before his departure to Ukraine and the organization has cut all ties to him. In an interview for portal Aktuality.sk Kepřta, located in Donbass at the time, said that he went away to fight in Donbass because of his commitment to “Slavic interests, values, traditions, family – something that allegedly the EU represses and fundamentally denies.” He also said:

*“Our aim is building New Russia (Novorossiia) and the recognition of the Donetsk independent republic. I am a member of the official army. It means that if the peace will continue I will remain in the barracks waiting when my homeland will call me to service once again.”<sup>47</sup>*

In an interview with the daily *Dennik N* in 2015, SB's chairman Švrček said that he was in Russia in “private capacity” at the “trainings provided by the Russian Cossacks”, who were “people who had nothing in common with current Russian politics”. In the same interview Filip Razga, the oldest member of SB's leadership, refused to acknowledge that Russia and the Russian army is present in Ukraine. According to him, in Crimea a “referendum took place and 91 per cent of the people were in favour of reuniting with the Russian Federation”. Razga argued that:

*“There are opinions which say that Russia annexed Crimea, and there are opinions which say that people expressed their will in a referendum for the reunification.”*

In the interview with *Dennik N's* editor, Švrček, speaking about the situation in Crimea, asked a rhetorical question: “Do citizens have a right to self-determination?”<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup> Tomáš Bičkoš, “Slovenskí Branci – Poslanie, Činnosť a Zmysel Existencie,” *Mea Patria*, February 15, 2013, <http://meapatria.sk/zaujalo-nas/slovenski-branci-%e2%80%93-poslanie-cinnost-a-zmysel-existencie/>.

<sup>47</sup> aktuality.sk, “Spoveď Slováka, Ktorý Bojuje Za Proruských Separatistov,” *Aktuality.sk*, February 23, 2015, <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/271050/nevzali-ho-do-armady-siel-k-separatistom/>.

<sup>48</sup> Mikušovič, “Rozhovor S Brancami.”

In the summer of 2016, SB publicized their intention to organize the “Way of Slavic Friendship” (a joint ride by bikers on the territory of the Slavic states). The aim of the event should be “spreading the idea of Slavic reciprocity, solidarity and friendship”.<sup>49</sup> As SB reported on its FB page, “on the basis of the long-term mutual contacts, communication and cooperation between the Slovak and Russian bikers, this idea attracted the attention of the Moscow-based ‘Night Wolves bikers’ club.”<sup>50</sup> SB’s “civilian wing” *Naša vlasť – Naša Budúcnosť* (Our Homeland – Our Future) established the Patriot motorcycle club in 2016.<sup>51</sup>

According to unofficial information, Švrček travels to the Balkans every year, where in addition to spending his vacations there he is seeking contacts with former senior officers of the Yugoslav Army and allegedly purchases original equipment of the former Yugoslav Army at low prices. The so-called *Všebranecký* (All-Conscripts) was an extensive training session in the summer of 2016, which lasted for a week and was a sort of a rite of passage for new recruits. It was attended by people from Croatia who were interested in setting up a militia similar to SB at home.<sup>52</sup> It can be said that SB is assisting in the establishment of such units, i.e. paramilitary groups, in Croatia and also in the Czech Republic.<sup>53</sup> Formally, three units of Czech-Moravian conscripts exist, however, only one is currently functional.

The group’s pan-Slavic and pro-Russian orientation also manifests in its attempts to bring its activities to secondary schools by organizing “patriotic” lectures delivered by its members to pupils in Eastern Slovakia. During the lectures SB’s speakers showed a map entitled “Territories inhabited by our nation” outlining the territory populated by Slavic nations as a homogeneous space, a single state stretching from Central Europe and the Adriatic Sea to the Pacific Ocean – thus emphasizing geopolitical unity with Russia.

At present, all commanders of SB units are ideologically pro-Russian according to an anonymous source from inside. The last member with any authority who was not pro-Russian left SB as a result of a dispute with Švrček in late summer 2016. Pro-Russian views are not promoted inside the group as an official programme, but such disposition is spreading rather organically mainly due to the fact that basically every person who has some authority in the organization and admired by young recruits is pro-Russian (and often anti-establishment).

---

<sup>49</sup> Slovenskí Branci, “Slovenskí Branci - Photos - Facebook Post,” facebook page - photo album, accessed April 5, 2017, [https://www.facebook.com/pg/slovenskibranci1/photos/?tab=album&album\\_id=1720312011558083](https://www.facebook.com/pg/slovenskibranci1/photos/?tab=album&album_id=1720312011558083).

<sup>50</sup> The road would lead through the Czech Republic to Slovakia, from Russia through Belarus, Ukraine and Poland to Slovakia and across Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Slovenia through Hungary to Slovakia.

<sup>51</sup> Naša Vlasť - Naša Budúcnosť, “Naša Vlasť - Naša Budúcnosť - Facebook Post,” facebook page, (July 13, 2016), <https://www.facebook.com/650692178296514/photos/pb.650692178296514.-2207520000.1469118853./1252746144757778/?type=3&theater>.

<sup>52</sup> Slovenskí Branci, “Slovenskí Branci - Photo - Facebook Post,” facebook page, accessed April 5, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/plugins/post.php?href=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.facebook.com%2Fslovenskibranci1%2Fpost%2F1738739426382008%3A0&>.

<sup>53</sup> Slovenskí Branci, “Slovenskí Branci, Pozdrav Z ČMB - Facebook Post,” facebook page, (October 2016), <https://www.facebook.com/plugins/post.php?href=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.facebook.com%2Fslovenskibranci1%2Fpost%2F1764154840507133&>.

In 2015, Razga outlined the following scenario of further developments in Europe (especially in the context of the refugee crisis) on SB's FB page:

*“Europe will be caught up in fragmentation and chaos and the first victims will come, (pseudo)“humanists” will croak their usual nonsenses, the real people will defend themselves, blood will flow. Politicians will run away and will speak their “smart” speeches from over the Ocean if ever ... The economy will collapse completely ... and then either we all will go to Russia, or Russia will come here. And America just wants it, that we will be bled and will kill each other. There are NATO troops ready to crush any resistance to protect the elite, they will wait and provoke Russia. After this they will find out that people are against them. Then the situation will be stuck, because Russia is not stupid and will wait until the moment of irreversible confrontation. Then it will be the end of the world as we know it”.*<sup>54</sup>

Although officially SB does not name its enemy against whom the association would stand in a possible military conflict with Slovakia's participation if it ever happens, from the statements of SB's individual representatives it can be concluded that SB's members would not fight on the side of Slovakia's allies from the EU and NATO, on the contrary, taking into consideration the well-known ideological preferences in SB (particularly its pan-Slavic orientation) they would rather side with Russia.

### **Action Group Resistance Kysuce (Akčná skupina Vzдор Kysuce – VK)**

*Akčná skupina Vzдор Kysuce – VK* (Action Group Resistance Kysuce) is a paramilitary neo-Nazi group known for the violent actions of its members, including its founder Marian Magát (clashes with the police during public actions, mimicking violent acts including mock executions/hangings of political opponents).<sup>55</sup> The Ministry of Interior's report on extremism in 2012 characterizes VK as a “nationalist-militant group of mostly young people, mainly supported by members of Slovak Togetherness”. It is categorized as a “formation operating with extremist elements”. According to Ministry's report, VK is “supported from abroad, especially by members of the extremist Hungarian National Front.”<sup>56</sup>

#### *Ideology: fight better for Slovakia*

VK is one of the most radical groups among the current far-right movement in Slovakia. The group's members conduct military drills in the woods to train for close combat and to learn other military skills. The group was founded in late 2010 – early 2011. Its members' views are marked by radical anti-Semitism, the adoration of Jozef Tiso and the de facto approval of the Holocaust.

---

<sup>54</sup> topky.sk, “Extrémistov Védie Aj Oceňovaný Vedec Zo SAV: Slovenskí Branci Začínajú Byť Profesionálmi,” *Topky.sk*, October 8, 2015, <http://www.topky.sk/cl/10/1502635/>.

<sup>55</sup> Kysuce is a region in the north-western part of Slovakia.

<sup>56</sup> rokovanie vlády SR, “Správa O Plnení Úloh Vyplyvajúcich Z Koncepcie Boja Proti Extrémizmu Na Roky 2011 – 2014 Za Rok 2012.”

It claims to follow the legacy of the war-time Slovak state's army that fought alongside the Wehrmacht "against Bolshevism". VK considers the Greek neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn as the political model for its own activities. It also states that the group was inspired by the (neo-Nazi) Hungarian National Front when it was established.<sup>57</sup>

In May 2015, the group published the following appeal on its FB page:

*"Brothers, Slovaks, sympathizers and supporters of Action Group Resistance Kysuce! Taking into account the tense relations with Russia and the catastrophic situation in the Slovak security and defense forces we call on all brave, mentally and physically healthy nationalists to, within their capabilities, try to infiltrate the ranks of the army or the police".*

According to the group, that is the way enabling its fans to "fight better for Slovakia, get to the weapons and sabotage incumbent politicians" arguing that "the method used to achieve our final victory does not matter".<sup>58</sup>

In the 2016 parliamentary elections, the formal group's leader Magát ran on the list of Kotleba's ĽSNS, but he did not get into the parliament.

#### *International neo-Nazi contacts*

Important factors influencing VK include the international contacts of some of its top officials. They attended the commemoration ceremonies of the "nationalist" Gábor Kecskés organized by Magyar Nemzeti Arcvonal (Hungarian National Front, MNA). These were physically demanding marches to the memorial plaque at the hill known as Mátraháza, which is associated with appeals for mobilization. They also sporadically contacted the smaller groups orbiting MNA, however, they have cautious or even hostile relations with the majority of Hungarian extremist groups due to the fact that one of the Hungarian groups' basic ideas is supporting the revision of Hungary's borders with its neighbours and the post-war arrangement that guarantees the territorial integrity of the Slovak Republic. VK's leaders are hostile to Jobbik and the paramilitary, revisionist organizations in its sphere of influence.<sup>59</sup>

---

<sup>57</sup> Ingrid Romancová, "Na Slovensku Vznikla Polovojenská Neonacistická Organizace S Napojením Na Maďarskou Národní Frontu," 2013, <http://www.evropsky-rozhled.eu/na-slovensku-vznikla-polovojenska-neonacisticka-organizace-s-napojenim-na-madarskou-narodni-frontu/>.

<sup>58</sup> Mikušovič, "Rozhovor S Brancami."

<sup>59</sup> At the same time, however, the truth is that the once so very efficient "Hungarian card" that was employed by the previously ruling mainstream nationalist and national-populist parties (SNS, HZDS, Smer-SD) has become marginal in recent years. Therefore – apart from some exceptions – the decline could be witnessed in picturing the image of Hungary as an existential threat to Slovak nation and its statehood. The current enemies of VK include the political elite, the establishment, NATO and the European Union. The anti-Hungarian rhetoric virtually disappeared from speeches of its representatives. This topic gradually lost its former mobilization potential (unlike anti-Roma and anti-Semitic rhetoric, which is as very strong as before). This topic gradually lost its former mobilization potential (unlike anti-Roma and anti-Semitic rhetoric, which is as strong as before). The unifying elements in VK's communication with sympathizers has become pro-Russian and pan-Slavic sentiments.

The long-standing links between the organization's key leaders with similarly oriented groups in the Czech Republic constitutes a much more significant threat than VK's contacts with Hungarian right-wing extremist groups. Magát has been participating actively in Czech extremist and neo-Nazi actions and events for more than ten years.

The initial model of inspiration for the foundation of VK was the Czech *Národní odpor* (National Resistance), an unregistered entity created from the remnants of an organization called Republican Youth, a youth branch of the Czech Association for the Republic – Republican Party of Bohemia. The founder of this party, Miroslav Sladek, gave a speech at a demonstration organized by VK in front of the Government Office in Bratislava in 2016.<sup>60</sup> The Czech National Resistance had a few small branches in Slovakia shortly after it began to conduct its activities, the strongest of which was the National Resistance in Nitra. The larger part of its members who were predisposed to turn to violent solutions later became a strong group of supporters for Kotleba's LSNS, while a smaller part has in recent years become a de facto part of the Slovak Revival Movement.<sup>61</sup>

Since 2004, *Národní korporativismus* – NK (National Corporatism) has played the role of the integrator of mutually hostile groups with similar agendas in the Czech Republic, which successfully accomplished something previously thought to be impossible: it organized several successful demonstrations with the joint participation of the majority of these groups.<sup>62</sup> Later NK transformed itself, but internal conflict arose within the group. As a result, the group's formerly stable structure deteriorated, which was successfully exploited by *Dělnická strana* (Workers Party) led by Tomáš Vandas. Magát and Holtan were actively involved in this process, and provided points of contact between the Slovak and Czech extremist groups.<sup>63</sup> Therefore, the role of the two aforementioned founders of VK had a key role laying the groundwork for extremism in the Czech Republic. They later called upon their fieldwork experience when establishing paramilitary organizations in Slovakia.

---

<sup>60</sup> Tomáš Ferenčák, “‘Zradca.’ Kotleba Hodil Spojencov Cez Palubu | Slovensko | Hospodárske Noviny - Denník O Ekonomike a Financiách,” *Hospodárske Noviny*, September 6, 2016, <http://dennik.hnonline.sk/slovensko/821127-kotleba-hodil-spojencov-cez-palubu>.

<sup>61</sup> At the violent demonstrations of National Resistance on October 28, 2005 in Ostrava, Magát appeared for the first time in the Czech Republic in the role of official organizer. At that time, among the participants there were dozens of persons from Slovakia. A year later another publicly known leader of VK, Richard Holtan, was involved in the organization of the violent actions of National Resistance in Bruntál (Czech Republic) together with him Ivo Muller and David Vaculik. They were also among the instigators of the subsequent racially motivated arson attack on a Roma family in Vítkov.

<sup>62</sup> Including the so-called Autonomous Nationalists, who compared to most other groups discussed here, had different parameters and did not manifest any interest closer cooperation given that the majority of extremist activists despised them and labeled them as amateurs. National Corporatism was the first relatively successful attempt to interlink political ambitions with the paramilitary instincts of a large part of the supporters.

<sup>63</sup> It should be noted that at that time the social media networks or internet resources either did not exist or were not available in their current form and did not play any significant role in mobilization and maintaining the contacts.

## *Turning point in Prague*

On May 1, 2008 in Prague another demonstration took place in cooperation with Workers' Party and National Resistance which was quite significant for Slovakia. Alongside the future founders of VK stood members of Slovak Togetherness. The organization was led by Marian Kotleba, later the governor of the Banská Bystrica region, and the incumbent chairman of the parliamentary party ĽSNS.<sup>64</sup> At the demonstration Magát and Holtan appeared in the role of organizers again together with four perpetrators of the arson attack on a Roma family in Vítkov committed on the eve of Adolf Hitler's birthday, less than two weeks before the demonstration.<sup>65</sup>

The event on May 1 is considered a key date in shaping the extremism in Slovakia, and a moment that led to the creation of VK itself.<sup>66</sup>

## *Hierarchy and discipline - zero tolerance*

VK strongly emphasizes the physical and mental resilience of its members and their adherence to strict rules. According to statements of one of VK's executives in 2011, the group's aim was to:

*"Replace the current civilization based on profit and personal benefit by a new civilization based on masculinity, heroism and the sense of victimhood of the individual for benefit of the whole."*<sup>67</sup>

Currently alcohol is considered taboo among ordinary VK members, smoking cigarettes is conditionally tolerated while the group's leadership shows zero tolerance for other drugs.

The group's attitude to the use of physical violence has changed gradually. While in the beginning of group's activities, VK's members quite often perpetrated physical violence in public (for instance in discotheques). After several years of intense physical and mental training for physical conflicts, routine beatings and other violent conflicts in public are no longer tolerated and are considered to be manifestations of a lack of discipline.<sup>68</sup>

---

<sup>64</sup> Later he repeatedly attempted to unite the "national" forces under the flag of the organization he led, however, due to internal conflicts and the intervention of state authorities that led to the dissolution of his political party, he failed in achieving the intended objective. On the contrary, three times in the recent years he became a participant in the developments which disabled the creation of a common candidate list of radicals and extremists from the key organizations in Slovakia.

<sup>65</sup> One of the perpetrators of the attack, in which two-year-old Natalia suffered burns over 80% of her body and two other persons suffered serious injuries (the house was completely burned down and later demolished), appeared with the obvious signs of severe burns caused by the clumsy handling of combustible materials – at the time of the demonstration that helped police to identify probable offenders and subsequently charge and sentence them to long stints in prison.

[https://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C5%BDh%C3%A1%C5%99sk%C3%BD\\_%C3%BAtok\\_ve\\_V%C3%ADtkov%C4%9B](https://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C5%BDh%C3%A1%C5%99sk%C3%BD_%C3%BAtok_ve_V%C3%ADtkov%C4%9B)

<sup>66</sup> It can be formally dated to the end of 2010, but its primary structure emerged two years earlier and gradually crystallized into a paramilitary organization that tries to gain support among the population living in the immediate vicinity of the implementation of VK's armed, sport and environmental activities or activities focused on the support of socially disadvantaged persons and families with small children in villages located on particular territories. The later attempts to extend its activities to the wider territory of Slovakia were only partially successful and VK gradually became a kind of a closed club with a strict internal hierarchy.

<sup>67</sup> Archive of the authors.

<sup>68</sup> The leadership's response to the isolated incidents is usually relatively tough and uncompromising. The use of force is permitted only if a commander decided to do so and only in cases where he recognizes it as appropriate.

Unlike the relatively undisciplined members of the Slovak Conscripts, VK's members are mentally and physically much better prepared for real armed conflict and survival in the field. Due to this fact, members of VK command respect from other extremists and are considered the strongest and most dangerous paramilitary organization in Slovakia despite the fact their membership has never exceeded two hundred.

Different trends can be identified in VK's leadership. Richard Holtan remains a strong supporter and a personal friend of Kotleba and aims to keep VK in the sphere of influence of LSNS. After the regional elections 2013, he personally congratulated Kotleba for his election as governor. Magát is not a person who seeks compromise because of his personal characteristics and volatile personal attitudes.<sup>69</sup> He excluded cooperation with Kotleba and even mulled over abstaining from political activities, however, later he accepted Kotleba's offer and unsuccessfully ran for LSNS on 88<sup>th</sup> place of the party's candidate list as an independent candidate. After the elections, he publicly criticized Kotleba and his party, emphasizing that he was disappointed by LSNS performance.

The importance of Magát's position in VK is generally overestimated as a consequence of his addiction to media attention. The true leader with the most substantial impact on the present and future of the group's direction is Lukáš Kopáč, who appeared in VK's leadership relatively recently.<sup>70,71</sup> Despite the fact that an open conflict never took place between him and Kotleba, Kopáč declined Kotleba's to be included on the candidate list of L'SNS, which offered him a solid chance to be elected in 2016, and instead opted for closer cooperation with the Slovak Revival Movement (SHO) with the intention to participate in the election in 2020. Neither Kopáč nor Švec (SHO) trust Kotleba and the feeling appears to be mutual.<sup>72</sup>

---

<sup>69</sup> During the few months prior to the parliamentary election in 2016 he changed his mind several times on VK's cooperation with LSNS. Initially he intended to run in these elections as a leading candidate of the transformed party Cesta – strana vlastencov a odborníkov (The Road – Party of Patriots and Experts) established by the former speaker of Kotleba's Banská Bystrica regional administration, Vladimír Gürtler.

<sup>70</sup> Kopáč Lukáš, "Lukáš Kopáč," *Lukáš Kopáč Spoločne Za Lepšie Slovensko!*, June 2015, <http://lukaskopac.blogspot.hu/2015/06/pocet-extremistov-pocas-sobotnajsieho.html>.

<sup>71</sup> Bránik Radovan, "Organizátor Zajtrajšieho Protestu Kopáč: Neonacisti by Sa Mali Zčať Hanbiť!," *Blog.sme.sk*, June 19, 2015, <https://branik.blog.sme.sk/c/383013/organizator-zajtrajsieho-protestu-kopac-neonacisti-by-sa-mali-zacat-hanbit.html>.

<sup>72</sup> While at successful demonstrations in SNP Square in Bratislava in August 2015, which was announced, paid and organized by Kopáč and people from VK, Kotleba used the mobilization potential of the protest to confirm his declarative image as a leader of authentic opposition to the system. Just one year later, a few months after the parliamentary election, at a similar event, he banned any promotion of LSNS and manifestly ignored this event in the public communication of his political party (at that time already a parliamentary one).

## COURSE OF SUCCESS: SPLIT IN THE SLOVAK EXTREME RIGHT

---

Kotleba's election to the parliament caused a split among the supporters of the extreme right into two groups. The first one considers Kotleba's penetration into the political mainstream to be a success and therefore supports him in his further endeavours. The second group sees him as a traitor and renegade who concluded "a contract with Devil" and instead of being the enemy of the establishment he became a part of it. For this less powerful group Kopáč is the indisputable authority due to his mental and ideological skill set as well as his cultivated membership.<sup>73, 74</sup> Members of this opinion group consider him as Kotleba's successor as leader of the so-called "authentic radicals." For several years Kopáč conducted fieldwork to integrate the previously fragmented connections between similar groups. He tried to reconcile the mutual animosities between key players without revealing his own power ambitions. Thanks to this he has attained a strong position and currently he is the most powerful man in VK, and possesses the right to veto. Due to Kotleba's inability to comply with cooperative agreement between LSNS and VK, Holtan's position in VK has weakened and currently he has no significant influence on the group's future direction. According to the opinion of many well-informed insiders, Magát is only a "mascot" and a "loose cannon" who is used for marketing purposes and distractions.

The situation is a strange one: Róbert Švec, as a representative of "moderate" extremist politics, concluded an authentic and mutual trust-based alliance with VK.<sup>75</sup> Consequently, VK is gradually changing under Kopáč's influence and starting to redefine its original objectives. Another one of the visible results of the deal is VK's gradual slide into illegality and its efforts to conceal its existence, activities and intentions, although years before it vigorously attempted to build a strong, publicly visible brand.<sup>76</sup> Kopáč was able to convince the membership about the necessity to change their approach and in the name of common success he re-directed the "media fame" and all public attention to SHO.

### *Infiltrating power*

According to sources inside the right wing extremist scene, in the course of several months in the second part of 2016, several dozen VK members underwent an intensive period of preparation to infiltrate the armed forces. They were trained at workshops in changing their image and concealing their real opinions and attitudes, which is required during the initial recruitment interview for the armed forces or the police.

---

<sup>73</sup> Bránik Radovan, "Picture: Protest Spoločne Za Slovensko, Proti Islamizácii Európy a ...," 2015, <https://goo.gl/images/CwDBaq>.

<sup>74</sup> "Kopáč," June 2015, <https://bratislavabeznaackov.files.wordpress.com/2015/06/lukc3a1c5a1-kopc3a1c48d.jpg>.

<sup>75</sup> "Moderate" politics based on "calm" arguments who rejects "the pub marketing" represented by Kotleba and LSNS and tries to get the protest votes of urban electorate,

<sup>76</sup> This trend could be observed during the demonstration in front of the Government Office on Freedom Square in Bratislava in June 2016. Similarly, as in 2015, that time most of organizational, material and financial burden was laid on the shoulders of dozens of VK's members, but unlike in the past, VK's logo and visuals did not appear among the gathered participants.

Kopáč posted on his blog detailed instructions on how to join the armed forces while masking one's true intentions and memberships in extremist organizations.<sup>77</sup> Kopáč acknowledges that the plan is mainly about "the immune system of the state". He was also clearly satisfied with the lack of a public response from state organs to his appeal. VK and SHO are gaining traction thanks to this coordinated approach, and they are gradually becoming a security risk to society.

Unlike ĽSNS with its superficially populist political line, key VK and SHO members recognize the profound importance of systemic linkages between political and power structures for achieving the necessary impact on society's development.<sup>78</sup> Kopáč is trying to conduct systematic work to get VK into positions in the security apparatus that would provide discreet support to SHO. SHO recently turned into a political party, which in the next four years will try to use citizens' dissatisfaction with the current ruling establishment and the disappointment of ĽSNS's voters who have become hostages of unrealistic promises and unfulfilled expectations.<sup>79</sup> VK and SHO are attempting to create a situation where parliament would include either one strong or two smaller anti-establishment extremist groups, without whose support it will be impossible to form a government.

### *Geopolitical implications*

The result of competition between the ĽSNS and SHO/VK to become the strongest force in right-wing radical and extremist politics may not have only domestic implications, but also affect the geopolitical power balance. Both organizations are known by their anti-Western and pro-Russian orientation; they support Slovakia's withdrawal from the EU and NATO; they criticize the West for its policy towards Russia. However, unlike ĽSNS, which expresses sympathy for Russia and its foreign policy rather spontaneously and instinctively, SHO's pro-Russian orientation is more conceptualized, as it is justified in historical and cultural contexts, particularly in the context of the special relationship between all Slavic nations, and especially between Slovaks and Russians.

Moreover, SHO has direct contacts in Russia through its partner organizations that are de facto constituent parts of the governmental establishment. The probable strengthening of SHO in Slovak politics may create favourable conditions for more open and more consequential support for a pro-Russian orientation in the foreign and security policy of Slovakia.

---

<sup>77</sup> The purpose of the blog was not to address the real membership base, which is kept well-informed on everything by completely different communication methods.

Zverejnil Alternatívna Cesta, "Nacionalisti Vyzývajú Na Vstup Do Armády, Neodmietajú Ani Sabotáže," June 1, 2015, <http://alternativnacesta.blogspot.com/2015/06/nacionalisti-vyzyvaju-na-vstup-do.html>.

<sup>78</sup> Kopáč excludes that in the case of attempts to infiltrate the power organs and the subsequent seizure of political power will have place, he even actively dampened the initiatives of overly radical supporters who were trying to provoke smaller armed conflicts with state security forces.

<sup>79</sup> Zverejnil Alternatívna Cesta, "Po Kotlebovom Volebnom Úspechu Sa Mobilizujú Aj Radikáli! Vzдор Verbuje Nových Členov," March 28, 2016, <http://alternativnacesta.blogspot.com/2016/03/po-kotlebovom-volebnom-uspechu-sa.html>.

### **Private Secondary Professional School for the Protection of Persons and Properties**

The Private Secondary Professional School for the Protection of Persons and Properties (*Súkromná stredná odborná škola ochrany osôb a majetku*) is an accredited secondary school in Bratislava educating security specialists. It employs Slovak and Russian teachers and instructors and spreads anti-Western, anti-NATO and pro-Russian views among its students.

The school was incorporated into the education system on September 1, 2007.<sup>80</sup> It prepares students for jobs in security forces (private security services, Police Corps, municipal police, customs service, Military Police). After the students meet the general and technical criteria for work in these structures, they can also go on to study at a university. It co-operates with several leading institutions in the security structures of the state. It can be concluded on the basis of the authors' fieldwork that state security institutions have ignored the potential risks posed by the operation of the school so far regardless of the above mentioned issues. This problem did not even appear in the classified parts of the SIS reports of the past two years.

The original name of the school was *Private Secondary Vocational School*. In 2014, the school's management asked the Ministry of Education to change the school's name to *Private Secondary Professional School for the Protection of Persons and Properties*.

School founder Štefan Kurilla is a certified instructor of the Spetsnaz System, a combat tactic used by members of the special units of the Defence and Interior Ministries of the Russian Federation. He is an organizer and participant of the Evening of Martial Arts, the largest annual show of martial arts in Slovakia and neighbouring countries since 1997.<sup>81,82</sup> He and his wife own a company with the same name, which, however, has accumulated virtually no sales in the past few years. Its profit corresponds to the costs associated with the big-budget event, while the financial backing of the event is provided by a non-transparent network of sponsors and co-operating partners. According to anonymous sources it has been verified that the institution is financed in large part by Russian banker Sergej Chepinoga, who holds a license for the organization W5.<sup>83,84</sup>

---

<sup>80</sup> The founder of the school is a company called Security Management Ltd, Bratislava, and the company's director is Štefan Kurilla. Its co-owner is Zdenek Rada, who, however, does not intervene in the school's operation and does not influence the general direction of the school. He only provides the premises for its operation. The school was included in the project of experimental verification of the field of study "92456: protection of persons and property". It was a four-year study organized over the course of a class and ended with graduation exams. There are male and female students in a proportion of 4 to 1. The school provides students with the ISCED 3A level of secondary vocational education.

<sup>81</sup> FinStat, "Večer Bojových Umení, S.r.o. - Obchodný Register," accessed April 5, 2017, [https://www.finstat.sk/36286320/obchodny\\_register](https://www.finstat.sk/36286320/obchodny_register).

<sup>82</sup> ssosoom.edupage.org, "Súkromná Stredná Odborná Škola Ochrany Osôb a Majetku - Fotoalbum," December 2013, <https://ssosoom.edupage.org/album/#gallery/23>.

<sup>83</sup> <http://sportky.zoznam.sk>, "Organizátor Bratislavských Majstrovstiev Sveta W5 v Kickboxe: Šampiónom Môže Byť Ktokoľvek!," *Športky.sk*, March 3, 2014, <http://sportky.zoznam.sk/c/120602/>.

Kurilla has an honorary diploma and a further unspecified award from the Ministry of Interior of the Russian Federation in the “jock strap medals” category (award ceremonies for some particular individuals are done in secret and the award itself is not intended to be worn in public). He also has a diploma thanks to Spetsnaz veterans from Russia. Based on the researchers’ extensive fieldwork, he has been providing organizational and financial mentoring to veterans of the Afghan war for many years, of Spetsnaz-, GRU- and FSB-members operating on Slovakia’s territory and closely cooperates with the Russian diplomatic office in obtaining visas and invitations. Since 2013 he has been wearing the St. George ribbon on his clothes on ceremonial occasions at the school.

The former head of institution Jozef Gandžala worked at the school between 2011 and 2013. He is an active member of the Association of Slovak Soldiers, a strong organization of veterans and reservists who are open about their hostile attitudes towards the existing political system, the European Union and NATO. After returning to civilian life Gandžala became openly pro-Russian and anti-establishment and due to the strict subordination and strong respect he commanded for his undeniable qualities his views became dominant in the school. Beyond compulsory education he supported cooperation with Russian experts with regards to martial arts through, for example, Spetsnaz instructors supplied by Kurilla.<sup>85</sup>

In 2015, Gandžala publicly commented on the status of reservists and veterans in Slovakia:

*“I would like to see very much how the movement (party, alliance) would arise on this platform that will defend and literally will fight for the interests of security forces! Personally, I think – enough is enough to have ministers, state secretaries, directors, I do not know whom else – incompetent, appointed by party’s headquarters who care only about their own pockets. If we will unite against them and will fight for common cause, we can already in the next elections mix political “cards”. We are disciplined enough, so let us use it! Let us be and let us stop begging for crumbs from the table of someone! That is my opinion. If there will be no positive response, nothing will happen, we will be only those whom we are today – timid, insecure and quarreling ex-fighters. We have potential for more!”<sup>86</sup>*

He resigned from the directorship of the school after a disagreement with its founder, who in the interests of cooperation with state security forces unsuccessfully tried to dampen Gandžala’s aggressive style in promoting a pro-Russian ideology which both of them share.

Currently, the school’s director is Svätopluk Škápik, winner of the shooting competition "Best Shot 2015" in the Open/Men category.<sup>87</sup> During the communist regime he was registered by State Secret Police (ŠtB) in Plzeň as a 3<sup>rd</sup> category threat.<sup>88</sup>

---

<sup>84</sup> Sergey Chepinoga, *Trailer of W5 DRILLS with Sergey Chepinoga*, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Swb3p9eS2AQ>.

<sup>85</sup> After he finished his cooperation with the school he became an instructor and organizer of controversial summer camps for children. He also sporadically publishes his articles and almost exclusively defends Russia’s excesses and expansionist foreign policy.

<sup>86</sup> Archive of the authors

<sup>87</sup> [ssosoom.edupage.org](https://ssosoom.edupage.org), “Súkromná Stredná Odborná Škola Ochrany Osôb a Majetku - Fotoalbum,” October 1, 2016, <https://ssosoom.edupage.org/album/#gallery/88>.

<sup>88</sup> [stbezo.info](https://stbezo.info), “EZO – Evidence Zájmových Osob StB,” accessed April 5, 2017, <https://stbezo.info/s96.htm>.

Later he worked in law enforcement on the different levels, including as head of the city (municipal) police in Pezinok (small city near Bratislava). He is a person whose pro-Russian attitudes are associated with a belief in Jewish conspiracy theories. He believes that the collapse of the Twin Towers was caused by CIA agents. These views are openly communicated in the school with students, a significant proportion of whom share them.

Many of the school's students were (and still are) the children of members of the police corps at higher-level posts, officers of the Military Intelligence Service (VSS), the Slovak Intelligence Service (SIS), the soldiers of the Armed Forces and civilian employees of the Ministries of Interior and Defence (for example, the daughter of František Kašický, former defence minister and later Slovakia's ambassador to NATO). Some students were also the children of people considered to be members of the underworld, and individuals under investigation or being prosecuted (for example, the son of Marian Gaál). In the ranks of security forces, it is a generally accepted fact that the skills of students from the school significantly exceeds those coming from secondary vocational schools of the police corps.<sup>89</sup>

On the basis of long-term research on the views and attitudes of students as presented on social networks, in addition to personal interviews with them, it seems that their opinions after obtaining the maturity diploma – with a few exceptions – correlate with the so-called alternative conspiratorial media (*Slobodný vysielač*, *Hlavnespravy.sk*). They exhibit negative and hostile attitudes towards the US and NATO and show a strong pro-Russian sentiment.

On the school's website<sup>90</sup> one can find information about joint exercises with LYNX commandos (Special Purposes Unit of the Police Corps)<sup>91,92</sup>, visits of Russian veterans (where Kurilla is shown with the St. George ribbon)<sup>93</sup>, professional practice<sup>94</sup>, discussions with graduates in the police corps<sup>95</sup>, and summer<sup>96</sup> and winter<sup>97</sup> survival courses.

---

<sup>89</sup> On the Fest of Martial Arts, which is an annual demonstration of classic martial arts, the share of Russian groups and “man against man” styles of fighting have been increasing from year to year. The school demonstrated crackdown techniques against a group of armed men and the demonstrated level of ability was higher than the level reached by graduates of the National Police School. There are two elite units in the police with the same profile, one in the army, and several graduates of the school are already their members.

<sup>90</sup> Súkromná stredná odborná škola ochrany osôb a majetku, Bratislava, “Súkromná Stredná Odborná Škola Ochrany Osôb a Majetku - O Škole,” accessed April 5, 2017, <https://ssosoom.edupage.org/about/>

<sup>91</sup> ssosoom.edupage.org, “Súkromná Stredná Odborná Škola Ochrany Osôb a Majetku - Picture,” January 13, 2014, <https://ssosoom.edupage.org/album/?#gallery/24>.

<sup>92</sup> ssosoom.edupage.org, “Súkromná Stredná Odborná Škola Ochrany Osôb a Majetku - Fotoalbum,” May 30, 2015, <https://ssosoom.edupage.org/album/?#gallery/63>.

<sup>93</sup> ssosoom.edupage.org, “Súkromná Stredná Odborná Škola Ochrany Osôb a Majetku - Fotoalbum,” October 1, 2016.

<sup>94</sup> ssosoom.edupage.org, “Súkromná Stredná Odborná Škola Ochrany Osôb a Majetku - Fotoalbum,” April 22, 2016, <https://ssosoom.edupage.org/album/?#gallery/81>.

<sup>95</sup> ssosoom.edupage.org, “Súkromná Stredná Odborná Škola Ochrany Osôb a Majetku - Fotoalbum,” June 20, 2015, <https://ssosoom.edupage.org/album/?#gallery/67>.

<sup>96</sup> ssosoom.edupage.org, “Súkromná Stredná Odborná Škola Ochrany Osôb a Majetku - Fotoalbum,” June 20, 2015, <https://ssosoom.edupage.org/album/?#gallery/66>.

<sup>97</sup> ssosoom.edupage.org, “Súkromná Stredná Odborná Škola Ochrany Osôb a Majetku - Fotoalbum,” May 22, 2014, <https://ssosoom.edupage.org/album/?#gallery/32>.

## Association of the Slovak Soldiers (Asociácia slovenských vojakov – ASV)

The Association of Slovak Soldiers (ASV) is currently one of the most assertive pro-Russian civilian-military organizations in Slovakia.

### *History*

ASV was founded in 1991 by a group of officers from the air force squadron stationed at the airport in Piešťany. The intention of the founders was to be the only professional organization of “nationalist-oriented” Slovak members of the Czechoslovak army. Ján Slota, then one of the leaders of the Slovak National Party (SNS), actively assisted in ASV’s birth. The founding congress of ASV took place in Žilina, where Slota resided. The three members of ASV’s leadership were – alongside Slota – members of the Czechoslovak Federal Assembly representing SNS. In the period between the split of Czechoslovakia (1993) and 1996 the ASV had a strong impact on the army’s operation and also on its support from politicians. The prime minister, and ministers of the interior, defense and economy participated in congresses of the ASV.<sup>98</sup> Today ASV’s representatives attack liberal democracy, the West and NATO, and supports Russia’s foreign policy. They publicize articles and interviews in Slovak conspiratorial media outlets.

Members of the association created the emblem of the Ministry of Defence, and the symbols and signs of military units and the flags of the special purposes regiment in Žilina. They also participated in the creation of the design of new uniforms and heraldic elements.<sup>99</sup> In the early period of ASV’s operation its first chairman, lieutenant colonel Peter Socha, as well as other leading persons consequently promoted an ethnicity-focused and separatist agenda. For example, they demanded in the association’s program that the „Slovak conscripts have to serve in Slovakia and only Slovak soldiers can be in the command positions in Slovakia”.<sup>100</sup>

Another remarkable event was the organization’s clear support for the controversial proposal submitted by Ján Klepáč, then an MP for the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH), who without preliminary discussion within his party initiated the creation of legal conditions for the establishment of *Domobrana* (guard, militia) at the plenary session of the Slovak parliament on July 11, 1991. It turned out this was one of the first visible signs of a gradual split inside the KDH. Although at that time the majority of KDH members refused to provide support for the previously mentioned proposal, the then-Minister of Interior and later the head of SIS (secret service) Ladislav Pittner supported it. The proposal was also supported by nearly a third of all MPs. It provoked a broad public discussion.<sup>101</sup>

---

<sup>98</sup> Asociácia Slovenských Vojakov, “Asociácia Slovenských Vojakov | História ASV,” *Asociácia Slovenských Vojakov, Ochrana Samostatnosti a Zvrchovanosti Slovenskej Republiky*, accessed April 5, 2017, <https://www.asvo.sk/fleet-and-crew>.

<sup>99</sup> Peter Zelizňák, “1997 – 2007 / Vojenská Symbolika / Register Znakov Vojenských Útvarov a Zariadení Ozbromených Síl Slovenskej Republiky,” 2008.

<sup>100</sup> “Bude Asociácia Prínosom Pre Armádu? ASV v Roku Jeden,” *No. 12, Vol. 39*, June 3, 1991.

<sup>101</sup> See more: Igor Baka, “Vojenská História, Časopis Pre Vojenskú História, Múzejníctvo a Archívniectvo” No.2 (2013).

*Bojovník* (Fighter), the magazine of the Slovak Union of Antifascist Fighters (SZPB), unceremoniously described this proposal as an „attempt to restore the fascist structures modeled after Hlinka’s Guard.”<sup>102</sup> Today, after ASV’s reactivation and its support for Russian interests, however, the leadership of the same Slovak Union of Antifascist Fighters became an active proponent of ASV activities.

Contrary to the original Klepáč proposal, ASV highlighted the particular military importance of *Domobrana* and justified its creation and existence as a necessary backup solution due to slow extraction or even the artificially maintained presence of (Czechoslovak) military units in Slovakia. ASV argued that *Domobrana* would be a tool „against the burgeoning crime which may rapidly increase due to the expected migration of foreigners into Slovakia.”<sup>103</sup>

The exalted nationalism and anti-migration attitudes were the main focuses of this organization a quarter of a century ago, albeit in a very different historical context. Opposed to the present situation, at that time the acute threat was considered to be the expected (however mistakenly) massive migration wave from countries of the former Soviet Union. Military historian Igor Baka argued that all of these proposals had in fact one common denominator: the creation of an alternative pole of power in Slovakia, which would operate outside of the reach of Prague’s federal authorities. In the context of sharpening Czech-Slovak tensions, the fears that this pole would be used as an auxiliary tool of exercising pressure not in favour of the interests of the then federal government were understandable. ASV insisted that *Domobrana* should remain completely outside of the army’s structures and not subject to its command.<sup>104</sup>

After Slovakia became independent the ASV initially had a strong influence on the overall direction of the army’s development, until after several years its power gradually began to fade. Due to personnel clashes inside the SNS, its disintegration, and the subsequent loss of political support, the association started slowly losing its positions at the Ministry of Defence, the General Staff and the army. Due to successful changes in Slovakia’s foreign policy orientation, the defeat of Mečiarism and the country’s leadership by pro-democratic and pro-Western forces, the members and sympathizers of ASV were definitively removed from high-ranking positions and in the following years the majority of ASV’s members left the armed forces. Even before 2000 the ASV existed only formally, carried out no relevant activities, and its original membership base crumbled.

---

<sup>102</sup> “Kto Zopakuje História?,” *Bojovník – Týždenník Antifašistov*, August 7, 1991, No.33 edition.

<sup>103</sup> “Asociácia Vojakov Za Domobranu,” *Pravda*, July 22, 1991.

<sup>104</sup> Less than a year before the split of Czechoslovakia (possibly in February 1992) the headquarters of Military Area “East” in Trenčín received material about the foundation of the Slovak Liberation Army. According to the document, as Baka wrote “its (army’s) role would have to be the provision of protection to the territorial integrity of the Slovak Republic and the achievement of Slovakia’s independence. The letter tried to mobilize professional soldiers as well as civilians who had to accumulate weapons. Authors of the letter threatened to organize a military coup if Slovakia’s independence was not declared by the end of 1992. The whole case has not been taken lightly (the defense and security committee of the Slovak parliament was dealing with it), especially in the context of the increasing numbers of the stolen weapons from military warehouses. Yet, due to the overall diction of the anonymous text it was assumed that its authors were professional military officers: Baka, “Vojenská História, Časopis Pre Vojenskú História, Múzejníctvo a Archívniectvo.”

Demoralized officers considered the orientation of the pro-EU and pro-NATO foreign policy orientation of Slovakia as their definitive defeat and the loss of national sovereignty. Faced with the new geopolitical reality they have completely given up any political activity. The subsequent formal dissolution of ASV due to its obvious inaction, however, did not only happen because of a lack of control from the competent government authorities, but also because the ASV could not even fulfil the basic legal obligations of such organizations for several years.

### *Present*

In 2014, however, steps were taken unexpectedly to reactivate the association. A small group of retired officers begun preparations for the continuation of ASV's activities. On March 21, 2015 in Liptovský Mikuláš, the ASV's board gathered, and decided to hold the 7<sup>th</sup> congress of ASV. The official relaunch of the association took place on April 25, 2015. In a short time, the ASV became a platform mostly encompassing the retired officers who disagree with the pro-Western orientation of the SR, and who, given the relatively well thought-out media strategy of ASV, could draw public attention to their agenda. ASV's typical media partners are conspiratorial media outlets such as *Slobodný vysielač*, *Hlavné správy* and *Parlamentné Listy*. At the same time, ASV promoted their views and opinions several times through the mainstream media or blogs.<sup>105</sup>

The communication strategy of ASV is to bring professional criticism of specific negative phenomena in the Slovak armed forces into public debate. The professional preparedness of their commentary on erroneous or questionable decisions, mainly regarding the procurement of technology and equipment, forms a positive impression of ASV's credibility. At the same time, since the reactivation ASV has been trying to discredit Slovakia's pro-Atlantic orientation, challenging the country's duties conferred upon it by its alliances and the reliability of Slovakia's partners in NATO; it openly defends the foreign policy interests of the Russian Federation. The order to send Slovak troops to Latvia served as an incentive to ASV to cross all possible barriers: the organization approached law enforcement agencies with a proposal to investigate allegations of treason, association with a foreign power, sabotage, threats and disclosing classified information committed in an organized group by the supreme representatives of the Ministry of Defence. In other words, the ASV basically accused the Slovak Ministry of Defence of treason for fulfilling its NATO obligations.

The ASV's growing influence on the armed forces and reservists can also be detected by soldiers' massive support for some of its activities on social networks, and also in the official measures taken by some organizations that have previously tried to avoid any political statements on the current foreign policy orientation of Slovakia. For example, the ASV's statements, among others, were supported by the Union of War Veterans of the Slovak Republic (ÚVVSR). Until recently, this organization had avoided any political declarations. The gradual shift towards pro-Russian narratives occurred under the leadership of its current chief, Colonel Pavel Marek.

---

<sup>105</sup> aktualne.atlas.sk, "ROZHOVOR: NATO by Nás Cez Palubu Nehodilo, Len by Nás Využilo a Nechalo Zahynúť | Aktuálne.sk," *Aktuálne.sk*, May 19, 2015, <http://aktualne.atlas.sk/rozhovor-kym-by-sa-nato-rozhybalo-je-po-nasej-armade/slovensko/politika/>.

This is an individual who until recently held high positions in military intelligence. At the time of Slovakia's accession to NATO he was the deputy director of the Military Intelligence Service (VSS) with top-level security clearance. Moreover, he held a certificate allowing access to classified information on the EU and NATO. ÚVVSR is still a contracted partner of the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Defence, the Slovak Union of Antifascist Fighters and the Club of Generals of the Slovak Republic. The ÚVVSR also raises the funds from national sources for its activities.

According to information confirmed by three independent sources inside the ASV, in January 2017 the organization had more than 220 official members and a stable organizational structure. Its members included former senior officers of the Ministry of Defence (now mostly retired), members of the Air Defence Forces, secret services, air force, diplomats, and teachers from the Academy of the Armed Forces. The most conservative estimate for the number of ASV supporters and sympathizers, or persons involved in some ASV activities, is around 1300. These are mainly members of military forces (soldiers, officers).

### *Resist transnational fascist corporatist*

ASV's rapid radicalisation and gradual shift towards extreme solutions beyond the framework of democracy can be illustrated by specific public statements by the organization over three consecutive years.

The beginning of this process can be traced to ASV leader Žarnovičan's 2015 interview on the online radio *Slobodný vysielateľ* where he offered his definition of extremism:

*“What is the difference between extremism and some expression of opinion? If we would say that it is necessary to **overthrow this government**, because it will never create control above itself in favor of citizens, it is extremism. But when we say that people should think about their decision in March (elections) to support (the situation of) the uncontrolled state, or on the contrary, they will make decision which will help to create a coalition that really will form the control mechanisms – this is not extremism.”*<sup>106</sup>

---

<sup>106</sup> ArchivSV, *Nebezpečná Bezpečnosť* 14.12.2015 -03-, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s9FqZuhgSkU>

Three other selected statements made by ASV's chairman Jozef Žarnovičan concerning Slovakia's foreign and security policy describes the security risk presented by the organization.

- *“The General Staff continues to learn English, it cringes to NATO, it is getting thicker in its concreted positions. Therefore my intention was to restore old associations from the 90s and to take over the sceptre of General Repaský, who in the name of state safety wanted to establish the General Inspection of the National Council of the Slovak Republic for the Control of the Operation of the Ministry of Defence. (...) The North Atlantic Treaty Organization is increasingly becoming a tool for American and European elites' aggression in the fight for redistribution of resources, not for the defence of democracy, which is already an essentially dead ideology.”(2015).<sup>107</sup>*
- *“There will come the time, and it is not so far, when Slovakia will have a national government resistant of the transnational fascist corporatist and globalist pressures, will have the clearly defined treaty of alliance with the strong and reliable states, with a strong national defence army ready to protect its own citizens. Until then, I remind the minister of defence, the chairman of SNS, and other politicians, ministers, and our prime minister and president that they are servants of every Slovak citizen and their power is only lent to them. They have still time, even if it is already running out, to demonstrate why they have gotten the trust of us, Slovak people, to defend the interests of all of us – citizens of Slovakia. There have been several chances, this is the last!” (2016)<sup>108</sup>*
- *“I ask the law enforcement agencies to immediately investigate the allegations of anti-state activities mainly because of associating with a foreign power according to §311, §315 sabotage, threats and disclosure of classified information §319-320 of the Act No.300/2005 and because of suspicion of a criminal offence including organized crime in the group of Minister of Defence Peter Gajdoš, the Secretary of State Robert Ondrejcsák, the representative of NGO STRATPOL, Marian Majer, the employee of the office of state secretary, who is also a representative of CEPI and SSPI, Jaroslav Nad', representative of CEPI and SSPI. (...) Among others, I suspect Minister of Defence Peter Gajdoš that he puts into positions at the Ministry of Defence those people who work for NGOs and that he signs co-operation with non-governmental organizations which promote not only cooperation with NATO, but carry out mostly one-side lobbying in favour of the military campaign of NATO against the Russian Federation and for the benefit of the military-industrial complex of the United States, which tries to promote buying American weapons by the Slovak Republic. The lobbying for the needs of the military-industrial complex of the United States and the*

---

<sup>107</sup> Juraj Pokorný, “Slovenská Armáda Neslúži Obrane Vlasti, Ale Záujmom NATO (Rozhovor Juraja Pokorného S Jozefom Žarnovičanom),” *Zem a Vek*, September 2015.

<sup>108</sup> zemavek.sk, “Výpoveď Asociácie slovenských vojakov - ZEM & VEK,” *Zem a Vek - Časopis*, accessed April 5, 2017, <http://www.zemavek.sk/articles/view/vypoved-asociacie-slovenskych-vojakov>.

*US government at the ministry of defence is more likely promoted by NGOs such as CEPI, SSPI, SAC, CENAA, STRATPOL.” (2017)<sup>109</sup>*

All the previously mentioned statements and the ongoing reactions to the publication of a provocative interview for the online portal tvnoviny.sk are designed to test and precisely measure of the efficiency of media coverage via the analytical service NEWTON Media. The results confirm the fact that ASV is currently the most powerful and most dangerous factor of Russian influence in Slovakia.<sup>110</sup>

---

<sup>109</sup> Hlavné správy - Konzervatívny denník, “Predseda ASV Žarnovičan Podozrieva Skupinku Okolo Gajdoša a Naďa Zo Spáchania Vlastizrady. Žiada O Prešetrenie,” *Hlavné Správy*, February 3, 2017, <http://www.hlavnespravy.sk/predseda-asv-zarnovican-ziada-o-presetrenie-z-protistatnej-cinnosti-skupiny-padlo-aj-meno-gajdosa-a-nada/893524>.

<sup>110</sup> tvnoviny.sk, “Bránik: Skutočnou Hrozbou Pre Slovensko Sú Frustrovaní Bývalí Vojaci, Hrozia Vojenským Pučom,” *Tvnoviny.sk*, February 16, 2017, [http://www.tvnoviny.sk/exkluzivne/1858496\\_branik-skutocnou-hrozbou-pre-slovensko-su-frustrovani-byvali-vojaci-hrozia-vojenskym-pucom](http://www.tvnoviny.sk/exkluzivne/1858496_branik-skutocnou-hrozbou-pre-slovensko-su-frustrovani-byvali-vojaci-hrozia-vojenskym-pucom).

## MEDIA ANALYSIS

---

The occupation and annexation of Crimea and the separatist rebellion inspired by Russia in Eastern Ukraine were accompanied by a massive propaganda campaign conducted by the Russian state after 2014 to justify its aggressive policies, to discredit Ukraine and to confront the West.<sup>111</sup>

Slovakia also became a target of the propaganda machine of the Russian Federation. In addition to Russian state media outlets (Russian-language federal TV channels and foreign-language versions of TV channel *Russia Today* and the *Sputnik* agency) available in Slovakia, some local Slovak media were involved in the process of shaping the opinion of Slovakia's population towards supporting Russia's policies.

The media landscape in Slovakia developed after 1990 in the context of the overall democratic transformation process. Some of the major dividing lines were attitudes towards political and socio-economic reforms, and the foundations of the liberal-democratic regime and its pivot towards pro-Western foreign policy orientation, including membership in the EU and NATO. Usually, media and journalists with favourable attitudes towards the process of democratic transformation had positive attitudes towards Slovakia's membership in the EU and NATO and thus they had critical stances on those internal and external forces that opposed the reforms and Slovakia's participation in European integration and the transatlantic alliance.

The Russian Federation was the external force that was trying to prevent the entry of Slovakia into the EU and NATO. These efforts by the Russian state evoked a positive response from some quarters of the Slovakian political parties and media, from those who did not agree with Slovakia's membership in either international organization. On the contrary, the above mentioned Russian policy provoked critical reactions in media outlets that supported liberal democracy and the pro-Western orientation of the country. It was expected that after Russia's aggression against Ukraine the media sphere in Slovakia would be split between different approaches to the policies of Russian state.

### **Mainstream media**

The Russian-Ukrainian conflict has become an event which has generated a wide range of reactions in Slovak media. Individual periodicals commenting on the conflict and its diverse circumstances, including responses in Slovakia, positioned themselves in compliance with certain opinions. Among serious mainstream media (with the exception of the daily *Pravda*) there was a prevalent tone criticizing Russia's aggressive policy toward Ukraine, while fringe outlets instead focused on efforts to justify or directly support Russia's policy.

---

<sup>111</sup> The main actors of this campaign were the Russian state media, which targeted the population in Russia itself as well as in Ukraine, other post-Soviet republics, and the Russian-language diaspora in Europe as well as local populations of European countries.

The opinion-making mainstream liberal (or liberal-conservative) print media – the daily *Sme* (We), the daily *Denník N* (*Daily N*) and the weekly *.týždeň* (Week), known for their pro-reform and pro-Western orientation, harshly criticized Russian aggression against Ukraine and condemned the Russian propaganda war against the West. They supported Ukraine in its internal reforms and its efforts to move closer to the West and published articles criticizing pro-Russian forces in Slovakia.<sup>112</sup>

The basic framework of the pro-Western stance was generally expressed by public media (Slovak Television and Slovak Radio) and by the most watched private TV stations *Markíza* and *JoJ* as well as by tabloids *Nový čas* (New Times) and *Plus 1 deň* (Plus One Day) and the mainstream weekly tabloid *Plus 7 dní* (Plus 7 days).

Ambivalent (and sometimes hidden pro-Russian) stances were displayed by pro-government left-leaning daily *Pravda* (Truth) and to some extent by private TV station TA3.

### **Pro-Russian fringe media**

The openly pro-Russian camp on Slovakia's media landscape consists of several, mostly fringe (politically and ideologically), media outlets. This camp combines the direct approval of Russia's state policies with a critical tone towards the West.

The monthly *Zem a Vek* (Earth and Age) is a conspiratorial periodical, a typical anti-Semitic media outlet, that publicizes material about the domination of the US and Zionism (Jews) over the world.<sup>113</sup> The articles published in this magazine are characterized by systemic resistance to the values of liberal democracy and by criticism of the West, the EU and NATO as well as a positive attitude towards the current political regime in Russia. The magazine took a stance close to the interpretation of Russian propaganda in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, and it openly supported the separatist rebellion of Donbass. The editors of the magazine, Tibor Rostás and Dušan Budzák, met the Russian Ambassador to Slovakia in 2015 and asked for Russian support for their media project.<sup>114,115</sup> At the beginning of 2015, *Zem a Vek* announced the start of a petition for Slovakia's withdrawal from NATO.<sup>116</sup>

---

<sup>112</sup> The content of articles in the mentioned outlets fit into the long-term value set that these periodicals represented (support for pro-Western foreign policy orientation of the Slovak Republic, support for socio-economic reforms, Atlanticism, preference for the values of liberal democracy, open society and civic principles).

<sup>113</sup> <http://zemavek.sk/>, "ZEM A VEK - Alternatívne spravodajstvo," Web Page, accessed April 5, 2017, <http://zemavek.sk/>.

<sup>114</sup> [dennikn.sk](http://dennikn.sk/), "Ako Je to S Údajnou Nezávislosťou Tibora Rostása," *Denník N*, February 22, 2016, <https://dennikn.sk/blog/ako-je-to-s-udajnou-nezavislostou-tibora-rostasa/>.

<sup>115</sup> [topky.sk](http://topky.sk/), "Slováci Spojencami Putinovho Režimu: Odborník Tvrdí, Že Médiá Ako Zem a Vek, Pomohli Ficovi," *Topky.sk*, February 21, 2016, <http://www.topky.sk/cl/11/1527019/>.

<sup>116</sup> "Rostás Vymýšľa Referendum O Vystúpení Z NATO," *Denník N*, February 2, 2015, <https://dennikn.sk/blog/rosta-vymysla-referendum-o-vystupeni-z-nato/>.

The online radio *Slobodný vysielateľ* (Free Broadcaster) is a fringe outlet established in early 2013 in Banská Bystrica.<sup>117</sup> It combines an anti-corruption rhetoric with calls for direct or “true” democracy along with a broad range of esoteric and conspiracy-related topics (anti-vaccination, chemtrails etc.) marked by strong anti-Semitism, criticism of liberal democracy and the West and open sympathies to Russian foreign policy.

The web portal *HlavnéSpravy.sk*, located in Košice, is an outlet spreading pro-Russian narratives in a sophisticated manner, mixing news from mainstream media (press and agencies) with its own comments and translated contributions taken from various Russian media.<sup>118</sup> Pro-Russian stances are accompanied by the open criticism of policies of the Western states.

In November 2016 the main pro-Russian fringe media outlets (*Zem a Vek*, *Slobodný vysielateľ*, *Hlavné správy* and *Medzičas*) formed the Association of the Independent Media (ANM).<sup>119</sup>

A clear pro-Russian attitude and an extremely critical tone towards the West (EU, USA, NATO) and Ukraine were the typical characteristics of articles published in the pro-government bi-weekly periodical *Slovenský rozhľad* (Slovak Outlook), which has ties to the ruling party Smer-SD.<sup>120</sup> The authors of these articles supported the opposition of Prime Minister Fico to the EU’s measures, and approved all activities aimed at strengthening cooperation with Russia. The web portal *Slovo*<sup>121</sup> (Word, previously the weekly *Slovo/Nové slovo*) took part in the discussion of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict as a media outlet publishing contributions with pro-Russian, anti-Ukrainian, anti-American and anti-Western content. Similar articles about the issue were publicized by the bi-weekly periodical *Literárny týždenník* (Literary Weekly)<sup>122</sup> and the monthly *Extra Plus*.<sup>123</sup> The content of the contributions in the above mentioned media outlets corresponds with the overall orientation of these periodicals, which for a long time have been marked by criticism of the pro-Western line of Slovakia’s foreign policy, opposition to liberal socio-economic reforms, statism, disagreement with NATO activities, criticism of various aspects of European integration and EU policies, anti-Americanism, nationalism and evident inclinations to support the policy of the current Russian leadership.

*Bojovník*<sup>124</sup> (The Warrior), the bi-weekly periodical of the Slovak Union of Antifascist Fighters, published materials taken directly from Russian sources that spread the Russian narrative about the struggle against „Ukrainian fascism“ and openly supported separatist rebels in Donbass.

---

<sup>117</sup> “Slobodný Vysielac,” *Slobodný Vysielac*, accessed April 6, 2017, <https://slobodnyvysielac.sk/>.

<sup>118</sup> Heureka Evolution, “Hlavné Správy - Konzervatívny Denník,” *Hlavné Správy*, accessed April 6, 2017, <http://www.hlavnespravy.sk/>.

<sup>119</sup> Zem a Vek, “Vznikla Asociácia nezávislých médií - ZEM & VEK,” Web Page, *Zem a Vek - Časopis*, accessed April 6, 2017, <http://www.zemavek.sk/articles/view/vznikla-asociacia-nezavislych-medii>.

<sup>120</sup> “Noviny Č. 4 - 22.03.2017 (Ročník VII.) - Internetové Noviny SLOVENSKÝ ROZHĽAD,” accessed April 6, 2017, <http://www.slovenskyrozhlad.sk/>.

<sup>121</sup> “Titulka | Noveslovo.sk,” accessed April 6, 2017, <http://www.noveslovo.sk/taxonomy/term/5>.

<sup>122</sup> “Literárny Týždenník,” accessed April 6, 2017, <http://www.literarny-tyzdennik.sk/>.

<sup>123</sup> “Extraplus,” accessed April 6, 2017, <http://www.extraplus.sk/>.

<sup>124</sup> “Bojovník | Dvojtyždenník Antifašistov,” accessed April 6, 2017, <http://www.szpb.sk/bojovnik.php>.

In 2015, Juraj Smatana, media analyst, published a list of 42 Czech- and Slovak-language websites which spread pro-Russian content and pro-Russian propaganda.<sup>125</sup>

Radical and extremist groups in Slovakia, including political parties, civil society organizations and paramilitary groups (People's Party Our Slovakia [Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko – ĽSNS], Slovak Revival Movement [Slovenské hnutie obrody – SHO], Slovak Conscripts [Slovenskí branci – SB], Action Group Resistance Kysuce [Akčná skupina Vzдор Kysuce – VK], Association of the Slovak Soldiers [Asociácia slovenských vojakov – ASV]) have an active presence in the country's media discourse. Mainstream media outlets are reporting on their activities mainly in a critical tone, emphasizing the fact that their ideological and value orientation, the proposals they have submitted, and the steps they have taken, contradict the liberal democratic system and Slovakia's official foreign policy orientation. On the contrary, the fringe, nationalist and conspiratorial media are offering these organizations and groups a broad space to present themselves and report on them in a prevalingly positive manner, while criticizing their opponents. Some organizations and media outlets established partnerships (for instance SHO with *Zem a Vek*, *Extra Plus* and *Slobodný vysielateľ*), while others are using these media outlets just as intensely to make their activities more appealing to the public, albeit informally.

### **Analysis of Slovak pro-Russian Facebook pages**

We selected three Slovak FB pages for analysis for the period of September 2016 – October 2016. The first page, *Som Slovák a som na to hrdý* (I am Slovak and I am Proud of It), is a nationalist pan-Slavic platform with clearly pro-Russian and anti-Western (anti-EU, anti-NATO, anti-US) content.<sup>126</sup> The second page, *Alexander Ivanovič Možajev*, presents itself as a “currently non-censored outlet reporting from Novorossiya” and the testimony of a man “who decided to leave his home in order to fight against something which he considers as Nazism”.<sup>127</sup> Allegedly, the initial intent of the page was to create a “fun page run by an interesting Cossack”. The picture on the main page attributes it to the well-known Russian fighter in the Donetsk and Luhansk region with the nickname “Babay”.<sup>128</sup> The third page is *Prečo Amerikanofilom hrabe? (Why Americanophiles are Going Crazy?)*, a platform for persons with anti-American views, which is allegedly dealing with the „attack of dangerous Americanophilic and liberal stupidity on everyday life“.<sup>129</sup>

---

<sup>125</sup> “Proruskú Propagandu O Zhýralom Západe U Nás Šíri 42 Webov,” *Denník N*, accessed February 26, 2015, <https://dennikn.sk/57740/prorusku-propagandu-o-zhyralom-zapade-u-nas-siri-42-webov/>.

<sup>126</sup> “Som Slovák a Som Nato Hrdý - Facebook Post,” accessed April 6, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/Som-Slov%C3%A1k-a-som-nato-hrd%C3%BD-419083908182335/>.

<sup>127</sup> “Bojovník | Dvojtyždenník Antifašistov.”

<sup>128</sup> The real person with the name Alexandr Mozhayev who came to Ukraine from Russia to fight on the side of pro-Russian “separatists”, a person who had a criminal record.

<sup>129</sup> “Prečo Amerikanofilom Hrabe? - Facebook Post,” accessed April 6, 2017, [https://www.facebook.com/amerikanofil/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/amerikanofil/?ref=page_internal).

The common traits of the selected pages are their anti-Western and pro-Russian views. The first two pages are anonymously operated. The names of the third page's administrators are public, one being Ján Ďuriník, who publishes his articles on his blog (jancidurinik.blog.pravda.sk) on www.pravda.sk.<sup>130</sup> The content of the published articles on this blog is in line with the anti-liberal and anti-US content of the reviewed FB page.

**Table 1. Featured pages**

Page	Likes <sup>131</sup>	Established
<i>Som Slovák a som na to hrdý</i> I am Slovak and I am Proud of It	11,433	10 March 2013
<i>Alexander Ivanovič Možajev</i> Alexandr Ivanovich Mozhayev	7,235	23 June 2014
<i>Prečo Amerikanofilom hrabe?</i> <i>Why Americanophiles are Going Crazy?</i>	14,646	1 April 2015

### Summary

The three Slovak FB pages analysed in this study were actively involved in spreading pro-Russian and anti-Western (anti-EU, anti-NATO and anti-US) narratives in public discourse. The common denominator of all three pages is disagreement with the basic principles of liberal democracy, which corresponds with the main goal of Russia's current regime in its hostile engagement with the West, namely to weaken or destroy liberal democracy as a socio-political order. Several important domestic and international events and trends framed the activities of these three pages. In international politics they have dealt with the ongoing refugee crisis in Europe, the presidential election campaign in the US, the continuing military and political confrontation in Eastern Ukraine and war in Syria. Domestic topics included the consolidation of radical and right-wing extremist political forces in Slovakia, the anti-immigration rhetoric and policies of Prime Minister Robert Fico, and the contradictory approach of President Andrej Kiska. Both supreme leaders presented different views on the necessity of Western sanctions imposed on Russia as a consequence of its aggression against Ukraine – Kiska was in favour of their continuation, while Fico called for their immediate cancellation. The general public thus perceived Kiska as a pro-Western and pro-US (ergo anti-Russian) politician, while Fico's stances were welcomed by the proponents of pro-Russian stances.

---

<sup>130</sup> The www.pravda.sk web portal is operated by the mainstream pro-governmental and prevalingly left-oriented daily Pravda.

<sup>131</sup> As of 20 November, 2016

## General statistics

In the interval between September 2016 and October 2016 the comparative statistical data of Table 2 shows us that the most active site in terms of posts was the *Alexandr Ivanovich Mozhayev* page, while the other two pages displayed lower levels of activity. The main reason was seemingly that this page published posts with reports and news originating from the region (Eastern Ukraine) frequently, which is an object of international attention. The average numbers of post per day in the case of two other pages were lower, however, the average numbers of interaction per post on them were much higher – on the *I am Slovak and I am proud* page there were almost three times more than on the ‘*Alexandr Ivanovich Mozhayev page* and on the *Why Americanophiles are Going Crazy?*’ page there were twenty times more than on the *Alexandr Ivanovich Mozhayev* Facebook page.

**Table 2. Page statistics September - October, 2016**

Pages	I am Slovak and I am Proud of It	Alexandr Ivanovich Mozhayev	Why Americanophiles are Going Crazy?
<b>Posts</b>			
Total number of posts in the period	114	732	319
Average number of posts per day	1.9	12.0	5.2
<b>Interactions<sup>132</sup></b>			
Total number of interactions in the period	4,121	9,497	82,825
Average number of interactions per post	36.1	13.0	259.6

## Page activity

### Trends

Tables 3, 4 and 5 feature the general distribution of posts and the specific audience’s reaction to it on a daily basis in the period under review.

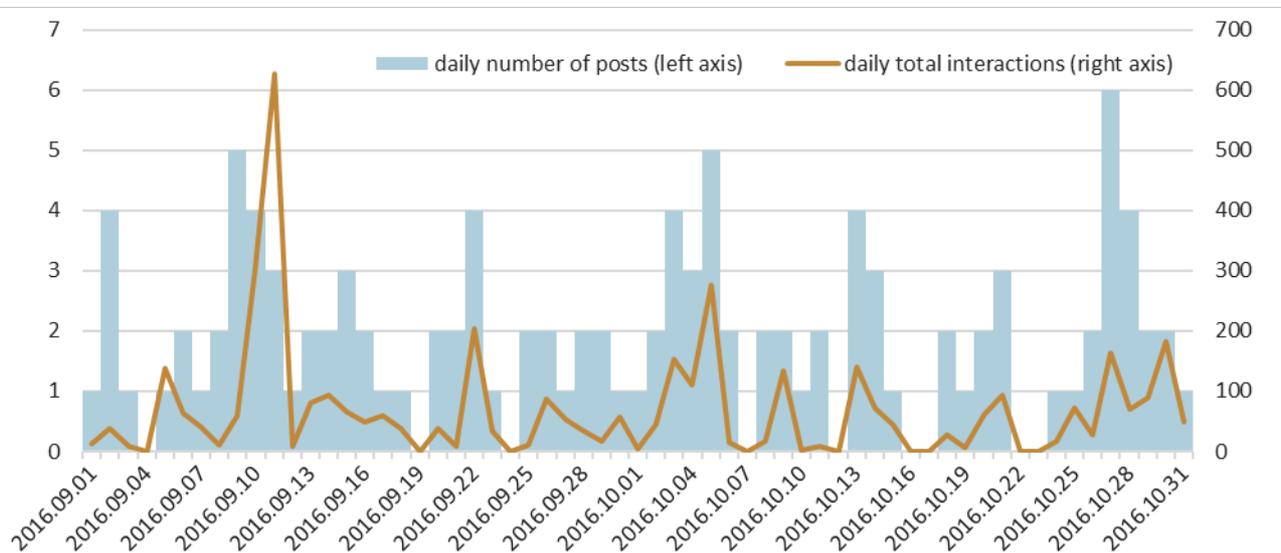
The distribution of posts on the *I am Slovak and I am Proud of It* FB page (see Table 3) was more or less even in the reviewed period. On seven days they shared a higher number of posts (4-5) and on a day at the end of October they shared the highest number of posts (6).

---

<sup>132</sup> Comments, shares and emotional reactions (like, love, haha, wow, sad, angry)

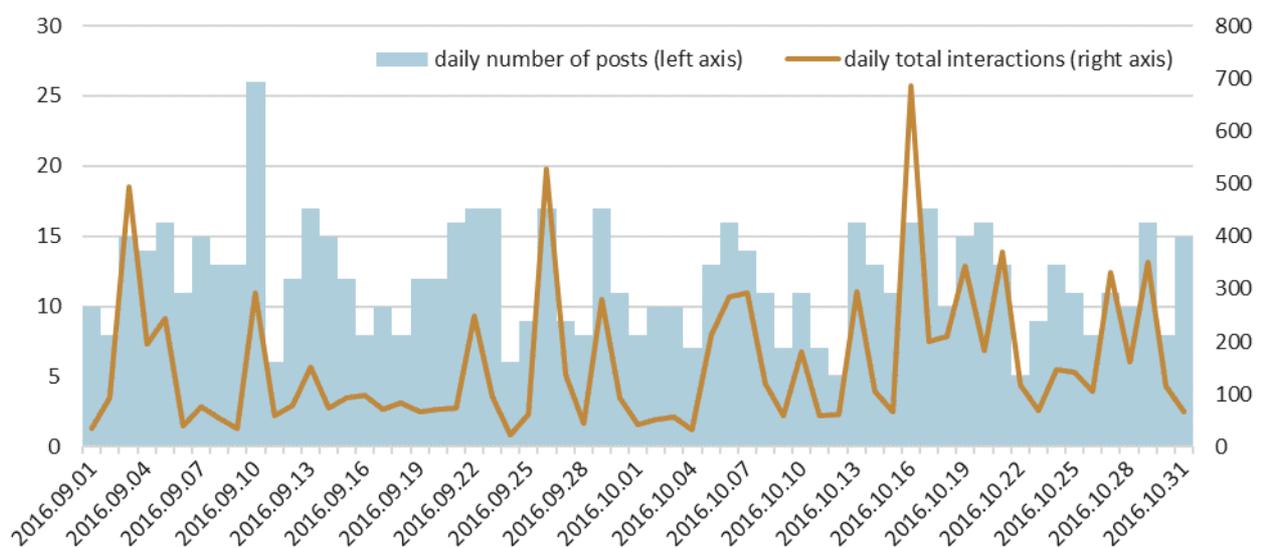
They generated the largest number of interactions, 626, on September 11, and the second highest number, 304, a day before on September 10. On other days there was high fluctuation in this regard (from several dozen to approximately 200 interactions).

**Table 3. Distribution of posts and interactions on a daily basis of *I am Slovak and I am proud of it***



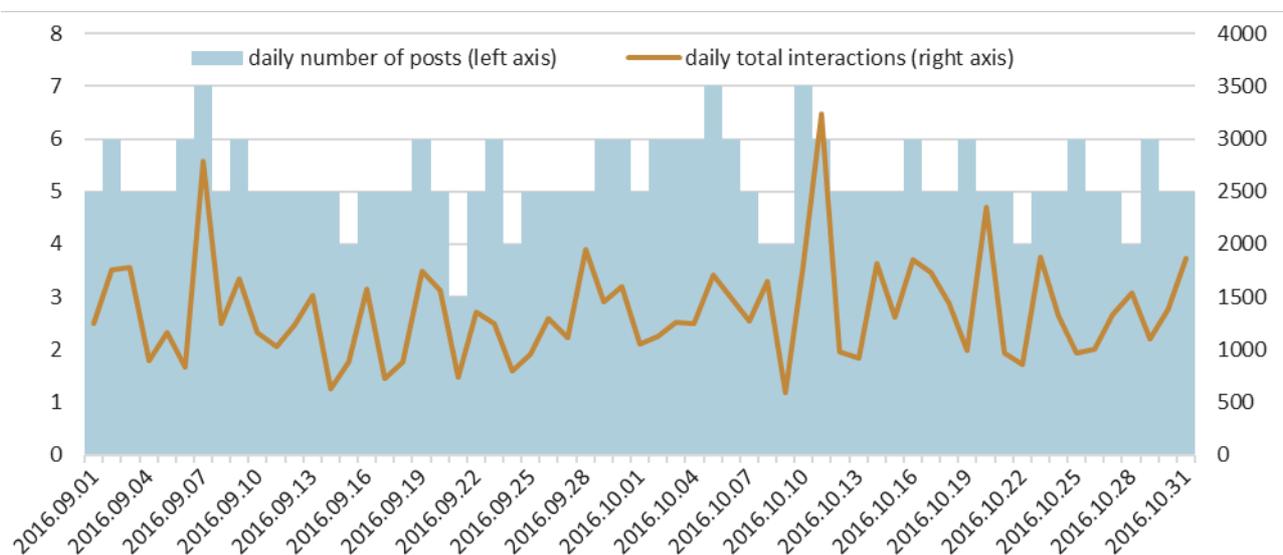
On the *Alexandr Ivanovich Mozhayev* FB page (see Table 4) the daily number of posts varied from 5 to 17. The highest number, 26, was posted on 10 September. In October the page generated a higher number of interactions than in September, with the highest number (686) achieved on October 16. The second highest number of interaction (527) was registered on September 26.

**Table 4. Distribution of posts and interactions on a daily basis of *Alexandr Ivanovich Mozhayev***



On the *Why Americanophiles are Going Crazy?* page (see Table 5) the distribution of posts was the highest among the three pages analysed (3 – 7 posts a day). On three days during the reviewed period the number of interactions was visibly higher than the average: 3233 on October 11, 2786 on September 7 and 2347 on October 20.

**Table 5. Distribution of posts and interactions on a daily basis of *Why Americanophiles are Going Crazy?***



### Campaigns

Between September 2016 and October 2016 the most relevant events in domestic political life and international relations that influenced the public and media discourse included:

- in domestic political life: corruption scandals that could be tied to the government (especially the tax fraud case of a businessman with personal ties to the prime minister and the minister of interior), Prime Minister Robert Fico’s anti-refugees stances and his critical attitude towards anti-Russian sanctions imposed by the West, a dispute between Prime Minister Fico and President Andrej Kiska about the visit of the Dalai Lama, and the circumstances of Minister of Foreign Affairs Miroslav Lajčák’s failure to be elected as the UN’s secretary-general;
- in international relations and world politics: the EU summit in Bratislava, the US presidential election campaign, the continuation of the war in Syria, especially the air strikes against civilian and humanitarian targets with Russian participation, the publication of the results of the investigation of the Malaysian Airlines MH17 case by Dutch authorities, the weak results of Angela Merkel’s CDU in regional elections and the failed referendum on refugees in Hungary.

Seemingly, not all of these events impacted the activities of the analysed FB pages and the frequency and typology of posts and interactions to the same extent. The situation in Eastern Ukraine, the migration crisis in Europe and the war in Syria were the most relevant and influential issues.

We can hardly find signs of any campaigns on the I am Slovak and I am Proud of It page, which would help explain the frequency of posts and interactions in relation to the ongoing events in domestic or international political life. The topics of the posts were too diverse and occasional, were not concentrated in certain intervals, and were not directly linked to the events.

The impression was that the main intent was just to get the expected reactions (positive or negative) from the audience with certain socio-cultural and ideological characteristics (nationalism, Europhobia, anti-Western and pro-Russian views) and to maintain the audience's perception that these views are shared and supported by like-minded people.

On the Alexandr Ivanovich Mozhayev page there were visible attempts to carry out a campaign at the beginning of September 2016 in regards to the situation in the Donbass (Novorossya). The context here was that US troops are holding joint military drills in Ukraine with the Ukrainian military and the Americans want to be present in Ukraine on a permanent basis. Another attempt to carry out a campaign about the same "Novorossiya" topic can be observed starting on October 13.

On the page Why Americanophiles are Going Crazy? page the frequency of posts was more or less evenly distributed during the surveyed period, therefore no clear campaign attempts can be identified.

### **Posts**

On the first page, *I am Slovak and I am Proud of It*, the overwhelming majority of shared posts are links (85%), the second most popular type of post were photos (13%). However, photos are much more efficient on this page, since they provoked a higher average number of interactions (94) than links(28). The sharing of any other type of post on this page is marginal.

On the second page, *Alexandr Ivanovich Mozhayev*, the sharing of links is also dominant (73%), but unlike on the first page the second most popular type is videos (19%), with photos in third place (5%). However, photos here are, similarly to the *I am Slovak and I am Proud of It* page, more efficient than all other type of posts. The average number of interactions on photos is 47, which falls to 13 on links and 6 on videos.

A completely different typology of posts can be observed in the case of the third page, *Why Americanophiles are Going Crazy?*: here photos account for 76% of posts, links for 13%, videos for 7% and status updates for 5%. Photos are the most efficient type of post on this page with the average number of interactions at 281. The second most efficient type of post is status updates, which provoked 245 interactions on average. The third most efficient are links with an average of 190 interactions.

**Table 6. Statistics by type of posts on the 3 pages under review**

<b>Page 1. <i>I am Slovak and I am Proud of It</i></b>			
type	number of posts	proportion of posts	Reaction/post <sup>133</sup>
Link	97	85%	28
Photo	15	13%	94
Video	1	1%	29
Status	1	1%	0
Event			
Note			
<b>Total</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Page 2. <i>Alexandr Ivanovich Mozhayev</i></b>			
type	number of posts	proportion of posts	Reaction/post
Link	537	73%	13
Photo	35	5%	47
Video	137	19%	6
Status	21	3%	3
Event	1	0%	5
Music	1	0%	2
Note			
<b>Total</b>	<b>732</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Page 3. <i>Why Americanophiles are Going Crazy?</i></b>			
type	number of posts	proportion of posts	Reaction/post
Link	41	13%	190
Photo	241	76%	281
Video	21	7%	172
Status	15	5%	245
Event	1	0%	96
Note			
<b>Total</b>	<b>319</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>260</b>

The dominant majority of links shared by the *I am Slovak and I am Proud of It* page are from the web portal Hlavnespravy.sk, which presents itself as a mainstream media outlet with alternative views. Nevertheless, Hlavnespravy.sk plays a dominant role in the Slovak disinformation space. The outlet mixes news from real mainstream media (for example from news agencies and dailies) with its own contributions, comments and with translated articles and reports from different Russian websites, including those with conspiratorial content, spreading false news and hoaxes. It is one of the most influential pro-Russian, anti-EU, anti-American and anti-Western sources in Slovakia.

---

<sup>133</sup> Total average amount of emoticons, comments and shares per post.

The second most popular source on this FB page is securitymagazin.cz. It is a website administered by Security Media, s.r.o.<sup>134</sup> Its publisher declares that it does not want to recite solely the views and stances of mainstream media, but to provide “the most objective look” on the world. Articles published on this site indicate a distrust of the mainstream political establishment in the Western world

The third highest share of links come from alternativnacesta.blogspot.sk which is propagating the activities of the right-wing extremist, fascist and pro-Russian Peoples Party Our Slovakia (LSNS) led by Marian Kotleba similarly to the fourth most frequent source, the website narodpovstan.com, which is operating as a clear and open supporter of LSNS.

The sources used by the *Alexandr Ivanovich Mozhayev* page consist of clearly pro-Russian information sources with prevalingly military-related contents. They report on the activities of pro-Russian forces in the Eastern part of Ukraine and Russian military activities in Syria in accordance with other sources spreading the same content.<sup>135</sup> Some of these sources are in the Slovak/Czech language, some in English, and some in Russian. A few of them are trying to position themselves as “independent” outlets, however, the vast majority are unambiguously pro-Russian and anti-Western.

The composition of the sources used by the *Why Americanophiles are Going Crazy?* page can be viewed in table 7. First, they are evenly distributed, as there is no clearly dominant domain among its sources. Second, these posts are mainly from mainstream media outlets. The references to reports, news and other types of information from these mainstream sources are used for the promotion of the main (anti-American) messages of the page.

**Table 7. Outgoing domains**

<b>Links on <i>I am Slovak and I am Proud of It</i></b>		
hlavnespravy.sk	58	60%
securitymagazin.cz	23	24%
alternativnacesta.blogspot.sk	4	4%
narodpovstan.com	3	3%

<b>Links on <i>Alexandr Ivanovich Mozhayev</i></b>		
novorossia.weebly.com	162	30%
southfront.org	62	11,5%
mediarepost.ru	45	8%
cigr.net	35	6,5%
dnr-news.com	26	5%

<sup>134</sup> This company is a publisher of the printed bi-monthly journal *Security Magazin* (the website *Security Magazin* is the online version) which publishes articles on the global security situation in the world, wars, terrorism, criminality, migration etc.

<sup>135</sup> This page offers a constantly updated summary of the situation in “Novorossiya” with reports about the “struggle of fighters for the freedom of Novorossiya” and about Russia’s battles in Syria.

<b>Links on <i>Why Americanophiles are Going Crazy?</i></b>		
aktuality.sk	3	7%
facebook.com	2	5%
independent.co.uk	2	5%

### *Issues and narratives*

Utilizing a tiered approach has allowed us to identify important issues featured on the sites. First, we selected a sample of 60 posts based on the 20 most liked, shared or commented posts. Second, we choose the top 4 performing posts among the 60, and the number one most liked, shared, commented or interacted messages,<sup>136</sup> to identify the 4 most popular issues. Third, we used our sample of 60 to map the best performing narratives based on a pre-identified set of issues or narratives utilized routinely by pro-Russian propaganda, namely Russia, the EU, NATO, USA, Syria, Ukraine, and migration.<sup>137</sup>

### **Top issues**

The illustration on the main page of the first source (*I am Slovak and I am Proud of It*) is a photograph of a typical landscape in Slovakia (hills and valleys) with emblems indicating the page’s sympathies to radical nationalism (styled crosses and the modified “Slavic” swastikas).

The most liked post was a cartoon (caricature) of the Slovak parliament that is described as a circus. It provoked the highest number of interactions (610, including 328 emoticons and 273 shares, also the highest number in both categories). However, only 9 persons commented on the post. Comments generally indicated a low level of trust in parliament and indirectly to the system of parliamentary democracy as such.




---

<sup>136</sup> The top post which received the highest number of interactions based on the total of number of likes, shares and comments.

<sup>137</sup> We used a pre-set list of issues based on previous propaganda analysis and experiences, however there was no guarantee that our top sample will include any of the aforementioned major topics.

The most commented post on this page is an article shared from the website Hlavnespravy.sk reporting on the controversial Czech left-leaning activist, university teacher and artist Milan Kohout who announced his candidacy for the next presidential elections.<sup>138</sup> Kohout proposed to invite 1 million refugees to the Czech Republic in order to transform the country into a multicultural nation.<sup>139</sup> The fact that Kohout was known for his criticism of the Western world for its alleged “imperialist” policies towards other nations did not help him very much: all commentators attacked him, blaming him for his stupidity using vulgar and racist rhetoric. Anti-American and anti-Semitic motives were also present in the comments.

The main page of the second source (*Alexandr Ivanovich Mozhayev*) displays a photograph of a battleground with a damaged armoured vehicle in Eastern Ukraine (Novorossiya).



The most liked post on this page was a report about the death of the “heroic fighter” of independent Donbass (in reality a Russian citizen with a criminal record who came to fight on the side of Russian army and pro-Russian separatists) nicknamed Motorola [Arseniy Pavlov])<sup>140</sup> This post generated the highest number of interactions (230), including the highest number of comments (34).



---

<sup>138</sup> Heureka Evolution, “Česko Ma Nového Kandidáta Na Prezidenta, Chce Prijat’ Milión Migrantov! - Facebook Post,” *Hlavné Správy*, September 17, 2016, <http://www.hlavnespravy.sk/cesko-ma-noveho-kandidata-na-prezidenta-chce-prijat-milion-migrantov/833100>.

<sup>139</sup> The slogan he put into his “candidacy” poster was “For multi-colorful Czechia”.

<sup>140</sup> “В Донецке Убит Командир Ополчения ДНР Моторола,” *ДНР - ДОНЕЦКАЯ НАРОДНАЯ РЕСПУБЛИКА, НОВОСТИ ДНР, САЙТ ДНР*, 2016, <http://dnr-news.com/dnr/36247-istochnik-soobschil-o-smerti-komandira-polcheniya-dnr-motoroly.html>.

The main messages of the comments included expressions of condolences, the “eternal glory and memory of the hero”, showing admiration for the fallen fighter for Novorossiia (who was according to his personal testimony a killer of at least 15 Ukrainian prisoners of war). One user presented him as a “fighter against the world of fascism”<sup>141</sup> Many comments are marked by a pathetic rhetoric on the edge of infantilism. According to one commentator the memory of Motorola will be secured by “Slavic gods”.

The most shared post (147 shares) on this FB page was an article including a video taken from the Czech pro-Russian website Aeronet.cz of a speech delivered by General Mark Milly, Commander in Chief of the General Staff of the USA.<sup>142</sup> General Milly mentioned North Korea, Iran, Russia and China as countries whose policies are intentionally threatening the values on which the democratic systems of the US and its allies are built. According to the commentary of Aeronet.cz, General Milly threatened the whole world flagrantly in his speech with the strongest words since the “times of McCarthysm”. The comments on this post on the FB page are critical and aggressive, condemning the foreign and military policy of the US as “warmongering”.

The most shared post on this page in the surveyed period was a photo showing travellers to the past with the title “We are flying to Poprad 1962 and carrying condoms for Kiska’s father” (President Andrej Kiska was born in city Poprad in 1962).<sup>143</sup> The total number of shares was 167. The post symbolizes resistance against president Kiska.

The cover photo on *Why Americanophiles are Going Crazy?* page symbolizes resistance against US ideological dominance in the world. It depicts the fighters against such dominance: Miloš Zeman, Norbert Hofer, Nigel Farage, Vladimir Putin, Viktor Orbán and Geert Wilders,



however, the leading person of this “squadron” of fighters against the USA is Donald Trump, only a presidential candidate in the surveyed period, and currently the president of the United States.

---

<sup>141</sup> “Jiří Novák - Facebook Post,” accessed April 6, 2017,

<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100009042260433&fref=ufi&rc=p>.

<sup>142</sup> Vedoucí kolotoče, “VIDEO: A Je to Tady! Náčelník Generálního Štábu Amerických Ozbrojených Sil v Děsivém Projevu Začal Vyhrožovat Rusku, Číně a Globalistům Zničující Válkou! [CZ Titulky] | AE News,” accessed April 6, 2017, <http://aeronet.cz/news/video-a-je-to-tady-nacelnik-generalniho-stabu-americkych-ozbrojenych-sil-v-desivem-projevu-zacal-vyhrozovat-rusku-cine-a-globalistum-znicujici-vaalkou-cz-titulky/>.

<sup>143</sup> “Alexander Ivanovič Možajev - Facebook Post,” accessed April 6, 2017,

<https://www.facebook.com/natoISterror/photos/a.1453795691532482.1073741827.1452891718289546/1809826265929421/?type=3&theater>.

The most liked post on the *Why Americanophiles are Going Crazy?* page is a short video from one of the televised debates between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton entitled *How to prematurely finish the presidential debate* <sup>144</sup> in which Donald Trump threatens to imprison Hillary Clinton after his victory in the elections. The total number of interactions related to this post is 1569 (46 comments, 557 shares and 966 emoticons). In the final sequence of this video Hillary Clinton appears behind bars as a prisoner. Commentators mostly approve this Trump “proposal”, openly express their sympathies to him, mock Clinton and ascribe only negative characteristics to her, including her responsibility for the rise of ISIS. <sup>145</sup>

The second selected post from this page is an article from the Czech mainstream online portal [www.aktualne.cz](http://www.aktualne.cz) with the results of a public opinion poll conducted in Slovakia by Globsec Policy Institute (non-governmental pro-EU and pro-NATO think-tank) about the popularity of national and international political leaders.<sup>146</sup> The poll showed that the most popular politician in Slovakia was President Andrej Kiska followed by Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, Vladimir Putin, Robert Fico, Viktor Orbán, Miloš Zeman, Angela Merkel, Donald Trump and Recep Tayyip Erdogan. This post was the most commented on in the surveyed period (86 times in total). The prevailing message in the comments was distrust of the results, the organization that conducted the poll and especially distrust of Slovakian President Andrej Kiska, Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton.<sup>147</sup>

### Major narratives

The most compelling narratives for the target group are reconstructed in depth by locating basic geopolitical issues in our sample of the top 60 posts, as ranked by the highest number of likes, shares or comments.<sup>148</sup> We pre-defined an initial set of major issues like the USA, the EU, NATO, Syria, and migration, but other emerging local or international topics are also mentioned in the analysis.

The page called *I am Slovak and I am Proud of It* presented three main narratives in the surveyed period. The first was the radical nationalist agenda (in various contexts – ethnic, social, historic) and support for Marián Kotleba’s right-wing extremist ĽSNS, the party which symbolizes this political stream.

---

<sup>144</sup> “Ako Predčasne Ukončiť Prezidentskú Debatu :D /Milan - Prečo Amerikanofilom Hrabe? - Facebook Post,” accessed April 6, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/amerikanofil/videos/1138534559537748/>.

<sup>145</sup> Heureka Evolution, “Stránka Nebola Nájdená,” *Hlavné Správy*, accessed April 6, 2017, <http://www.hlavnespravy.sk/spinave-praktiky-v-americkej-volebnej-kampani-globalmedia-robja-z-trumpa-priatelapachatelov-genocidy-a-hrdloreza-milosevica/845364>.

<sup>146</sup> Romancová, “Na Slovensku Vznikla Polovojenská Neonacistická Organizace S Napojením Na Maďarskou Národní Frontu.”

<sup>147</sup> Disagreement with the results symbolized a disagreement with elected politicians, especially with President Kiska, who is considered by users of such pages (prevalingly strong Anti-American, nationalist and illiberal audience) as an “American agent”, “anti-Russian” politician, supporter of refugees etc. (all “bad” characteristics in such an environment). Obama, Clinton and George Soros were also mentioned in the comments in negative contexts while Putin, Fico and Zeman in a positive one.

<sup>148</sup> The actual number of posts is usually lower due to the comparison of the top 20 liked, 20 shared and 20 commented posts because many posts of those lists overlapped.

Posts and interactions expressed open sympathy for this party and its proposals and practical steps including the so-called “order patrols” aboard trains for the protection of “ordinary people” against the “violent Roma”. The identifiable motive was the presentation of radical nationalism as a normal “patriotic” opinion and a legitimate political stream, not as “extremism”. An integral part of this narrative was an adoration of Slovakia’s clerical fascist Tiso-regime of 1939-1945.<sup>149</sup>

The second main narrative dealt with the issue of migration from Africa and Middle East to Europe. Several posts and interactions were marked by xenophobia, islamophobia, negative characteristics attributed to migrants, attacks on politicians and public figures in Europe and in Slovakia who emphasized the humanitarian aspects of the issue. Furthermore, posts contained approval of those politicians who stood strongly against migration, the “Islamisation of Europe”, and for the preservation of the indigenous nature of European civilization (for example praise for Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, who was awarded a “Man of the Year” prize on the Economic Forum held in the Polish town Krynica)<sup>150</sup>. One post (article) described the comfortable life of a Syrian immigrant in Germany: “The Syrian refugee lives with his large family a careless life in Germany. Reportedly, he receives around 360,000 euro per year. Forty-year-old Syrian refugee Ghazal fled his homeland last year. Four of his wives travelled to Germany with him and a total of 22 of their children”.<sup>151</sup>

The third main narrative was the war in Syria, regarding which the authors of posts and comments openly supported Russia’s operations, Bashar al-Assad’s regime and strongly condemned US policies, even accusing Americans of supporting ISIS.<sup>152</sup>

Two main narratives and one “complementary” one were present on the page called *Alexandr Ivanovich Mozhayev*. The first was the situation in “Novorossiya”: the struggle of pro-Russian forces against the Ukrainian army, the adoration of fighters for their activities in pursuit of the freedom of the people of Novorossiya (such as Motorola who was killed and buried during the surveyed period).

---

<sup>149</sup> “Jozef Tiso, Prvý a Skutočne Jediný Slovenský Prezident – Národ Povstaň,” accessed April 6, 2017, <http://www.narodpovstan.sk/2016/10/13/jozef-tiso-prvy-a-skutocne-jediny-slovensky-prezident/>.

<sup>150</sup> “Viktor Orbán Dostal Za Svoju Anti-Imigračnú Politiku Ocenenie „Muž Roka“ | SECURITY MAGAZÍN,” accessed April 6, 2017, <http://www.securitymagazin.cz/zpravy/viktor-orban-dostal-za-svoju-antiimigracnu-politiku-ocenenie-muz-roka-1404052610.html>.

<sup>151</sup> “Sýrsky Utečenec, Spoločne Zo Svojim Manželkami a Deťmi, Poberá v Nemecku 360 000 Eur Ročne ! | SECURITY MAGAZÍN,” accessed April 6, 2017, <http://www.securitymagazin.cz/zpravy/syrsky-utecenec-spolocne-zo-svojim-manzelkami-a-detmi-pobera-v-nemecku-360-000-eur-rocne-1404053376.html>.

<sup>152</sup> Clear pro-Russian stances and sympathies and at the same time anti-American views were present in other posts and comments (for example in an interview with Leonid Reshetnikov, the former general of the intelligence service and the director of the Russian Institute of Strategic Studies (RISI) of FSB; the article was taken from Hlavnespravdy.sk which translated it from the Russian site tsargrad.tv or a post informing that US military aircrafts were intercepted a close distance from Russian borders in the Black Sea).

Posts informed readers about the hard lives of people in the Donbass. The opinion was that it was not the Russian administrators who are responsible for this, but Ukraine and its Western allies, who allegedly sent their mercenaries to fight against pro-Russian forces and wanted to deploy their military forces in Ukraine permanently. Sympathies with pro-Russian forces are expressed in numerous posts and comments, including the following photograph on which one can find a comparison of “feminists” from Kurdistan, Donetsk and Russia with “feminists” from “NGOs”):



The second most frequently disseminated narrative was the war in Syria with the authors of posts and comments taking a clearly pro-Russian stance.<sup>153</sup> The third – and most minor – narrative was a about the West trying to encircle Russia by sending its military forces closer and closer to Russian borders and increasing tensions in those areas. The page did not forget to congratulate Vladimir Putin on his birthday on October 7, 2016.

---

<sup>153</sup>According to them, Western allies (US, UK, Israel) coordinated the activities of rebels from An-Nusra and ISIS inside Syria and it was fully justified that Russia rejected to make concessions which the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov said only allowed anti-regime fighters (“terrorists”) to re-group their forces and to continue their operations. Unlike Russia who helped people in Syria, US support terrorists in the Middle East and fight against local people - <http://aeronet.cz/news/video-rusko-pozabijelo-americke-britske-a-izraelske-vojaky-v-syrskem-aleppu-kteri-z-bunkru-ridili-operace-is-a-fronty-al-nusra-rusko-celi-narceni-z-barbarismu/>

The third page, *Why Americanophiles are Going Crazy?*, presented various narratives, however three were more frequent. The first was the US presidential elections and Hillary Clinton's efforts to accuse Russia of interfering in the election campaign. Authors of posts and comments all criticized and mocked Clinton for such statements and supported Donald Trump.<sup>154</sup>

The second narrative was ridiculing statements on Russian propaganda which tries to undermine the West/Europe from the inside. It is rather "Russophobia", which really exists, than Russian propaganda.<sup>155</sup> The third more frequent narrative dealt with migration to Europe, with a main thrust suggesting that migrants are dangerous for Europe. Anti-American and pro-Russian stances were present in other posts and comments (on the situation in Ukraine, the attitude of Slovakian President Andrej Kiska, and some historic events). Sympathies to radical nationalist, homophobic, anti-Muslim and anti-Roma views were visible in the posts and comments.

---

<sup>154</sup> "Prečo Amerikanofilom Hrabe? - Facebook Post," accessed April 6, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/amerikanofil/photos/a.832502473474293.1073741828.832415466816327/1110940798963791/?type=3&theater>.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.