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ESSAYS

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A New Perspective on Poland's Policy towards Russia in 2005–2007: a Middle Power Attempts to Engage a Rising Major Power

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Abstract: *Scholars of middle powers have been trying to solve its definitional issues and some progress has been made in the systemic approach. This article shows that further advancement may be gained by employing neoclassical realism in studying middle powers' foreign policy behaviour. This done by analysing Poland's policy towards Russia in 2005–2007. It is widely accepted in academic literature that Poland in 2005–2007, during the rule of the Law and Justice Party, pursued a confrontational policy towards Russia. However, this article challenges such widespread views. It demonstrates that Poland's policy towards Russia was actually simultaneously based on balancing and engagement. Using a neoclassical realist framework and data gathered from interviews with Poland's main foreign policymakers at that time, this article shows that the balancing was caused by the power asymmetry and differing interests between Russia and Poland, whereas the engagement – by the Polish policymakers' attempts to influence Russia's intentions towards Poland and by their perceived situation in the European balance of power.*

Keywords: ***Polish-Russian relations, Law and Justice Party, Polish foreign policy, Poland's eastern policy, middle powers***

Introduction[1]

International relations (IR) scholars have long argued that it is impossible to apply IR theories towards states in a unified way – there are important differ-

1 The present article is based on a conference paper presented by the author at the Third Annual Tartu Conference on Russian and East European Studies, 11–12 June 2018, Tartu Estonia.

ences among states in terms of its' territory, geography, capabilities, etc. Hence, states should be categorised by its size and capabilities and IR theories' claims accordingly have to be adjusted. For instance, a lot of work has been done on studying great powers and small states, their foreign policies and adaptations to challenges stemming from the international system.

Among such categorised states are middle powers, though less studied compared to other group of states. There are three ways to describe a middle power. First is identity: those states that claim to be middle powers, should be regarded as one. Second – behaviour. Scholars have identified certain foreign policy attributes which they ascribe to middle powers. If certain country's foreign policy behaviour resembles these attributes, then it can be classified as a middle power. The third way to identify a middle power is by evaluating a country's position in the international system: it should have less capabilities than great powers, but more than small states (Carr 2014, Jordaan 2017). These three approaches can be traced respectively to IR theories of constructivism, liberalism and realism.

However, each approach has it drawbacks. As Andrew Carr (2014: 79) argues the behavioural definition may fall into a tautological trap, whereas Eduard Jordaan (2017: 404) claims that the identity approach still lacks an exterior definition of a middle power. Both agree that the systemic approach cannot predict the behaviour of middle powers (Carr 2014: 72; Jordaan 2017: 404). Though it is still discussed how to rectify these weaknesses, some progress has been achieved on the systemic view. Carr proposes (2014: 79) his "systemic impact" approach, where middle powers are described by having at least some capacity to defend their interest and an ability to initiate or lead change in the international system.

However, this proposal to identify middle powers by their ability to influence the international system is not entirely new. David R. Mares (1988) argued to divide the international system into four categories of states: great powers are those around which balancing occurs, major powers are states that can disrupt, but are unable to change the system unilaterally, middle powers are states that can affect the system together with a few smaller allies, and small powers – states that cannot affect the system, unless in an alliance, which the small power loses any influence on (Mares 1988: 456). It can even be argued that this classification is now a consensus among realists on how to divide states in the international system (Mares 1988; Lobell et al. 2015; Schweller 2017).

Nevertheless, when it comes to predicting middle powers' behaviour, the arguments of realists do not generally differ from their main theoretical claims. For instance, Allan Patience (2014) argues that middle powers usually bandwagon with a great power. Randall L. Schweller (2017) argues that middle powers pursue bandwagoning or balancing policies. Meanwhile, David R. Mares (1988) developed a structural model to find out how middle powers respond to rising powers, which is based on game theory. All in all, the

majority of authors argue that middle powers either bandwagon or balance against great powers.

Lobell et al. (2015) claim that states may pursue multiple strategies due to participation in different games at different levels, i.e. global, regional and domestic (Lobell et al. 2015: 150–151), but their model does not foresee that states may pursue multiple strategies at the same level even towards the same state. For example, Fareed Zakaria (2020) argues that the USA since the presidency of Richard Nixon until the terms of Barack Obama had been a pursuing a policy of simultaneous engagement and deterrence towards China.

Curiously, one can also find instances when such a strategy was actually implemented by middle powers. Michael Leifer (1999) and Amitav Acharya (1999) have described respectively Indonesia's and Malaysia's attempts to simultaneously balance and engage China at the end of the 20th century. But instances of middle powers pursuing simultaneously engagement and balancing towards a rising power are not found solely in Asia. Another example may be Poland's policy towards Russia in 2000–2014.

This may seem counterintuitive at first glance, as both in the public sphere and in the academic literature, there is widespread belief that Poland solely balanced against Moscow (Lakomy 2001; Cimek et al. 2012; Zaborowski – Longhurst 2007; Zając 2016). But when such views are scrutinised empirically, these arguments appear to be incorrect (Gorska 2010; Kaczmarski – Konończuk 2009: 203–204). What is interesting, this argument even applies to Poland's policy towards Russia in 2005–2007, when the Law and Justice Party (in Polish: *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, PiS) held power. Such a view may seem odd, as many researchers note a deterioration in Polish–Russian relations at that period and usually ascribe it to nationalist attitudes on part of PiS (Kuźniar 2012; Zięba 2013: 182–199; Wawrzyński 2012; Mal'gin 2011: 11–12; Taras 2014; Stolarczyk 2016: 195–206).

Thus, it is possible to identify instances of middle powers pursuing simultaneously engagement and balancing towards a rising power. From a realist point of view this is an anomaly, as it predicts either balancing or bandwagoning is such situations. Hence the goal of this article is to give explanations why middle powers may choose such a policy towards a rising power. It will do so by analysing Poland policy towards Russia in 2005–2007. There are several reasons for choosing this period. First, due to lack of space it is difficult to fully study the period of 2000–2014, when Poland attempted to engage Russia, especially given there were several changes in key foreign policy positions during that period. Second, as mentioned above, there is widespread belief in the academic literature, that Poland pursued an "anti-Russian" policy during that period, so in addition to explaining the reasons behind attempts to engage and balance Russia, this article will also make a claim that these evaluations are false.

Consequently, this article shall contribute to the study of middle powers by providing explanations why it may choose to pursue engagement and balancing

towards a rising power. Moreover, this study will bring Poland closer to the field of middle power studies. So far, with the exception of Joshua B. Spero (2009), Poland has been marginal in this field. Authors have preferred to study mostly Canada, Australia, South Korea, Turkey, though from a structural approach Poland without doubt can be classified as a middle power. And last but not least, this article will show that neoclassical realism can be a solution to the middle powers structural approach's weakness in predicting states behaviour.

To achieve these objectives this article will use the method of systematic process analysis (Hall 2006) and employ neoclassical realist theory, which sets to find out why states do not follow international systemic imperatives through domestic level variables. Based on this theory, the article shall develop and test four hypotheses. The definition of engagement used in the article is that provided by Evan Resnick (2001: 559). Engagement is a policy of attempting 'to influence the political behaviour of a target state through the comprehensive establishment and enhancement of contacts with that state across multiple-issue areas (i.e. diplomatic, military, economic, or cultural)'The empirical evidence for this article was gathered using a host of primary sources. The main sources of information were interviews with Polish diplomats and politicians that were actively engaged in forming and executing Poland's policy towards Russia in 2005–2007. In total, eight interviews were conducted during 2018–2019, granting the respondents anonymity (for more information about the interviews and the interviewees see the Annex at the end of the article[2]). In order to verify claims made in the interviews other primary resources were used, mainly official public and party documents, press releases, politicians' and diplomats' speeches. In addition, secondary sources were utilised: academic, policy, media publications, and memoirs.

Systematic Process Analysis, Neoclassical Realism and Polish–Russian Relations

Theoretical framework

This article shall apply the theory of neoclassical realism (Rose 1998; Lobell 2009). It analyses states' foreign policy on two levels. The first is the structural level of the international system. It is based on the theory of neorealism and analyses the position of states in the international system, evaluating how its situation changed in terms of balance of power. The behaviour of individual states is determined by the polarity of the international system, i.e. the number of great powers and their place in the international system, which is based on the military and economic capabilities of the states prevailing at the time (Waltz

2 The annex was created according to Bleich – Pekkanen 2013.

1979/2010: 79–128). However, contemporary realists admit that the evaluation of the status of a specific state and the shift in its power is a far more complex issue (Schweller 2003: 332–340) that cannot be reduced solely to military-economic statistics (Barkin 2003: 330). Hence, while analysing the structural level, the focus must be on the threats originating from the international system and radical changes taking place in the system (Lobell 2009: 46–51).

Neoclassical realists also maintain that it is necessary to evaluate the strategic environment in the system, whether it is permissive or restrictive, i.e. to determine the scope and seriousness of any threats and opportunities in the international system. It is also imperative to judge the clarity of signals and information sourced from the international system: how explicit the threats and opportunities in the international system are, whether it is possible to assess the timeframe in which they may materialise, and whether the system provides an unambiguous answer as to which policy would be optimal for the state. And let's not forget the structural modifiers that can also have an impact on the variables mentioned – such as the geography, the rate of technological change, or the offence-defence balance (Ripsman et al. 2016: 33–57).

Unlike realism or neorealism, neoclassical realism argues that states do not solely balance or bandwagon and has identified several other strategies such as buck-passing, chain-ganging, appeasement, hiding (Taliaferro 2006: 469), binding, distancing, and engagement (Schweller 1998: 70–75). In order to explain the selected behaviour strategies of states, it introduces another level of analysis – that of domestic politics of states, which involves scrutiny of how state decision-makers react to imperatives that stem from the international system.

In due course, many potential variables have been applied at this level. As a result, neoclassical realists have received a huge amount of criticism for selecting their variables for domestic politics on an *ad hoc* basis (Kaarbo 2015: 204; Narizny 2017: 170–171). Norrin M. Ripsmann, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro and Steven E. Lobell tackle this issue in their book on neoclassical realism *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics* (2016). After having reviewed the main works in neoclassical realist thought, they attempted to group the variables for domestic politics. According to these authors, the stimuli from the international system go through three stages, until they materialise into policy response: perception, decision-making, and policy implementation. These stages are affected by four groups of variables: leader images, strategic culture, state-society relations and domestic institutions (Ripsman et al. 2016).

Each of the groups of the domestic politics variables mentioned earlier comprises discrete variables. Strategic culture is made of organisational culture, society's beliefs, worldviews and expectations, and dominant ideologies. The state – society relations are created by the autonomy of foreign-policy decision-makers from other actors of domestic politics and society's pressures, disagreements between state institutions and society, the dynamics of political coalition

formation, or the shape of civil-military relations. Domestic institutions are described by formal institutions, organisational and bureaucratic routines and processes, the concentration of power in the hands of foreign policy decision-makers, the relationship between the executive and legislative powers, party systems, the quality of the administration, informal institutions, decision-making procedures, and political practices (Ripsman et al. 2016: 58–79).

The importance of each group of variables is chosen according to the degree of systemic clarity and the nature of strategic environment (Ripsman et al. 2016: 95). This can be shown graphically:

Table 1

		Degree of Systemic Clarity (High to Low)	
		High Clarity	Low Clarity
Nature of Strategic Environment (Restrictive to Permissive)	Restrictive Environment	*Leader images and strategic culture*	*Leader images and strategic culture*
	Permissive Environment	*Strategic culture, Domestic institutions, and state-society relations*	*Indeterminate – all four group of variables could be relevant*

Source: Ripsman et al. 2016, 95.

The assertion of this article is that Poland during 2005–2007 existed in a permissive environment with relatively high clarity of information (the reasons for that shall be given below). Henceforth, Poland's foreign policy towards Russia is likely to be affected the most by such groups of variables as strategic culture, state-society relations and domestic institutions.

But how can one best select the relevant variables from each of these groups applicable in a given case? Ripsman et al. provide two methods to solve this puzzle. The first one is deductive. On the basis of logical, abstract thinking that relies on earlier theories, theoretical debates, thought experiments and the construction of formal models, the variables that are potentially applicable in a specific case are selected, hypotheses are derived, and conclusions are drawn on how appropriate the model is. In the second – inductive – method, the potentially relevant variables are selected after a superficial acquaintance with the literature on the case. As the authors point out themselves, in practice it is difficult to separate these methods. Each induction has at least an element of deduction and vice versa (Ripsman et al. 2016: 117–118). For this article, variables from each of the potentially influential groups have been selected deductively with an element of induction. Thus, the method used here is based on the recent discussions among neoclassical realists and its applicability to Poland's rela-

tions with Russia, based on the review of literature on Polish-Russian relations published earlier (Antonovič 2018).

When talking about the state–society relations, it is worth mentioning interest groups. According to neoclassical realists, all essential interest groups – such as organised lobby groups, media, public opinion, or parliament – can be treated as one (Ripsman 2009: 171). Since foreign policy decision-makers are interested in preserving their power, interest groups have the biggest influence at the time when foreign policy decision-makers are under threat of losing their power positions (Ripsman 2009: 188). From the above, the first hypothesis may be formed:

> Hypothesis 1: Poland tried to improve relations with Russia due to the fact that Polish foreign policy decision-makers were affected by domestic political interest groups.

When discussing the domestic institutions group of variables, one cannot leave out the Polish Constitution, adopted in 1997 and still valid today. According to the Constitution, the task of formulation and execution of Poland's foreign policy falls upon the government. The definition and execution of foreign policy must, however, take place in consultation and negotiation with the president of Poland.[3] Looking from a neoclassical realist perspective, it can be said that in the regimented institutional structure of Poland's foreign policy, the ability to mobilise resources has been divided, thus creating conditions for a potential conflict among foreign policymakers. Besides, power to mobilise resources may be divided on the governmental level if the government is coalitional. At such points foreign policy may become one of the instruments for discrediting the other side and, in so doing, taking over all the power to mobilise resources for the execution of a desired foreign policy. Hence, another hypothesis can be derived:

> Hypothesis 2: Poland's attempt to engage Russia was a consequence of domestic political struggle between competing political actors. This was an attempt to discredit the foreign policies offered by other political groups and in so doing diminish their political influence.

Moving on to the strategic culture group of domestic level variables, this article shall take into account decision-makers' intentions. Neoclassical realists believe that while the state does not really know the actual intentions of other states, this does not mean that it automatically treats them as hostile. States can try to determine what these intentions are or even change them with respective ac-

3 'Konstytucja RP', Prezydent.pl: available at https://www.prezydent.pl/prawo/konstytucja-rp/ (27 November 2019).

tions. David M. Edelstein (2002: 2) maintains that states may choose a strategy of cooperation with another country in order to change its intentions. Therefore, this study will also include intentions as a domestic level variable. From this premise stems the third hypothesis:

> Hypothesis 3: Poland chose a strategy of engagement with Russia in the hope of altering its intentions towards Poland.

Another important variable in terms of strategic culture is foreign policy decision-makers' perception of the international balance of power. Although Ripsman et al. did not mention it in their model, other works on neoclassical realism discussed it extensively (Kitchen 2010). Poland just like other non-great powers must consider the international system while executing its foreign policy. And this does not apply solely to Russia. Equally important is the fact that Poland is a member of the European Union (EU) and NATO and that it has close ties to the USA.

Therefore, this research will include in the model of neoclassical realism the attitude of Polish foreign policymakers towards the international power balance. It manifests itself in the perception by foreign policy decision-makers of the threats, their countries perceived power and changes in the international system. Thus, the final hypothesis:

> Hypothesis 4: Poland tried to improve relations with Russia due to perceived changes in the international balance of power by Polish decision-makers.

Methodological framework

This article shall employ the method of systematic process analysis, specified by Peter A. Hall (2006), used to identify which theoretical explanations best explain outcomes and contains four steps. The first is theory formation, where one must identify potential variables and plausible causal relations among them leading to the outcome (Hall 2006: 27), in this case the policy of engagement pursued by Poland towards Russia in 2005–2007. This step has already been performed in the previous section.

Following the logic of systematic process analysis, the next step is to derive "predictions about the patterns that will appear in observations of the world if the theory is valid and if it is false," based on chosen variables (Hall 2006: 27). Hall claims it is best to make several rivalling predictions stemming from different theories, to make the potential inferences more valid. Due to limits of space, this article (which is not by any means exceptional in this regard, [Hall 2006: 29]) shall focus solely on predictions derived from neoclassical realism. However, an element of theoretical rivalry is added by the fact that this article tests 4 hypothesis.

Hence, if hypothesis 1 holds, it should be visible from the data, that Polish foreign policymakers perceived the possibility of losing their power positions to be high and the only way to secure it was by pursuing a policy of engagement towards Russia, favoured by certain interest groups, capable of removing the decision-makers from power. In the case of hypothesis 2 being true, Polish foreign policy decision-makers should perceive relations with Russia to be an important part of Poland's domestic political struggle and one of the ways to distinguish one's party identity from its rivals was the policy of engagement towards Russia. For hypothesis 3 to be accepted, the data must show that Polish foreign policymakers perceived Russia's intentions and thus its policy towards Poland to be alterable and that this could be achieved with a policy of engagement. Finally, hypothesis 4 foresees that Polish foreign policy decision-makers saw a policy of engagement towards Russia as necessary to improve Poland's position in the European balance of power.

The third step foreseen by systematic process analysis is making observations. It is necessary to analyse processes by which the identified variables operate. As Hall (2006: 26) states: "The point is to see if the multiple actions and statements of the actors at each stage of the causal process are consistent with the image of the world implied by the theory." Thus, following the logic of systematic process analysis and neoclassical realism, in the next parts of this article Poland's relations with Russia in 2005–2007 will be analysed first by reviewing the position of Poland and Russia in the international system of states and subsequently, the domestic level of Polish foreign policymaking towards Russia will be reviewed.

At the last stage of systematic process analysis, the observations must be compared with the theoretical predictions and judgments on the validity of the hypotheses must be made (Hall 2006: 28). This will be done in the penultimate part of the article.

The Systemic Aspect of Polish-Russian Relations in 2005–2007

This article shall use a classification of states proposed by David R. Mares (1988), presented earlier. In 2005–2007 Poland was part of the European international system which included five major powers: Russia, the United Kingdom, France, Germany and the USA. It is debatable whether the USA and Russia should be differentiated from this group as great powers. Although both countries were each by far stronger militarily than Germany, the UK or France, certain factors mitigated this misbalance. Russia was economically weak, while the relatively small US army in Europe and the sheer geographic distance between America and Europe to a certain extent limited the scope to project its power to the European continent. As Randall L. Schweller (2017: 4) argues, "major powers are great powers of the second rank because they do not possess either a complete portfolio

of state-of-the-art capabilities or the critical mass (territory and population) or both to qualify as poles." Thus, it is fully justifiable to treat Russia and the USA in Europe as major powers, especially as it was impossible to say that balancing in Europe was focused solely around the USA and Russia in 2005–2007. Moreover, Germany, France and the UK were not only strong economically, but also played a significant role in the EU, which increased these countries' position in the European balance of power vis-à-vis Russia and the USA.

On paper there were two identifiable political blocks in this system. On the one hand there was the EU and NATO with its member states. On the other, Russia with Belarus, its closest ally in Europe. Nevertheless, it cannot be claimed that the system in 2005–2007 was bipolar. First of all, there was no cohesive, co-ordinated policy between Western states and especially its major powers towards Russia. Secondly, the major powers in the system pursued a mix of balancing and bandwagoning strategies towards one another. For instance, the UK was trying to preclude French and German hegemony in the EU, bandwagoned with the USA in the Middle East and confronted Russia on many issues, whereas Germany was co-operating with France and Russia to counterbalance what they perceived as USA unilateralism. Thus, the European international system was multipolar and this created a permissive strategic environment for Poland.

In this constellation Poland was a mid-level power. Such a classification can be justified with the most basic data used by realists to classify states. In terms of population, Poland during 2005–2007 was the 6th largest country in the EU. However, it was weak economically. The size of Poland's GDP ranked only 10th in the EU in 2005, edging up to the 9th position in 2006 and 2007. Per capita, however, Poland's GDP was one of the lowest in the EU. In 2005 it ranked 23rd among the then 25member states, and in 2006 and 2007 Poland was the EU's poorest country in per capita terms.[4] But most importantly, referring back to Mares's (1988) classification of states, Poland could exert an impact on the European international system only by co-opting other states on its side. The example par excellence was the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004–2005 when Poland, through joining forces with Lithuania, influenced the EU to develop deeper relations with Ukraine and become more engaged in its politics.

From the perspective of Poland's relations with Russia, the most striking is the asymmetry of power in Polish–Russian relations. Moreover, this asymmetry was aggravated by Poland's geographical position. No natural barriers separate it from Russia, as both countries are located on plains. This meant that Russia had a clear offensive advantage against Poland in 2005–2007. To add, at that time NATO was prioritising anti-terrorist and peacekeeping operations beyond NATO's territory rather than collective defence. Poland wished it was otherwise, and for that reason it participated in the Baltic air policing mission in 2006,

4 Author's calculations based on Eurostat.

supported Estonia during the Bronze Soldier of Tallinn incident and continued its participation in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars to prove Poland's credibility as a NATO ally.[5]

Second, Poland had diametrically different interests from Russia regarding the future orientation of post-Soviet states. In 2003–2005 a series of political changes swept across the post-Soviet space. In Georgia and Ukraine crony, semi-authoritarian Moscow-orientated political regimes were replaced by democratic politicians who mostly favoured Euro-Atlantic integration and a pro-Western foreign policy. Although these developments were positive from Warsaw's point of view, Russia opposed them. This increased tensions between Poland and Russia, as any spontaneous protest movement or crisis situation in the post-Soviet space was treated by both parties as a potentially revolutionary moment pitting the West against Russia.

Third, the period 2005–2007 marks Russia's increased confidence and assertiveness in the international arena, which stemmed from the stabilisation of Russia's internal political model. Vladimir Putin had eliminated all major political opponents and secured loyalty from Russia's richest and most powerful oligarchs. Rising energy prices also helped.[6] These developments increased Russia's ability to mobilise resources to pursue more expansionist foreign policy aims and its leverage on numerous European countries, including Poland. It is worth noting here that Poland was importing most of its gas and oil from Russia. All these trends meant that Poland faced a clear threat from Russia: at best the two countries' political interests would clash, at worst Russia could present a tangible threat to Poland's political sovereignty and statehood. This means that there was a relatively high degree of systemic clarity for Poland.

Based on this strategic evaluation, one would expect Poland to try and balance Russia's political and military power. In order to do so, as a middle power Poland had to find other allies in this endeavour if it were to exert a meaningful impact on the European international system. But this was not exactly how Poland responded to its strategic environment in 2005–2007.

Poland's Policy towards Russia in 2005–2007

In late 2005, after PiS had won both parliamentary and presidential elections, it had to devise its own informal formula on foreign policy decision-making. It turned out that the main decision-making centres in both PiS governments were focused around president Lech Kaczyński, his presidential staff and the chiefs of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA).[7] In the first government led by

5 Interview Government-MFA expert 1.

6 Interview with MFA employee 4.

7 Interview with Member of Parliament 1; Interview with MFA employee 5.

Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz, this was Stefan Meller, while in the second, headed by Jarosław Kaczyński – Anna Fotyga and her deputy Paweł Kowal.

From the start, PiS politicians clearly stated their intentions to improve relations with Russia, which were then in a state of crisis due Poland's involvement in Ukraine's Orange revolution, disputes regarding the NordStream pipeline and history (Eberhardt 2006: 115–123). In his New Year's Eve greeting to the Polish nation, president Kaczyński expressed his hopes that the year 2006 would mark a positive breakthrough in Poland's relations with Russia.[8] He repeated this later when meeting foreign ambassadors accredited to Poland.[9] Stefan Meller (2006) emphasised in his exposé that there were no objective conditions and obstacles for Poland and Russia not to pursue neighbourly co-operation based on rationally devised national interests. Crucially, before becoming minister, Meller had been Poland's ambassador to Russia. This was a clear sign of the importance that Warsaw put in its relations with Moscow[10] (Kowal 2012: 199). One of the minister's first visits was to Moscow, where he met his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov and agreed to re-establish the work of the Polish-Russian intergovernmental group on economic co-operation, to reactivate the work of the group on difficult matters, inter-resort consultations and to establish a direct contact between the two ministers of foreign affairs.

Poland persevered further with its policy of engaging Russia. Firstly, the Polish MFA worked out a blueprint for renewing relations with Russia. An amicable ambiance was to be created in Polish-Russian relations through culture. The plan was to follow through with Poland's and Russia's presidents meeting in Kaliningrad Oblast, where they would embark on a ship and travel to Gdansk. The concept was presented to Russia's MFA – which vehemently opposed the project, and to the administration of Russia's president, where the reception was more positive.[11]

Nevertheless, these Polish attempts at engaging Russia did not bring about the desired results. Almost immediately after PiS had taken office, Russia took a number of steps that caused problems for Warsaw. Most importantly, on the 10th of November 2005, during the inaugural speech of Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz as Prime Minister (Cichocki – Świeżak 2008: 67), Russia announced that it had put an embargo on Polish agricultural and meat products. Later in 2006 Russia banned Polish passenger ships from travelling in the Russian part of the Vistula lagoon (Żurawski vel Grajewski 2011: 28) and Moscow continued its NordStream gas pipeline project.

8 'Orędzie noworoczne Prezydenta RP Lecha Kaczyńskiego', Archiwum Lecha Kaczyńskiego (31 December 2005): available at https://www.prezydent.pl/archiwum-lecha-kaczynskiego/ (20 June 2019).

9 'Noworoczne spotkanie Prezydenta RP z Korpusem Dyplomatycznym', Archiwum Lecha Kaczyńskiego (10 January 2006): available at https://www.prezydent.pl/archiwum-lecha-kaczynskiego/ (20 June 2019).

10 Interview with MFA employee 5.

11 Interview with MFA employee 1.

The Polish side considered these Russian actions as a test of Western support that Poland would be able to garner in its dispute with Russia as well as of Poland's capabilities in forming the EU's policy towards Russia.[12] Moreover, these measures were also designed to discredit the EU's enlargement policy in the eyes of the main Western capitals.[13] This was important given that Poland was still a newcomer in the EU and Ukraine's potential membership of the EU had only recently emerged as a possibility. This interpretation seemed to be confirmed by the fact that Russia took disproportionate measures in response to irregularities found in Polish meat and agricultural products.[14]

Numerous attempts were made by Polish diplomats and politicians to solve this issue with Russia on a bilateral basis.[15] At the same time Poland was lobbying other EU member states for support in its trade dispute with Russia, since the EU had a vantage point in negotiating trade relations with third parties.

Nevertheless, a new attempt at engaging Russia soon emerged. Polish diplomats invited to Poland Sergey Yastrzhembsky, then Russia's president's influential advisor of Polish origin. He visited Warsaw in February 2006 and delivered a letter from Putin to Lech Kaczyński, in which the Russian president expressed his wishes to normalise relations with Poland. The Polish side once again presented the concept of revitalising Polish-Russian relations through culture.[16] Yastrzhembsky then met with Meller to discuss the potential meeting of the countries' presidents. Yastrzhembsky was also received by Poland's prime minister and a government think-tank, the Polish Institute of International Affairs.[17]

Poland further tried to engage Russia. To that end, the Polish authorities tried to organise a meeting between the two presidents. Russia refused to succumb to Lech Kaczyński's request that the Russian president should first visit Poland rather than vice versa.[18] The Head of the Chancellery of the President of Poland, Aleksander Szczygło, suggested that presidents of Poland and Russia should meet in 2006 on neutral ground.[19] Later Andrzej Krawczyk, undersecretary of state at the Chancellery of the President of Poland, repeated that Vladimir Putin had an invitation to visit Poland and that works on the details of the meeting between presidents would continue.[20] He accepted that the sidelines

12 Interview with MFA employee 4.

13 Interview with MFA employee 5.

14 Interview with MFA employee 5.

15 Interview with Member of Parliament 1.

16 Interview with MFA employee 1.

17 Interview with MFA employee 1.

18 Interview with MFA employee 1; Interview with MFA employee 2.

19 'Potrzeba dużej rozwagi i spokoju', Archiwum Lecha Kaczyńskiego (7 August 2006): available at https://www.prezydent.pl/archiwum-lecha-kaczynskiego/ (20 June 2019).

20 'Prezydent Putin ma otwarte zaproszenie do Polski', Archiwum Lecha Kaczyńskiego (8 August 2006): available at https://www.prezydent.pl/archiwum-lecha-kaczynskiego/ (20 June 2019).

of the EU-Russia summit scheduled in Finland in late 2006 could be one of the venues for the presidents to meet.[21] Other places under consideration were the Vistula lagoon or Belarus (Eberhardt 2007: 134–135).

Poland continued its attempts at engaging Russia in other spheres as well. In June 2006 the chief of Poland's National Security Bureau Władysław Stasiak visited Moscow, where he met Igor Ivanov, the head of Russia's Security Council. Both parties discussed regional as well as international matters of security and the planned US anti-missile shield installations in Poland.[22] In addition, Paweł Kowal was frequently visiting Moscow to discuss and resolve bilateral issues in Polish-Russian relations.[23] Later, in September 2006 joint Polish-Russian--Danish-Swedish naval exercises took place in the Baltic Sea to improve co--operation in countering trafficking of materials for the production of weapons of mass destruction.[24] To add, science and culture remained two important fields where Poland and Russia worked closely with each other.[25] Moreover, contacts and dialogue had been established between the Catholic Church in Poland and the Russian Orthodox Church.[26]

On the 5th of October 2006 the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov visited Warsaw, where he met with Lech and Jarosław Kaczyński and Anna Fotyga. With the Polish president, he discussed the implications of NordStream pipeline. Both parties agreed to resolve the issue of the trade embargo as quickly as possible and to organize a meeting between Putin and Kaczyński the following year. In addition, they discussed the issue of the US anti-missile shield in Poland and possible co-operation with Russia within the EU and NATO. Both sides expressed their wishes to improve relations through political dialogue, cultural initiatives and economic co-operation.

During the same visit, Sergey Lavrov met Anna Fotyga and discussed problematic issues in the bilateral relations. They also agreed to organise an economic presentation in Poland of Kaliningrad Oblast and a festival of Russian culture and science in Poland. In addition, it was decided to revive the activity of the Polish-Russian group on difficult matters and schedule a plan of consultations between the two countries' MFAs. Both sides also discussed a number of international issues, including EU-Russia relations and the upcoming negotiations on the new EU–Russia partnership treaty, Iran's nuclear program,

21 'Prezydent jest aktywny', Archiwum Lecha Kaczyńskiego (9 August 2006): availabe at https://www.prezydent.pl/archiwum-lecha-kaczynskiego/ (20 June 2019).

22 'Szef BBN na rozmowach w Moskwie', Biuro Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego: available at https://www.bbn.gov.pl/pl/wydarzenia/967,dok.html (20 June 2019).

23 Interview with Member of Parliament 1.

24 'Amber Sunrise 2006', Proliferation Security Initiative: available at https://psi.msz.gov.pl/pl/cwiczenia/amber_sunrise_2006/ (20 June 2019).

25 Interview with MFA employee 3.

26 Interview with Member of Parliament 1.

the situation in Lebanon, Iraq, Afghanistan and the frozen conflicts in the post-Soviet region. The two ministers noted huge similarities in Poland's and Russia's positions on these issues.[27]

Although there were no signs of a Putin-Kaczyński meeting in sight, the two had an opportunity to meet each other in the EU–Russia summit in Finland in late October 2006. During an informal meeting between all EU leaders and Vladimir Putin, Lech Kaczyński stressed the situation in Georgia,[28] raised the issue of the murder of Anna Politkovskaya,[29] and argued that Russia should accept the EU energy charter and that EU solidarity in energy should be strengthened.[30]

At the end of November 2006, Russia made a public move in response to Poland's policy of balancing and engagement towards it. President Putin wrote an article for the Polish newspaper *Dziennik*, in which he argued, that Russia belonged to the European family and warned against the rhetoric implying that Europe was too dependent on Russia. According to Putin, this was unfounded and only served to raise new divisions in Europe.[31] One interpretation of the Russian president's move is that it was a reaction to the spreading rumours that Poland might veto the European Commission's mandate to negotiate a new EU-Russia partnership treaty.

Despite Polish efforts to engage Russia, there was no progress made on Russia lifting its trade embargo and neither did Poland find sufficient support from other EU members nor the European Commission in resolving this issue. As a result, in November 2006 Poland decided to veto the European Commission's mandate to negotiate a new Partnership and Co-operation Agreement between the EU and Russia in order to make the European Commission get more involved in Poland's trade dispute with Russia.[32] President's spokesperson Maciej Łopiński confirmed that Poland would withdraw its veto once Russia lifted its trade embargo.[33]

27 'Komunikat dot. wizyty w Polsce Ministra Spraw Zagranicznych Federacji Rosyjskiej Pana Siergieja Ławrowa', Archiwum Ministerstwa Spraw Zagranicznych (6 October 2006): available at https://www.msz.gov.pl/pl/aktualnosci/archiwum/ (20 June 2019).

28 'Drugi dzień wizyty w Finlandii', Archiwum Lecha Kaczyńskiego (20 October 2006): available at https://www.prezydent.pl/archiwum-lecha-kaczynskiego/ (20 June 2019).

29 'Maciej Łopiński w Trójce, 24 października 2006 r.', Archiwum Lecha Kaczyńskiego (24 October 2006): available at https://www.prezydent.pl/archiwum-lecha-kaczynskiego/ (20 June 2019).

30 '10 minut z Putinem to nie to, o co nam chodzi', Archiwum Lecha Kaczyńskiego (19 October 2006): available at https://www.prezydent.pl/archiwum-lecha-kaczynskiego/ (20 June 2019).

31 'Według Putina Rosja należy do Europy', WP wiadomości (22 November 2006): available at https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/wedlug-putina-rosja-nalezy-do-europy-6036190391280769a (20 June 2019).

32 'UE musi zacząć dostrzegać i akceptować nasze interesy', Archiwum Lecha Kaczyńskiego (25 November 2006): available at https://www.prezydent.pl/archiwum-lecha-kaczynskiego/ (20 June 2019).

33 'Maciej Łopiński w Sygnałach Dnia, 30 listopada 2006 r.', Archiwum Lecha Kaczyńskiego (30 November 2006): available at https://www.prezydent.pl/archiwum-lecha-kaczynskiego/ (20 June 2019).

Apart from the veto, Poland's actions in balancing Russia were noticeable in other areas, especially in energy. In December 2006 Poland finalised its investment in Lithuania, where PKN Orlen bought the Mažeikiai oil refinery from JUKOS. One of the main reasons for this purchase was that Poland intended to prevent Russia from gaining dominance in the regional petrol markets.[34] In May 2007 Poland organised a summit in Krakow together with Lithuania, South Caucasus and the Central Asian states dedicated to diversification of energy supplies to Central and Eastern Europe.[35] This liaising was continued in October 2007 in Vilnius.[36] The outcome of the summit was a memorandum to build the Odessa–Gdansk oil pipeline.[37] In June 2007 Lech Kaczyński participated in the GUAM[38] summit, where he gave public support for energy co-operation with GUAM countries and for its Euro-Atlantic aspirations.[39] Poland was also simultaneously pushing for a common EU stance on energy.

Although, following the veto the Polish rhetoric towards Russia became harsher, attempts at engaging Russia were not abandoned. In December 2006 the Weimar Triangle meeting took place. Germany, France and Poland jointly declared that they recognized Russia as a strategic partner and would continue to support the development of co-operation with Russia on equal basis in relation to common interests, especially in trade and energy.[40] At the beginning of 2007, Krawczyk announced that Poland wanted to improve relations with Russia and that would be one of the main priorities in the following year.[41] Lech Kaczyński himself often repeated that there was a possibility of reaching a compromise on Poland's veto regarding the EU-Russia treaty.[42] In her exposé Anna Fotyga (2007) affirmed that Poland was interested in developing co-operation and dialogue with Russia in the fields of history, culture, economy and in strengthening ties between Russian and Polish local municipalities.

34 Interview President's chancellery's employee 1.

35 'Minister Łopiński w Sygnałach Dnia 11 Maja 2007 r.', Archiwum Lecha Kaczyńskiego (11 May 2006): available at https://www.prezydent.pl/archiwum-lecha-kaczynskiego/ (20 June 2019).

36 'Wizyta Prezydenta RP w Wilnie', Archiwum Lecha Kaczyńskiego (10 October 2007): available at https://www.prezydent.pl/archiwum-lecha-kaczynskiego/ (20 June 2019).

37 'Studio Wschód, TVP3, 10 października 2007 r.', Archiwum Lecha Kaczyńskiego (10 October 2007): available at https://www.prezydent.pl/archiwum-lecha-kaczynskiego/ (20 June 2019).

38 A regional grouping made of Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova.

39 'Prezydent RP gościem specjalnym szczytu GUAM w Baku', Archiwum Lecha Kaczyńskiego (19 June 2007): available at https://www.prezydent.pl/archiwum-lecha-kaczynskiego/ (20 June 2019).

40 'Budowa Europy pozostaje projektem dla przyszłych pokoleń', Archiwum Lecha Kaczyńskiego (5 December 2006): available at https://www.prezydent.pl/archiwum-lecha-kaczynskiego/ (20 June 2019).

41 'Tok FM, 16 stycznia 2007 r.', Archiwum Lecha Kaczyńskiego (16 January 2007): available at https://www.prezydent.pl/archiwum-lecha-kaczynskiego/ (20 June 2019).

42 'Udział prezydenta RP w posiedzeniu Rady Europejskiej', Archiwum Lecha Kaczyńskiego (15 December 2006): available at https://www.prezydent.pl/archiwum-lecha-kaczynskiego/ (20 June 2019).

Despite the embargo, Poland's president searched for other ways to establish contacts with Russia. One possibility was increasing regional co-operation between Poland and Kaliningrad Oblast.[43] Another example took place in May 2007. The first ladies of Poland and Russia, Maria Kaczyńska and Lyudmila Putina, met in Saint Petersburg to open the Polish House.[44] On the sidelines of this event the first ladies together with their countries' diplomats discussed the potential normalisation of Polish-Russian relations[45] (Kowal 2012: 200). In fact, some claim that both countries at that point were close to reaching an agreement to normalise relations. In the Russian MFA, Poland's behaviour was seen as irrational, but causing too much trouble for Russia, thus a necessity to come to terms with Poland was growing.[46] But once it became clear, during the summer of 2007, that Poland was heading to pre-term parliamentary elections, Russia gave up these thoughts.

However, even during the electoral campaign Poland consequentially continued its policy of engagement towards Russia. In September 2007 Lech Kaczyński visited Smolensk, where he participated in commemorations of the Katyn massacre.[47] During the ceremony Lech Kaczyński argued that Poland acknowledged Russia's important role in Europe and globally, and that it wanted to have good relations with Russia, but they should be based on truth.[48]

Let us not forget that Poland still managed to achieve its goal, for the sake of which the decision to veto the start of negotiations of a new EU-Russia treaty had been made. In May 2007, during the EU–Russia summit in Samara, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who also happened to hold the EU presidency at that time, stated that Poland's trade dispute with Russia was an EU level matter.

Judging by Polish diplomats' and politicians' rhetoric, the issue of the USA building part of its anti-missile defence shield on Poland's territory seemed to be a problem in Polish–US and US–Russian, but not Polish-Russian relations. For instance, Andrzej Krawczyk dismissed Russia's opposition to stationing the missile defence shield in Poland as institutional noise and claimed that it had nothing to do with Polish–Russian relations.[49] Having met with George W. Bush in July 2007 Lech Kaczyński stated that the anti-missile shield was of defensive

43 'PAP, 2 stycznia 2007 r.', Archiwum Lecha Kaczyńskiego (2 January 2007): available at https://www.prezydent.pl/archiwum-lecha-kaczynskiego/ (20 June 2019).

44 'Wizyta Pani Prezydentowej w Sankt Petersburgu', Archiwum Lecha Kaczyńskiego (13 May 2007): available at https://www.prezydent.pl/archiwum-lecha-kaczynskiego/ (20 June 2019).

45 Interview with Member of Parliament 1.

46 Interview with MFA employee 2.

47 'Wizyta Pani Marii Kaczyńskiej w Katyniu', Archiwum Lecha Kaczyńskiego (17 September 2007): available at https://www.prezydent.pl/archiwum-lecha-kaczynskiego/ (20 June 2019).

48 'Uroczystości w Katyniu', Archiwum Lecha Kaczyńskiego (17 September 2007): available at https://www.prezydent.pl/archiwum-lecha-kaczynskiego/ (20 June 2019).

49 'Magazyn TVN24, 11 października 2006 r.', Archiwum Lecha Kaczyńskiego (11 October 2006): available at https://www.prezydent.pl/archiwum-lecha-kaczynskiego/ (20 June 2019).

nature, directed to protect Poland against rogue, unpredictable regimes, suggesting, that Russia did not belong to such a category of states.[50] Still, other sources[51] (Sikorski 2018: 137–146) show that Poland's negotiations with the USA on the anti-missile shield were part of a policy to balance Russia, since Warsaw was trying to persuade Washington to increase US security guarantees for Poland from a potential Russian attack in exchange for the permission to station the anti-missile defence shield.

On the 21st of October 2007, the pre-term parliamentary elections in Poland were overwhelmingly won by the Civic Platform party (Polish: *Platforma Obywatelska*, PO) which formed a new coalition government with the Polish People's Party (Polish: *Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe*, PSL). This marked the end of PiS's control of Poland's foreign policy. Although Lech Kaczyński remained president, he was essentially excluded from foreign policy decision-making by the PO government.

The Drivers behind Poland's Attempts to engage Russia

As shown above, Poland pursed a mixed strategy of balancing and engagement towards Russia in 2005–2007, while PiS was in power. Whereas the reasons for Poland's balancing are obvious given the power asymmetry and different interests between Poland and Russia, the question arises why Poland was at same time pursuing engagement towards Russia.

Hypothesis 1

Although during 2005–2007 PiS was in a coalition with Self Defence (Polish: *Samoobrona*) and the League of Polish Families (Polish: *Liga Polskich rodzin*) parties, which did not hide their pro-Moscow foreign policy views, and in the case of the latter there were even suspicions of ties to Russian business and intelligence services,[52] it had no effect on Poland's policy towards Russia. The parties' portfolios in the government were not related to foreign policy and the Polish parliament in 2005–2007 had little influence on Poland's policy towards Russia.

Russia did indeed try to influence Polish politics through *Samoobrona* and *Liga Polskich Rodzin*. For instance, two honoris causa doctoral titles for *Samoobrona's* leader Andrzej Lepper were awarded in Moscow, along with invitations to visit Russia for *Samoobrona* activists and support for common projects. There were also attempts to gratify nationalists linked to *Liga Polskich Rodzin*.[53] But

50 'Prezydent RP w Stanach Zjednoczonych', Archiwum Lecha Kaczyńskiego (16 July 2007): available at https://www.prezydent.pl/archiwum-lecha-kaczynskiego/ (20 June 2019).

51 Interview Government-MFA expert 1.

52 Interview with Member of Parliament 2.

53 Interview with MFA employee 3.

Russia's actions brought no results, as PiS coalition partners were completely isolated from foreign policy decision-making.

Moreover, Polish business was also marginalised from it[54] and neither did public opinion or media outlets had an effect on Poland's decisions. Rather, decision-making was concentrated around the President and the MFA chiefs, who viewed Poland's foreign policy and its relations with Russian in the same manner and made their decisions independently, without any external interference or pressure. Thus, there was no evidence found that any interest group affected Poland's policy towards Russia in 2005–2007.

Hypothesis 2

There were no internal political motivations guiding Poland's policy towards Russia in 2005–2007. All of the main foreign policy decision-making posts belonged to one political group – PiS, so it had full control of all available resources to be mobilised for foreign policy execution and did not need to compete in that with any political group. Furthermore, the opposition, especially PO, fully supported Poland's actions towards Russia, including the decision to veto the European Commission's mandate to negotiate an EU–Russia partnership deal.

Although the then oppositional PSL which had a strong electoral base among Poland's farmers was pressuring the Polish government to renew trade with Russia, as Poland's agriculture suffered losses due to Russia's embargo, PiS politicians treated such discourse as an attempt by PSL to appeal to its electoral base, which would not affect PiS's rankings in opinion polls. Thus, Poland's policy towards Russia in 2005–2007 was not part of the internal political debate and therefore it did not produce any incentives, which could potentially pressure foreign policy decision-makers to pursue engagement towards Russia.

Hypothesis 3

There is strong evidence to suggest that Poland aimed to change Russia's intentions towards it. Poland's policy's aim was not only to change Russia's perception of Poland as a country inherently unfriendly towards Russia, but also to make sure that Russia did not pursue its sphere of influence policy.[55] Bilateral meetings with Russian politicians and diplomats, and the cultural, regional and economic co-operation were intended to demonstrate that Poland had no malign intentions towards Russia, which henceforth should have fastened the process of Russia coming to terms with Poland's sovereignty.

For instance, at the end of September 2007, president Lech Kaczyński visited the USA, where in a lecture on Polish foreign policy he stated that the sole

54 Interview with Member of Parliament 2.

55 Interview with MFA employee 1.

problem in Polish–Russian relations was Russia's inclination to treat Poland as part of its own sphere of influence. Russia's use of energy for political reasons or historical disagreements were also mentioned, but they were not as important as the former. Otherwise, according to Kaczyński, Poland did not see in Russia any military or political threat and it was ready to pursue normal relations based on partnership.[56] Elsewhere, he noted that the unwillingness of the governing circles in Russia to accept that Poland was a sovereign country, and a member of both the EU and NATO, and with its own interests was the main obstacle in organising meeting between Poland's and Russia's presidents.[57]

What is not so evident from first glance is that Poland's political leaders from 2004 onwards had perceived that Poland's power had increased along with its capability to change its relations with Russia. According to this thinking, NATO had provided Poland security, which had significantly diminished Russia's military threat, whereas EU membership had provided Poland with new instruments to form its policy towards Russia.[58] This line of thought was confirmed in Poland's 2007 National Security Strategy, which stated that Poland did not foresee any large scale conflicts, only lower-intensity regional clashes in which Poland would not be involved.[59]

For example, in May 2007 Lech Kaczyński announced that the EU might block Russia's access to WTO unless it lifted its embargo. He also repeated that Poland was not interested in confrontation with Moscow and that it wanted sincere co-operation with Russia, not one which implied Russian dominance in Central Eastern Europe.[60]

In numerous interviews, Lech Kaczyński appeared to genuinely believe that it was possible to persuade Russia to refrain from seeking influence in Central Eastern Europe.[61] Kaczyński expressed similar views when commenting the US anti-missile shield in Poland after meeting G. W. Bush in June 2007: he argued that Russia had to understand that the world had moved on, especially in Central Eastern Europe.[62] In similar mode Anna Fotyga (2007) expressed her exposé Poland's desire to start negotiating a new EU-Russia treaty, and

56 'Lech Kaczyński w Chicago', Archiwum Lecha Kaczyńskiego (25 September 2007): available at https://www.prezydent.pl/archiwum-lecha-kaczynskiego/ (20 June 2019).

57 'Rozsądek i pamiętanie o przeszłość', Archiwum Lecha Kaczyńskiego (22 August 2006): available at https://www.prezydent.pl/archiwum-lecha-kaczynskiego/ (20 June 2019).

58 Interview with MFA employee 4.

59 'Strategia Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego RP 2007', Biuro Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego: available at https://www.bbn.gov.pl/pl/wydarzenia/1142,Strategia-Bezpieczenstwa-Narodowego-RP.html (20 June 2019).

60 'L. Kaczyński: UE może zablokować wejście Rosji do WTO', Wprost (27 May 2007): available at https://www.wprost.pl/swiat/107224/komandosi-opuszczaja-kijow.html (20 June 2019).

61 Interview with MFA employee 1; Interview with Member of Parliament 1.

62 'Prezydent RP spotkał się z prezydentem Stanów Zjednoczonych', Archiwum Lecha Kaczyńskiego (8 June 2007): available at https://www.prezydent.pl/archiwum-lecha-kaczynskiego/ (20 June 2019).

confirmed the necessity of such a treaty, on condition that Russia began to treat all EU member states equally.

This stance was strengthened by the perception on part of the PiS leadership of Russia that they had developed in the 1980s while participating in the Solidarity movement. For them Russia had the potential to overcome its imperial past and become a humanist force in international politics, becoming an advocate of moral politics instead of power politics.[63] Such hopes were harboured towards Russia's intelligentsia and political and cultural dissidents. For instance, during the ceremony of awarding the Jerzy Giedroyc prize, Lech Kaczyński remarked that the situation inside Russia was disturbing and had a great effect on the decisions made in Poland and in Europe generally. He also noted that the intelligentsia did not have any influence on Russia's politics and expressed his hopes that that would change in the future,[64] implying that such a development would democratise Russia and its foreign policy.

Hypothesis 4

There is a substantial amount of evidence that by engaging Russia, Poland tried to improve its standing in the EU, NATO and among the major Western countries. One of Poland's main foreign policy goals was to support the sovereignty of countries located between Poland and Russia – Belarus and Ukraine – in this way hoping to diminish Russia's influence in the region and hence increase Poland's own security. Therefore, Poland actively supported the Euro-Atlantic integration of Ukraine, but also Georgia, Moldova, and potentially Belarus, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, and the idea of the EU and NATO eastward enlargement. In order to achieve this goal, Poland endeavoured to garner support from the main Western powers.

However, the majority of Polish foreign policy decision-makers feared that Poland had a reputation in most Western countries of an irresponsible country, whose foreign policy, including active support for NATO and EU expansion, was guided purely by irrational 'Russophobia.' Such accusations were constantly made by France and Germany.[65] Hence, attempts at engaging Russia were meant to show the Western countries that Poland had no malign intentions towards Russia and that it was a responsible member of the EU and NATO, which always took into consideration these organisations' common interests and was not aiming to disrupt the EU–Russian and NATO–Russian relations for the sake of Polish particularistic interests. It was expected that Poland's engagement with Russia would eventually convince other EU and NATO members, especially

63 Interview with MFA employee 1; Interview with Member of Parliament 1.

64 'Chcielibyśmy normalnego ułożenia stosunków z Rosją', Archiwum Lecha Kaczyńskiego (9 November 2006): available at https://www.prezydent.pl/archiwum-lecha-kaczynskiego/ (20 June 2019).

65 Interview with MFA employee 1.

those in Western Europe, that Poland's propositions regarding Russia and the EU's and NATO's eastern neighbours were motivated by seeking a common good for the sake of all countries and not by Poland's anti-Russian views.

Hence, Poland's engagement policy towards Russia was not only directed towards Moscow, but towards Western capitals as well. Poland thought that good relations with Russia and the reputation of an expert on Russia would help the country to increase its standing in the EU generally.[66] An example of this approach is Lech Kaczyński's speech to the foreign diplomats accredited in Poland, in the beginning of 2006:

I would like to express hope that the year 2006 will be the year in which we are able to improve considerably these relations [with Russia], though I understand that this is a specific process. I would like to say to representatives of all countries accredited in Poland that there are no obstacles on our side. There are no obstacles, because there is no Russofobia, of which we are often being accused. There is no such stance, there is only our will to co-operate on principles of partnership.[67]

In another case, Anna Fotyga visited Moscow, where she participated in a conference dedicated to co-operation in fighting drug trafficking. This issue and the event itself were only of secondary importance for Poland. As a matter of fact, Fotyga's attendance was a deliberate display of Poland's goodwill towards Russia,[68] as Lech Kaczyński pointed out later, commenting that the West had to understand that it took two sides to co-operate.[69]

Furthermore, during the already-mentioned Jerzy Giedroyc award ceremony in 2006, he openly stated that Poland wanted and needed to normalise its relations with Russia, since this would ease Poland's policy towards its Western, Southern and Eastern neighbours.[70] Later, at the New Year annual meeting with the diplomatic corps in 2007, Lech Kaczyński stated that Poland wanted to have good relations with Russia, and that it wanted to contribute to the maintaining of friendly and positive relationships between the EU and Russia.[71]

Another instance showing that Poland's engagement policy towards Russia was motivated by the country's desire to make an impression on Western countries was Lech Kaczyński's speech at the 61st General debate at the UN general session in September 2006. There, he again declared Poland's wish to have good relations with Russia. But most importantly he brought up the is-

66 Interview with MFA employee 3.

67 'Noworoczne spotkanie Prezydenta RP z Korpusem Dyplomatycznym', 2006.

68 Interview with MFA employee 5.

69 'Nowy prezez NBP ma dbać o wzrost gospodarki', Archiwum Lecha Kaczyńskiego (29 June 2006): available at https://www.prezydent.pl/archiwum-lecha-kaczynskiego/ (20 June 2019).

70 'Chcielibyśmy normalnego ułożenia stosunków z Rosją'.

71 'Noworoczne spotkanie z Korpusem Dyplomatycznym', Archiwum Lecha Kaczyńskiego (16 January 2007): available at https://www.prezydent.pl/archiwum-lecha-kaczynskiego/ (20 June 2019).

sue of Polish–Russian relations in the context of Polish–German relations and reconciliation, which followed the German–French reconciliation's example.[72] This was a suggestion that Poland and Russia could undergo a similar path of reconciliation as France and Germany or Poland and Germany.

This line of thought, aiming to show that Poland wanted to have good relations with Russia for the benefit of all Europe, was repeated numerous times by Lech Kaczyński's associates. Andrzej Krawczyk argued that there were few countries in Europe that had as many ties with Russia as Poland did, and that it was wrong to claim that Poland was anti-Russian.[73] He went as far as to say that Poland was Russia's main transit channel to Europe.[74] In a follow-up press conference after meeting Yastrzhembsky, Meller stated that not only Poland, but also Russia and Europe needed good Polish-Russian relations.[75]

Conclusion

This article has shown that Poland in 2005–2007, during PiS term in power, pursued a foreign policy towards Russia based on a mix of engagement and balancing. Whereas balancing stemmed from the power asymmetry and diverging strategic interests between the two countries, Poland engaged Russia for two reasons. First, PiS politicians tried to change Russia's intentions towards Poland and sincerely believed that was possible. Second, and most importantly, such engagement was meant to show Western countries, especially those that played the main role in the EU and NATO, that Poland was not a 'Russophobic' country, which tried to entangle the EU and NATO into its drive against Russian imperialism. Poland hoped that it would convince its Western partners that Warsaw's policy propositions, especially support for eastward EU and NATO enlargement, were to increase regional stability and bring benefits for both the West and Russia.

Such findings are entirely commensurate with Poland's status as a middle power in the European international system. One of Poland's main foreign policy's goals was to change the European international system by bringing its Eastern neighbours – especially Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia – as close to Euro-Atlantic institutions as possible so as to push Russia's influence away from

72 'Reformy muszą być skierowane na człowieka', Archiwum Lecha Kaczyńskiego (19 September 2006): available at https://www.prezydent.pl/archiwum-lecha-kaczynskiego/ (20 June 2019).

73 'Zasada równego partnerstwa', Archiwum Lecha Kaczyńskiego (12 September 2006): available at https://www.prezydent.pl/archiwum-lecha-kaczynskiego/ (20 June 2019).

74 'Sygnały dnia PR 1, 6 października 2006 r.', Archiwum Lecha Kaczyńskiego (6 October 2006): available at https://www.prezydent.pl/archiwum-lecha-kaczynskiego/ (20 June 2019).

75 'Spotkanie Ministra Stefana Mellera z przebywającym z wizytą w Warszawie doradcą prezydenta Federacji Rosyjskiej Panem Siergiejem Jastrzembskim', Archiwum Ministerstwa Spraw Zagranicznych (21 February 2006): available at https://www.msz.gov.pl/pl/aktualnosci/archiwum/ (20 June 2019).

Poland. In order to do so, Poland needed support from its Western and regional allies, since it did not have enough power to achieve this goal on its own.

Finally, some notes should be made from a theoretical point of view. In relation to the article's theoretical framework, it has been shown that the main variables that caused Poland's engagement policy derived from strategic culture, whereas domestic institutions and state–society relations had no effect.

Secondly, most of the academic literature treats engagement as a separate policy aimed to change the threatening behaviour of another state (Resnick 2001; Cha 2002: 44; Schweller 1998: 74; Edelstein 2002: 5). This article has demonstrated, however, that the engagement policy that Poland pursued towards Russia in 2005–2007 was essentially designed to strengthen its long-term policy aim of balancing Russia by attracting support from Western countries. Thus, it is possible to argue that alongside the traditionally perceived engagement, there exists pragmatic – or 'instrumental' – form of engagement that can be undertaken by small or middle powers in order to improve one's standing among allies rather than to improve relations with the engaged state. Theses findings nuance in some way the opinion widespread in the public sphere and academic literature that during 2005–2007 Poland pursued a purely anti-Russian policy. It cannot be said, that PiS leadership followed blindly their "anti-Russian" views and tried to confront Russia on every occasion. Rather, they analysed the European balance of power, sensed Poland's limitations and tried to adapt Poland's foreign policy with the main trends in EU-Russia relations.

Most importantly, this article has shown that neoclassical realism may be a useful way to solve the problems of the systemic approach to identifying middle powers, which finds it difficult to predict middle powers' behaviour. By employing neoclassical realism in future research and studying middle powers' foreign policy decision-makers more thoroughly it may be possible to devise at least some conditional predictions on middle powers' foreign policy behaviour.

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Table 1: Interview table

Respondent	Status	Source	Theoretical Saturation	Form	Length	Record
			Yes			
MFA employee 1	Done 2 March 2018, Warsaw	Sample frame		Semi-structured	1h 16 min	Audio record
MFA employee 2	Done 12 May 2018, Warsaw	Sample frame		Semi-structured	1h 13 min	Audio record
MFA employee 3	Done 3 July 2018, Warsaw	MFA employee 2		Semi-structured	1h 59 min	Audio record
MFA employee 4	Done 23 October 2018, Warsaw	MFA employee 3		Semi-structured	1h 30 min	Audio record
MFA employee 5	Done 12 December 2018, Warsaw	MFA employee 3		Semi-structured	1h 15 min	Audio record
MFA employee 6	Refused 5 February 2018	Member of Parliament 1				
MFA employee 7	Did not reply	Sample frame				

MFA employee 8	Refused 26 March 2018	Sample frame				
Member of Parliament 1	Done 8 February 2018, Warsaw	Sample frame		Semi-structured	30 min	Audio record
Member of Parliament 2	Done 12 December 2018, Warsaw	MFA employee 4		Semi-structured	45 min	Audio record
Government MFA expert 1	Done 4 July 2018, Warsaw	MFA employee 2		Semi-structured	47 min	Audio record
Government MFA expert 2	Refused 5 February 2018	Member of Parliament 1				
President's chancellery's employee 1	Done 19 February 2019, Warsaw	Member of Parliament 2		Semi-structured	1h 25 min	Audio record
President's chancellery's employee 2	Refused 5 February 2018	MFA employee 1				
Prime minister's chancellery's employee 1	Refused 5 April 2018	Sample frame				
Prime minister's chancellery's employee 2	Refused 10 April 2018	Sample frame				
Prime minister's chancellery's employee 3	Did not reply	Sample frame				

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Russian Influence in the Czech Republic as a Grey Zone Case Study

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Abstract: *In recent years, the concept of grey zone has been popularised to analyse the activities a State can use to influence the decisions and to limit the strategic choices of another State below the threshold of war. This article presents a case study, aimed at verifying if the Russian activities in the Czech Republic may constitute a grey zone. The paper commences by introducing the concept of the grey zone and developing the appropriate theoretical framework to identify its main characteristics. It continues by examining the Russian influence in the Czech Republic by using open sources, local sources and documents from the Czech intelligence services. It concludes by asserting that the analysed case meets most of the requirements to classify it as a 'limited grey zone'. This new theoretical development may help to assess similar situations that may occur in this or other nations.*

Keywords: ***grey zone; hybrid threat; Russia; Czech Republic; political influence; disinformation; active measures.***

Introduction

A number of buzzwords – from the traditional ideas of 'disinformation' and 'active measures', the catch-all concept of 'hybrid threat', the inexistent 'Gerasimov doctrine' or the ambiguous 'grey zone' – are used to define Russia's political warfare activities in the West.[1] Among others, those can include political in-

1 More specifically, those may be tactics of the Russian approach to unconventional warfare. Dubbed by a number of experts as New Generation Warfare, it *'…differs from Western views of hybrid warfare – a blend of conventional, irregular and cyber warfare* [the current hybrid threat approach focuses on the multidimensional strategies (or traditional political warfare activities) below the threshold of war] – *in*

terference, information operations, economic pressure, criminal activities or show of force. This article aims to set out a series of research findings on such activities in Eastern European countries, using the Czech Republic as a case study to apply the grey zone (GZ) theory. The research question is whether the Russian actions in the Czech Republic may constitute a GZ.

This proposal is, theoretically speaking, mature. In fact, before the grey – and not so grey – activities in Ukraine that led to redefining and popularising the original concept of a hybrid threat, some experts pointed out that Russia might exert pressure in some former Warsaw Pact countries as a means to erode NATO (Trenin 2011: 107). More recently, organisations such as NATO and the EU pointed out the convenience of monitoring the Russian activities in various European States, since there were signs of high proactivity which could not be the result of chance (Morris 2019).

To transform the research question into a hypothesis, we analyse whether Russia is taking advantage of its historical ties, political relationships and commercial contacts in the Czech Republic to generate a GZ in the country. Our hypothesis is that Russia is developing a GZ in the Czech Republic. The GZ tactics, techniques and procedures used by Moscow may have three main goals in the Czech Republic: influence the country's domestic decisions, detach it from the EU and NATO, and erode both organisations.

To carry out this research, the first section of the article develops a theoretical framework of the GZ and outlines the objectives that can be pursued through this strategy, as well as the means used for it. The second section describes the case-study method used in this research. The third section examines the relations between Russia and the Czech Republic to underline some of the basic assumptions of the clash of narratives, which always constitute the substrate of a GZ. Fourth, the connections and practical outcomes between some top Czech leaders and the Kremlin are analysed. Fifth, a number of Russian interferences – including economic and diplomatic pressures – in the Czech Republic are analysed. The article concludes by testing the hypothesis and making a theoretical contribution that may be useful for other case studies.

Grey Zone as a theoretical framework

A GZ can be defined as the strip that separates peace from war and which has been turned into an ambiguous new battlefield. It is precisely this ambiguity that allows actors to project their power knowing that, if their activities cannot easily be traced back to them, can be plausibly denied, and do not affect the

that it combines low end hidden state involvement with high-end direct, even braggadocio, superpower involvement' (Karber – Thibeault 2016). Debates on the 'Russian new wars' can be found at Gareev (1998), Berzins (2015, 2014), Galeotti (2016) and, above all, the works by Timothy Thomas (2016).

vital interests of their victims, it will be difficult to deploy a clear and effective response by the defenders of the *status quo ante*.

Taken in isolation, these actions that may include support for political opposition, economic coercion, influence activities, cyberattacks, aggressive intelligence, coercive deterrence or *fait accompli* policies would hardly constitute a *casus belli* because they will seek to remain below the threshold of conflict. However, their aggregate long-term effect by using 'salami tactics' (Haddick 2012) – combining actions that provide small gains – may alter existing correlations of forces. The GZ is the natural battleground for traditional political warfare activities, which employ all the instruments at the disposal of a State to weaken, influence and demoralise their adversary politically, militarily, economically or socially (Robinson 2018; Polyakova – Boyer 2018).

These multidimensional strategies have become popularised as hybrid threats.[2] In fact, a GZ may constitute its less kinetic version, as opposed to 'classical' hybrid warfare theories, in which an armed conflict does occur (Hoffman 2012).

In this regard, despite the theoretical, historical and practical limitations of such concepts (Stroker – Whiteside 2020; Echevarria, 2016), there is broad doctrinal consensus on their practicality to describe a wide range of activities to project influence under the threshold of armed conflict, which forms the basis of this research (Chambers 2016; Koven 2016; Freier 2016; Mazarr 2015; Hoffman 2015; Brands 2016; Votel et al., 2016; Baqués 2017; Jordán 2018; Colom, 2019).

The situation in a GZ is one of warring peace, contrary to the principles of *bona fides* destined to govern International Relations, to the point of being *a tertium genus* between situations of genuine (Kantian) peace and war (Schadlow 2014; Brands 2016). Basically, although a GZ may be minimalist in the means employed, it is maximalist in its aims, which are similar to those that would have required the outbreak of a war in the past.

Thus, the concept of a GZ enhances analysis of actions taken by major powers in the context of what some refer to – with evident Clausewitzian traces[3] – as the 'fog of peace' (Goldman 2011) on account of its ambiguity. It is a reasonable instrument in the hands of a state which, although powerful, is not yet powerful enough to impose a military solution on the powers interested in defending the *status quo*.

2 It is important to bear in mind that this concept had its origins in the idea of complex-irregular warfare, but it was the war of 2006 between Hezbollah and Israel that led to its development. In this sense, it was originally coined to define *'…a range of different modes of warfare, including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts including indiscriminate violence and coercion, and criminal disorder'* (Hoffman 2007: 14).

3 The Prussian used to refer to the 'fog of war' to warn about situations that were not predictable in the plans of military leaders, but which affected their conduct. In the context of the GZ, this concept is very useful for alluding to similar situations, but in times of peace.

To gain a better understanding of the GZ, we should analyse its ends, ways and the means used to achieve them. In fact, they are relevant to the extent that a truly operational concept of the GZ can be built from them.

The work carried out throughout our research, reflected in this article, has been developed using them as a framework. The inspiration for its contents has been developed from previous works in which this framework has been outlined (Mazarr 2015; Baqués 2017; Jordán 2018). In this way, it is possible to draw up a package of the ends for a GZ, as well as another aimed at setting out the means used to achieve them.

a) A GZ is a particularly suitable resource for moderately revisionist powers. These are states that question the role of other powers, even the major powers, but are not so uncomfortable with the *status quo* to initiate a war. Their actions are, therefore, based on a certain strategic patience or gradualism (Mazarr 2015: 58–60). This is one of the reasons why they develop such zones as a pressure strategy: the GZ increases its effectiveness in the medium and long-term, although in the short-term is debatable.
b) This revisionism is maximalist in its objectives (Brands 2016). In fact, it is intended to achieve warlike aims. The novelty lies, therefore, in the instruments used for this purpose. According to the dominant doctrine (Mazzar 2015: 91; Freier 2016: 33; Echeverría 2016: 13; Votel 2016: 107), they can range from supporting domestic movements, forcing changes of government or influencing its political leadership when this has geopolitical implications, to even annexing part of another state.
c) Because of (a) and (b), the promoters of a GZ want to avoid a *casus belli*. Thus, those who would seek to promote a GZ do not cross the red lines that would justify an armed response from the defenders of the *status quo*[4]. The key is that these actions must not be (openly) against International Law. If necessary, they will develop in the slippery area of *lawfare* (Echeverria 2016: 38). According to Chambers (2016: 27) the key to the success of a GZ lies in the ambiguity and non-attribution of the actions taken.
d) In accordance with points (a) and (b), a GZ is a way of exerting pressure without military escalation. However, in the event of armed confrontation, those who have taken greater advantage of the GZ are more likely to win. For this reason, a GZ can be the prelude to a war.[5] In other words, a GZ can

4 In this sense, maybe the conventional military balance between the competing parties is an important aspect for assessing the success of a *grey zone*. If the actor developing a *grey zone* also maintains military superiority, it will likely maintain the scalation dominance in any scenario. This possibility might have important practical effects, since it could help to understand and establish relationships between the consolidation of *Anti-Access/Area-Denial* (A2/AD) capabilities with the increase of the GZ activities.

5 An account of the problems related to deterrence in a GZ can be found in Matisek (2017). However, the elimination of Iranian general Qasem Soleimani with no escalatory effects (at least so far) seem to demonstrate that an actor cannot only restore deterrence by climbing a step in the escalation ladder (Byman, 2020), but also restore the strategic initiative and make a GZ disappear, at least temporarily.

be an alternative to war, but it can also be a preparation for it (Mazarr 2015: 58; Chambers 2016: 30–31).

The means are also important for defining a GZ. If some are identified in a particular scenario, a connection to the ends already exposed through a bottom-up approach may be made. In this sense, although there are many shades of grey on the spectrum from white (peace) to black (war), the following can be considered key features[6]:

e) The basis of a GZ is a narrative that influences society as a whole and erodes the credibility of *status quo* advocates. It may take place both within and beyond the geographical borders of the GZ to erode the international legitimacy of *status quo* advocates (Freier 2016: 39–40). It is also useful to have the necessary channels to disseminate it – especially mainstream media and social media – to achieve the desired effects.[7] This narrative also entails the use of propaganda, disinformation and deception (Mazarr 2015: 109–110).

f) Civilians are placed front and centre in a GZ. This is important when it comes to fulfilling the provisions of point (c) concerning the purposes of the GZ: not to generate a *casus belli*. They are on the receiving end of influence and information operations, but they are also the agents of such operations, acting as collaborators, informants, broadcasters or funders of such initiatives (Votel 2016: 40).

g) The GZ incorporates measures that place economic pressure (Freier 2016: 41) on those who defend the *status quo*, weakening their position and discouraging their policies in terms of rational calculation. Such measures are usually legal (subsidies and boycotts), although on occasion they conceal blackmail (total or partial cut-off of supplies or the threat to do so).

h) The proponent of a GZ requires military support/deterrent to avoid the response from those who would defend the *status quo*, even at the cost of

6 Many of the GZ activities can be carried out in the physical world (from the traditional incursions of Chinese fishermen into the disputed islands with Japan to the attacks on Saudi tankers in the Persian Gulf). However, the popularisation of the GZ theories – as well as the current debates on hybrid threats – is related to the activities performed in the virtual domain. This is due to the ambiguity, anonymity, asymmetry, economy and ubiquity that characterise the information sphere. These features allow many actors to project their power asymmetrically by hindering the attribution of their actions, preventing the allocation of legal responsibilities, hampering any retaliation and compromising credibility of the deterrent tools of the victim.

7 The use of disinformation, misinformation and propaganda to influence allied, neutral or adversary, and domestic as well as foreign populations is not new. However, a number of factors – from the information revolution, the penetration of internet in the societies, the changing preferences of the population, the crisis of the traditional mass media to the weaponisation of the information domain – have increased its impact. Now, tactics such as multi-channel propaganda, user profiling to reinforce the filter-bubble, dissemination of fake news or leaking compromised personal information could also be used to undermine trust in political institutions, exploit existing divisions in societies and influence public opinions. There is abundant literature on the subject, but Polyakova and Boyer (2018), and Bradshaw and Howard (2018) provide a general account of the situation.

appearing as aggressors (Baqués 2017: 24–25).[8] This buys them time so that the actions described in points (e), (f) and (g) can take effect.

Methodology

On the basis of this theoretical framework, the article will proceed to examine the specific case of the Czech Republic as a potential Russian GZ. This analysis aims to complement the ongoing debates on disinformation and hybrid threats affecting the country, which Mareš, Holzer and Šmíd (2020) and Daniel and Eberle (2018), among others, provide detailed accounts from academia.

The case study is the most appropriate methodology to address this task. On the one hand, by developing a reasonably generous approach to the object of analysis, case studies offer complex answers, with many nuances, to why and how certain phenomena occur (Chetty 1996). On the other hand, case studies allow for observation of the object with greater analytical depth than the use of qualitative methodology because of the variety of sources and perspectives – narratives, events, tools or actors – used in approaching it. This allows us to develop a research that is certainly robust on an empirical level.

The other advantage of this approach is that it encourages the possibility of constant feedback on the connections between theory and practice. Indeed, case studies make it easier for the theory, approach or perspective applied (the GZ) to be contrasted with the case study (the Czech Republic). But, even if the immediate objective remains the verification of a hypothesis, this methodology can contribute to the improvement of the theory itself (Stake 1994). Indeed, the GZ are a relatively recent field of study, which may be subject to further refinement.

Therefore, case studies are particularly useful for developing a new theory, or for refining an existing one (Eisenhardt 1989: 545; Merriam 1998). In this case, the variant known as 'gaps and holes' will be used (Yin 2014; Ridder 2017) to stress the bidirectional relationship between the existing theory and the case of study. Precisely, this case study may contribute to the improvement of the theoretical frameworks currently available (in this case, the GZ approaches) so that they can be applied to future cases (Pinfield 1986). This theoretical sensitivity has contributed to the choice of this methodology to develop the research from which this article arises.

As indicated so far, the underlying research question is whether Russia has developed a GZ strategy in the Czech Republic. On the one hand, Russia might be using practically all the means described in the theoretical framework to achieve some of the aims of the GZ, and its attempt to have like-minded governments in Prague to condition the Czech role in the main European institutions

8 This might be the situation that arose when the U.S. intervened in Grenada (October 1983) because of the arrival of Cuban workers. However, the USSR was too weak to adopt forceful measures against Washington.

is particularly relevant. On the other hand, the nuances point, firstly, to the advisability of not systematically equating the development of a GZ with its prospective success. This is because the GZ resources, which are important, are still limited compared to those that would be on the agenda in the event of war. Therefore, this case study demonstrates the need for the general GZ theory to be open to Grygiel and Mitchell's (2017: 59–61) hypotheses, according to which these strategies are orchestrated to check possible reactions of rival powers, though always in the spirit of the GZ, that is, without triggering wars. And all this is without prejudice to the parallel interest in damaging the reputation of those affected by the establishment of a GZ.

The Czech Republic case study

Context and evolution

Unlike Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, the population and territories that make up the present-day Czech Republic hold no major historical grievances with the Russian Federation. For centuries, relations between Russia and the territories that were part of the current Czech Republic (v. gr. Bohemia) were friendly, because the Russian Empire was the last defensive bastion of the Slavic peoples in the face of German or Turkish expansionism (Kratochvil 2004: 1).

Thus, after considering that the West betrayed Czechoslovakia in the Munich Agreements (1938) by endorsing the incorporation of Sudeten Germans into Germany, not only did the outcome of World War II – with the Soviet expulsion of German troops – not pose a problem for most Czechs, it also left a feeling of déjà vu. This situation facilitated the acceptance of the political, economic and social changes that occurred in Czechoslovakia after 1945… for a few years at any rate.

The problem – which had lain dormant for years – was rooted in the totalitarian nature of the Soviet regime and its thirst to control the States that it considered satellites. The experience of the Prague Spring (1968), therefore, gave rise to an enduring conceptual shift between the two countries (Benyumov 2018). Russia's image as protector has become one of a State that sparks suspicion and fear among much of the Czech population.

The Russian narrative continues to emphasise the 'liberation' they provided at the end of World War II, skirting around – and even omitting all together – any reference to episodes such as Hungary (1956) or Czechoslovakia (1968) (Walker 2018). Moreover, the Czech Republic remains an important and valued trading partner, while the Slavic nature of the Czech people – as well as the fact that Catholicism has barely taken hold there[9] – helps Russia to maintain this favourable viewpoint, beyond any historical disagreements.

9 Indeed, according to data from the US think tank PEW for 2017, 72% of the Czech population profess no belief, while 27% declare themselves to be Catholic and 1% orthodox (Cooperman 2017: 20).

Finally, the geographical situation of the Czech Republic is highly valued by Russian criminal networks – along with Ukrainian, Armenian, Uzbek and Chechen networks – to carry on their illegal activities (Security Information Service [BIS] 2004). Since the fall of the Iron Curtain, these networks have used the country as a meeting point or transit route for drug, weapons and human trafficking. However, these criminal networks, which collude to a certain extent with Czech economic, financial and political sectors (Bugajski 2004: 152–60; Wesolowsky 2003: 15)[10], appear to be collaborating with Russian security operations in terms of intelligence, influence, financing, murder or cyberoperations (Galeotti 2017).[11] This is relevant to our work, since the use of *proxies* to project power makes it difficult to attribute actions and contributes to the consolidation of the GZ (Jordán 2018).

Russian foreign policy towards the Czech Republic has undergone several phases since the end of the Cold War: An initial phase (1993–97) of discontent and even pressure, followed by a certain degree of disinterest (1997–99) before culminating, from the year 2000 onwards, in a kind of 'normal relationship' once the irreversibility of Czech integration into Western security structures had been accepted (Holzer et al. 2020: 56–58; Kratochvíl 2004: 2–4).[12] This helped to defuse some of the accumulated misgivings, since, although at the start of the cold-war Russia was regarded as an enemy by the majority of the Czech population,[13] it gradually became for many *'...a partner in economic and energy matters'* (Kratochvil – Kuchyňková 2010: 196).[14]

However, at the end of the last decade, this pragmatism – accompanied by a certain degree of concern in the Czech Republic about the health of Russia's democracy and its respect for human rights – in dealing with bilateral

10 Although the sources underscore this political connivance through action or omission, it is worth noting that *Transparency International* assigned the country 56 points out of 100 in 2019, making it the 44th least corrupt country in the world. Available on the webpage: https://www.transparency.org/cpi2019 (09 November 2020).

11 Although intelligence reports refer to criminal networks from the former USSR and their links with their countries of origin, it was not until the 2010 report that the Czech security services suggested: *'Contacts of officers of Russian intelligence services with persons whose past is associated with Russian-language organised criminal structures and their activities in the Czech Republic are somewhat disturbing'* (BIS 2011: 10). This should not come as any great surprise, since contacts between organised crime and Russian intelligence services were established by the tsarist police in the nineteenth century and maintained during the Soviet era.

12 Czech integration into NATO was one of the main objectives of President Havel's foreign policy, as opposed to maintaining Finland-style neutrality or security relations with Moscow. Although this goal was achieved in 1999, Russia had tried to prevent Czechoslovakia from falling into the allied orbit, including military transfers to modernise its armed forces, something that occurred once again in the 2000s.

13 Indeed, in 2003 – one year before Czech secret services publicly exposed that Russia had begun to engage in influence activities – only 3% of the country's population was suspicious of their Eastern neighbour (Bugajski 2004: 153).

14 Soon, issues related to the economy, energy, science and industry would become the main targets of Russian espionage from the mid-1990s onwards (BIS 2009: 5).

relations became more complicated. Firstly, because of the agreement between Washington and Prague to deploy components of the US missile defence shield in Czech territory (Paszewski 2013)[15]. Motivated by Russian misgivings about the real purpose of this system aimed at protecting the US from Iranian and North Korean ballistic missiles, and by its loss of influence in Central and Eastern Europe, this controversy reached a peak between 2007 and 2009, fading away shortly thereafter, once the programme had been cancelled. But Moscow took note of Prague's role as Washington's ally in the region. This explains why Russian grey activities in the Czech Republic seek to generate distrust of the Atlantic Alliance and the European Union, to demonstrate to Russian public opinion that Moscow has allies in the West, and to regain the influence lost after the end of the Cold War (Morris et al. 2019: 63; Waisová 2020).[16]

The second issue was the discovery that the Kremlin had resumed – though it may never have actually ceased – *'…the Soviet practice of using active measures to promote its foreign-policy interests'* (BIS 2009: 5). As early as the 1990s, Czech information services observed that the number of workers at the Russian embassy in Prague was unusually high and that this could be due to Russia's determination to establish an espionage network in the country. At the same time, they detected activities to *'…influence decisions in local governments, spread false information, erode the country's credibility abroad, and undermine citizens' confidence in its authorities'* (BIS 1997, quoted in Bugajski 2004: 160). These were in addition to the 'standard' efforts to attract collaborators among extremist groups, police forces, military personnel, local representatives, politicians and businessmen, or political, military, scientific, technical and economic espionage (BIS 2016: 8).

However, it was from 2000 onwards – coinciding with Putin's arrival in the Kremlin[17] – that they detected a surge in these efforts among officials, politicians

15 Washington intended to deploy an X-band radar at a base 150 km from the Czech capital. The conservative Topolánek government (2006–09) felt that the agreement would improve relations with Washington, strengthen the Czech position in European defence, and facilitate the development of the allied anti-missile system. This decision was criticised by communists and social democrats, conditionally supported by the greens, endorsed by liberals and disapproved of by the majority of citizens. Criticism was levelled against the potential effects of the radar on the environment and health of local residents, the legal status of US troops, the risks of terrorist attacks, and the limited economic or technological compensation. Although the agreement was eventually signed in 2008, parliamentary ratification was postponed several times until the fall of the Topolánek government and Obama's entry into the White House archived this project definitively. Dodge (2020) offers a comprehensive account of this issue.

16 In 2016, Czech security services stated that Russian information campaigns were pursuing six major objectives: (1) weaken the media (through infiltration and the spread of propaganda and disinformation), (2) strengthen the news resilience of the Russian population (by fabricating information from Czech sources for the Russian audience), (3) influence Czech perceptions and undermine their resilience, (4) promote social tensions (creating *proxies* or supporting extremist actors), (5) demeaning Czech support for NATO and the EU (undermining Czech-Polish relations, defaming both organisations or spreading rumours of war with Russia) and (6) damaging Ukraine's reputation in order to isolate it internationally (BIS 2016: 9).

17 Bugajski (2004: 160) argues that there is a direct relationship between the arrival of Putin and the rise in the activities of Russian intelligence services.

(especially former Communist Party members), military personnel, businessmen, and members of the Russian diaspora (BIS 2004: 8)[18]. Although they believed that these movements sought to improve Russian intelligence about Czech politics and the allied defence, and to strengthen Moscow's economic influence[19], in 2008 they corroborated that Moscow had taken active measures (*Aktivnyye Meropriyatiya*) to influence, disinform and potentially destabilise the country[20]. Not only was Russian intelligence supporting *proxies*, creating front organisations, and engaging agents of influence among the Czech population, it was also infiltrating internationalist or civic groups with false-flag tactics. They were blackmailing citizens into collaborating and had begun to spread false narratives, amplify socio-political *cleavages*, and influence the country's political and business decisions (BIS 2009: 5; Waisová 2020). Over time, these activities became more systematic, exploiting cyberspace, communication platforms, and nationalist, populist or anti-immigration movements, seeking social polarisation, political radicalisation, distrust of institutions and subverting the existing constitutional order (BIS 2019: 8–10; Facon 2017; Janda – Víchová 2017).

The final trigger was the start of Vladimir Putin's second presidential term (2012–), which cooled relations between the two countries on account of Russia's growing assertiveness in its area of influence. This culminated in the annexation of Crimea (2014) and military intervention in eastern Ukraine (2014–). Since then, more and more anti-Russian voices have been heard among Czech politicians (Benyumov 2018; Walker 2018).[21]

But Moscow was already implementing its own plan to counter that mood. In the years between the fall of the Czechoslovak Communist regime and Putin's return to power (2012), at least two political parties consistently held pro-Kremlin positions – the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM) and the Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD). Similarly, figures such as Miloš

18 However, the 2008 report states that these activities – focused especially on MPs, political advisers and the business sector – date back to the early 1990s (BIS 2009: 5–6).

19 More specifically, they would seek to strengthen Russian-Czech trade relations, obtain relevant information to win public contracts or support the conclusion of contracts in an illegal manner (BIS 2004: 8). In fact, several sources have linked the country's current president Miloš Zeman to these practices since the early 2000s (Bugajski 2004; Wesolowski 2003).

20 Used extensively during the Cold War, they not only practised disinformation, propaganda, manipulation and the counterfeiting of documentation by means of open, semi-covert or clandestine media, they also used a wide range of *proxies* (parties, unions, or associations with accredited links to Moscow), front organisations (scientific, cultural or pacifist entities with no apparent relationship with the Kremlin), economic manipulation, blackmail, agents of influence (who would use their position to secretly support Moscow), or collaborators who would consciously or unconsciously support the Soviet narrative (Bittman 1985).

21 This does not mean that the country has neglected its economic pragmatism, as many continue to consider – especially in the aftermath of the most recent financial crisis – that Russia is an important trading partner with which ties should be strengthened in order to reduce Czech dependence on European markets (Jirušek – Kuchyňková – Vlček 2020: 120–21).

Zeman – President of the country since 2013 – were already showing promise in this direction (Kratochvíl – Kuchyňková 2010: 197).

Indeed, over these years, many pro-Russian Czech politicians have struck a balance in interpreting the most sensitive historical events, avoiding burning bridges with Moscow. According to this interpretation, the Prague Spring would not have been the result of Russian aggression as a nation, but a Soviet-style Communist aggression that has nothing to do with the current Russian Federation (Walker 2018). By disentangling these two variables, the dilemma is removed from the equation, although this cannot be sustained in geopolitical terms.

On the basis of this interpretation of the facts, there is a clash of narratives, beyond the positions defended by its governors, although, logically, these positions also pick up on various sensitivities with regard to Russia. Václav Havel – President from 1993 to 2003 – had a good personal relationship with Mikhail Gorbachev, and then Boris Yeltsin, but his preferences – and his interpretation of history – were closer to those of the United States and Western Europe, with all that implies (Walker 2018). Today's leaders, on the other hand, advocate very different positions (Holzer et al. 2020: 79–82).

Russia's strong men in the Czech Republic?

Miloš Zeman has been President of the Czech Republic since 2013 and was previously Prime Minister (1998–2002). The current Prime Minister Andrej Babiš (2017–) has followed a similar path. Both come from communism and are currently active in populist parties that have gradually moved away from traditional formations (Hanley – Vachudova, 2018). Their biographies are important and contain significant data for our research.

Zeman was a member of the Czechoslovak Communist Party from 1968 to 1970. After a few years without displaying any obvious militancy, he rose up through the ranks of the ČSSD until he eventually left to found a social democratic party in 2009 – the Party of Civic Rights – Zeman's people (SPOZ) founded in his image and likeness.

His messages have been controversial, calling Islam the 'enemy' and 'anti-civilisation' (CTK 2011), statements that extrapolate any legitimate debate about the most appropriate migration policies. In fact, Zeman praises any move the Kremlin makes, either in Crimea, or in Ukraine, denying Russian intervention in the latter case (Ereli 2017). Zeman says that there is simply a 'civil war' in Ukraine (Špalková – Janda, 2018: 2). But this 'simply' – ignoring Moscow's support for the Donbass separatists and its participation in hostilities – clearly underscores the problem raised in his speech[22].

22 If he views the conflict in Ukraine as a civil war, Zeman cannot defend Russian intervention, because in this type of conflict foreign intervention is only legitimate when it seeks to counter previous actions by States that support the other side.

These facts could be due to his Communist past, to the consideration of Russia as the last bastion of the West, or due to his own sympathies towards Putin. However, there are other factors that explain Zeman's ties to Moscow. We cannot rule out the possibility that, as a former member of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, he was co-opted by Russian intelligence in the 1990s. Furthermore, Zeman was involved in several corruption scandals when he was Prime Minister (1998–2002). Cases such as the unjust awarding procedure for the contract to build the D–47 highway, or the appointment of the Falkon Capital financial group to manage debts owing to Russia (Bugajski 2004: 156–57) link him with organisations that maintain ties with the Kremlin and probable relationships with organised crime.

He is notoriously a friend to Russian tycoons, including former diplomat Vladimir Yakunin, former director of Russian railways, which currently sponsors the *Rhodes Forum*, one of the most active organisations in the struggle between the Kremlin and Western institutions (Morris et al. 2019: 64). Or the friendship that links him to Martin Nejedlý, executive director of the Czech branch of the Russian company *Lukoil* (Ereli 2017), in which he owns a 40% share, whose money has been used to finance the election campaigns that Zeman himself has won (Špalková – Janda, 2018: 3). In fact, even when Nejedlý's company racked up multi-million-dollar debts – partly because of these extraordinary outlays – these debts were diligently cancelled by *'…Lukoil headquarters in Moscow'* (Špalková – Janda, 2018: 3). Such is the bond between the two that Nejedlý has become Zeman's chief adviser on international policy matters, accompanying him on official trips (on a diplomatic passport), ahead of many public office-holders linked to the Czech ministerial structure (Waisová 2020). Similarly, not only does Zeman feature so regularly in the Russian media that, like the TASS news agency, they present him as an ally to Putin or a counterweight to Washington (Špalková – Janda 2018: 2, Helmus et al. 2018),[23] but also he himself is a vector of disinformation, repeating many of the false narratives published by alternative media and platforms[24] with possible links with the Kremlin (Janda – Víchová, 2017; Krejčí 2017).

Though his friendships with Russian tycoons, dubious public practices with actors that have ties with Moscow, or his likely relationships with Russian organised crime do not point to any solid conclusions that Zeman's actions are politically motivated or allow us to accuse him (or excuse him) – using Soviet terminology –

23 Although the historical *TASS* cannot be compared with the popular and controversial *Sputnik* or *RT*, specifically devised to be a soft power tool to promote Russia's image internationally and erode the West's monopoly on news, it should be noted that this official news agency contributes to the country's information objectives. For a detailed account on this ecosystem, Herpen (2016).

24 For a broad account of the media and alternative platforms – which, in many cases, work to spread grey or black propaganda that will then be reproduced on social media as well as by media such as RT or *Sputnik*, thus making it difficult to attribute responsibility to the Kremlin – dedicated to such tasks, see Smoleňová (2015: 7–13) or Krejčí (2017). For an analysis of the ecosystem, see Helmus et al. (2018).

of being an agent of Russian influence,[25] nonetheless these actors, dynamics and practices that allow the Kremlin to plausibly deny its responsibility are still part of its traditional ecosystem of influence (Whitmore 2018; Galeotti 2017).

Therefore, when Zeman announced his willingness to hold a referendum for the Czech Republic's exit from the European Union and the Atlantic Alliance (Ereli 2017), many concluded that Zeman could be acting under Moscow's designs and that the Kremlin could be ultimately responsible for this movement. Because, as many sources – including Czech secret services (BIS 2016: 9) – had indicated prior to these statements, one of the objectives of Russian actions of influence in Eastern Europe is to dismantle the European security architecture built after the fall of the Iron Curtain (Polyakova et al. 2016: 4). As a result, several experts refer to Miloš Zeman as the Kremlin's 'Trojan Horse' in the Czech Republic (Špalková – Janda, 2018), using a metaphor that had already been used generically to refer to other European leaders who systematically support the Kremlin's activities on the old continent (Polyakova et al. 2016). In any case, either because Zeman is a devotee of Putin, because he has personal interests beyond political considerations, because he could be an agent of influence in the service of Russia or because he might have been the object of a campaign of reflexive control to influence his decisions,[26] Zeman's actions clearly benefit the Kremlin directly or indirectly.

For his part, Prime Minister Andrej Babiš – dubbed the 'Czech Donald Trump' by the press – is also a former member of the Czechoslovak Communist Party of the Soviet era (in his case, from 1980 onwards), but he might also have worked as a secret agent during the Communist era (Tait, 2019). However, after the Velvet Revolution, Babiš became a business tycoon, founding *Agrofert*, a holding company that encompasses more than two hundred and fifty companies in sectors such as agriculture, chemicals, construction, energy and even the media. A traditional recipient of European subsidies, this business conglomerate recently suffered a major setback when the European Commission demanded the repayment of £17.6M it had received unduly – as there was a conflict of interest, because Babiš continued to head up *Agrofert* – from Brussels between 2017 and 2019 (Transparency International 2019).

At the same time, Babiš – with personal assets of $ 4,600M, making him one of the richest people in the country[27] – faces additional charges for having

25 In general terms, an agent of influence uses their public position to secretly support Moscow, representing one of the traditional components of the aforementioned active measures (Bittman 1985).

26 Without citing this idea put forward by the USSR during the Cold War to try to influence – with limited success – the decision-making processes of allied governments, the Czech annual intelligence report for 2018 states that: *'The key Russian goal is to manipulate decision-making processes and the individuals responsible for the decision-making in order to force the counterparty to conduct activities to weaken itself'* (BIS 2019: 6).

27 According to Forbes magazine in September 2020. Available at: https://www.forbes.com/profile/andrej-babis/#77669a8021ee (28 September 2020).

defrauded more than €2M in European funding (Janíček 2019). These accusations are not new, and indeed Babiš had already been charged with tax fraud as the Minister of Finance, forcing him to resign in May 2017 (Ereli 2017; Kopeček 2016). Not only is Babiš one of the richest people in the country, he also founded his own party – the Alliance of Dissatisfied Citizens (ANO). Purportedly created to fight corruption, this populist group, tailored to the aims of Babiš in 2011, is supported in the legislature by social democrats and communists, that is, by those who have traditionally been pro-Russian (Tait 2019).

Hence, it is plausible that the Kremlin would support these candidates. Indeed, during the 2018 presidential campaign, certain unusual events occurred, which Czech researchers use as proof of external interference (Krejčí – Víchová – Janda, 2018). It was not the first time that misinformation entered the fray[28]. In the 2013 presidential election, candidate Karel Schwarzenberg, who fought against Zeman himself, was accused of having Nazi ancestors, and in the 2017 parliamentary elections the Social Democratic party was accused of trying to sell Czech lithium reserves to foreign corporations (Krejčí 2017). In this case, the rumour emerged from the alternative website *Aeronet.cz* – hosted in the Netherlands by an Indian client providing services to Russian companies (Weisburd 2015) and spreading pro-Kremlin narratives (Gazda – Šaur 2020: 186) – and was introduced into the country's mainstream media by Babiš, who used it as a weapon against the social democratic candidates. This was precisely one of the elements that explain ANO's victory in these elections (Krejčí 2017).

In the 2018 presidential election, polls predicted a very close result between Miloš Zeman and Jiří Drahoš, an independent pro-European and American-friendly candidate (Holzer et al. 2020). What broke out over those weeks was a fiercely fought dirty campaign of disinformation against Drahoš. The parliamentary elections of the previous year had already put this issue on the political agenda, and the government had opened the Centre against Terrorism and Hybrid Threats – dismissed by Zeman as pointless expenditure and a censorship body (Reuters 2017) – to combat disinformation. However, it returned to the fore when Drahoš was accused of being a former member of the Czechoslovak secret police during the Communist era, and it was argued that if he came to power he would allow immigration without limits. An accusation of paedophilia was even levelled against him (Krejčí – Víchová – Janda, 2018: 1). He was also accused of being a mason, of belonging to the *Club of Rome,* and discredited as a scientist and academic (he was president of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic between 2009 and 2017) claiming that he appropriated the work

28 A comprehensive analysis of the 71 Czech and 6 foreign communication portals operating in the country and publishing fraudulent content can be found in Klingová (2018). It should be noted that the Czech site of the Russian news agency *Sputnik* (*cz.sputniknews.com*) is the most visited site in the country, while *Aeronet.cz* is the fourth and *Novarepublica.cz* is the eighth, with 806,000 and 564,200 visitors respectively.

of his colleagues. He was even criminalised for being funded by the controversial George Soros. Although Soros has become a mainstay of the 'conspiranoia' narrative – as we are also seeing in our country – this issue was irrelevant to Czech public opinion, quickly denied by *Hospodářské Noviny*, and no candidate used this argument to attack Drahoš.

With regard to these propaganda activities, *Aeronet.cz* and *Novarepublika.cz* were particularly active sites, regularly included in European and allied reports on disinformation, for disseminating pro-Kremlin fake news and narratives[29]. However, unlike previous elections, there was propaganda paid for by private donors in newspapers (perhaps because, as in many countries, much of the adult population continues to get their news from traditional media), and social media such as *Facebook* played a major role in encouraging the users themselves to spread disinformation.

The issue that hurt Drahoš the most during the campaign was his portrayal to Czech public opinion as pro-immigration – a typical Russian misinformation issue given its ability to divide society, especially Eastern Europeans – when, in reality, his speech only condemned unrestricted 'economic immigration'. Although neither *Novarepublika.cz* nor the authorship of the disinformation campaign can be attributed (Syrovátka – Hroch, 2018), there are sources suggesting that some adverts carried in the traditional press were financed by Russian and Chinese funds (Krejčí – Víchová – Janda, 2018: 2).

One of the main characteristics of information and news activities carried out within a GZ is ambiguity. The lack of accredited sources and conclusive evidence prevent a firm conclusion from being reached – beyond the role played by *Aeronet.cz* which has circumstantial links with Russia – with regard to external interference or that this propaganda campaign would correspond to Zeman's own malpractice. If such interference occurred, it was limited, simple, and cheap because, unlike the US – and to some extent French – presidential elections that might suggest the Russian modus operandi in this regard, the popular news portal *cz.sputniknews.com* owned by the Russian news agency *Sputnik* – and the focus of misinformation – did not get fully involved in the propaganda campaign, and there are no recorded cases of hack & leak or data access and filtering in forums, news aggregators, online platforms or mainstream media or their subsequent amplification through social media campaigns (Jeangéne et al. 2018).

There is also no record – although it was disseminated – of how adverts were bought on social media such as Twitter or Facebook, or of the organised use of trolls to interact with other online users and automated *bots* that amplify the

29 In this regard, see the reports published on the EU's External Action European Service portal *EUvsDisinfo* (https://euvsdisinfo.eu/) or the reports of the NATO – linked Centre of Excellence for Strategic Communication (https://www.stratcomcoe.org).

impact of the former to expand the propaganda. In other words, this intense propaganda campaign against the opposition candidate cannot be attributed to Moscow (or Beijing), but their involvement cannot be ruled out either. This is precisely the ambiguity we were referring to when we defined grey zones.

Whether this information campaign was a decisive factor in the 2018 elections (Krejčí – Víchová – Janda 2018) or not (Syrovátka – Hroch 2018), or simply helped to sow the seeds of mistrust with regard to the opposition candidate, Zeman won the election by just 150,000 votes, keeping him in power as Russia-friendly leader…

Other tools in the Czech grey zone

The more or less well-founded suspicions of interference in electoral and political processes are becoming a classic trope when Russia is discussed (Jeangéne et al. 2018). But a GZ cannot be defined, identified or catalogued based solely on the use of this tool of influence. As noted previously, these situations underscore the debate between different narratives or accounts about the Czech Republic's historical relations with Russia. However, there are other tactics, techniques and procedures in place beyond political influence, propaganda manipulation or interference in electoral processes that can be included – together with the use of *proxies* with links with Moscow, cultural or social entities without any apparent relationship with Russia, blackmail, or direct and indirect collaborators (Bittman 1985) – within the traditional raft of Russian active measures. These include activities typically used in political warfare (Robinson et al. 2018).

This article focuses on economic pressure and military threat[30], since, as pointed out in the theoretical framework, these are two of the mechanisms most present in GZ (Freier 2016; Baqués 2017; Chambers 2016; Jacob 2017). In fact, one could suspect that a combination of both measures is now taking place in the Czech Republic. This combination is, according to experts such as Jordán (2018: 132), the best option for a GZ, as well as the best indication that this type of scenario is ongoing.

Starting in 2008, coinciding with the signing of the agreement between Washington and Prague to install a component of the US missile defence shield on Czech soil, Russia not only used its traditional energy weapon – cutting off oil supplies from the Druzhba pipeline (Jirušek – Kuchyňková – Vlček 2020: 125) – but also launched an economic offensive to acquire critical Czech infrastructure. This was not the first time this tactic had been deployed. In 1994 and 2002 Russia tried unsuccessfully – perhaps because of the nearness of the Soviet past and the Czech Republic's determination to approach the West (Jirušek – Kuchyňková – Vlček, 2020: 152) – to acquire Czech gas infrastructure. This

30 A comprehensive list of tools that can be used in the grey zone can be found in Jordán (2018).

generated the typical dual interpretation: support for Czech income or a new form of servitude?

In particular, Russia tried to acquire the Czech airline (Czech Airlines – ČSA) and Prague airport. The Czech government wanted to privatise the company, and the main candidate to win the contract was *Aeroflot*, 51% owned by the Russian State. However, the contest was declared null and void in 2009 for no apparent reason. It is speculated that this was for security reasons, since this decision was reached after Aeroflot's offer was discussed in the lower house Security Commission (Kratochvíl – Kuchyňková, 2010: 203).[31] Finally, in 2013 it was the South Korean company Korean Air that acquired 44% of ČSA shares with the approval of the Czech government and the airline itself. Russia tried to do something similar with the public company *Transgas,* which imported energy – distributed in the country by the Russian company *Gazprom* after Zeman signed an agreement with Russia in 1998 (Posaner 2019: 251) – and which had been operated by the German RWE consortium since 2009. This attempt was also unsuccessful, for similar reasons, at least in the short term (Kratochvíl – Kuchyňková 2010: 198).[32]

In addition to these movements, private Russian actors with possible links to the Kremlin also tried – sometimes successfully – to acquire technology firms, the media or Internet providers, feasibly to facilitate Russian intelligence and subversion (Bugajski 2004: 160)[33], a possibility that would support the achievement of Russian influence objectives identified by the Czech secret services (BIS 2016: 9). In any case, Czech intelligence not only warns that certain countries – implicitly referring to Russia or China – use their businesses to serve political, military or intelligence purposes (BIS 2019: 15), it also admits that many companies with Russian capital violate tax, regulatory or contractual rules, this being *'…the relationship of capital with the "grey zone" of the legal system'* (BIS 2016: 5).

However, beyond these activities, which at the time absorbed the attention of many media channels, what truly worries the Czech authorities is much more structural. Because, like its neighbours in Central and Eastern Europe, which are dependent on Russian hydrocarbons, the Czech Republic has suffered several supply interruptions since the 1990s, motivated by a wide range of circumstances, from domestic affairs to technical problems and disputes

31 The 2008 intelligence report also covered this privatisation but highlighted another issue: '…activities of potential bidders interested in the privatization […] showed a dramatic increase. The interested parties were focusing mainly on developing contacts with relevant government officials and with the companies to be privatized, their objective being to use the contacts to acquire information or to build a better starting position compared to others' (BIS 2009: 4).

32 In 2015, *RWE* sold its oil and gas unit to Russian tycoon Mikhail Fridman, although this did not necessarily signify intent on the part of the Russian government.

33 In 2018, Czech secret services detected that the Federal Security Service (FSB) had attempted to create its own network – taking advantage of the infrastructures of these Internet providers – to carry out its cyberactivities in Europe (BIS 2019: 6–7).

over transport charges (Jirušek – Vlček, 2015), which grew between 2007 and 2009, due to Russian pressures resulting from the signing of the US missile shield agreement, based on the supplies cut that revolved around *Transneft* (Morris et al. 2019: 68)[34]. This scenario coincides with the situation outlined by Chambers (2016: 20) in which such unlawful pressures do have political aims, not merely economic objectives[35]. The advantage of the GZ is that these measures can be taken in peacetime, that is, without apparent hostility, graduating them in the form of small – but escalating – doses (Jacobs, 2017: 80). In this way, it is very unlikely for the affected party to deduce a *casus belli* from those apparently isolated events and small doses. But, as it can be seen, the effects of these measures are serious on both internal and geopolitical scenarios.

Unlike some of its neighbours, the Czech Republic is not entirely dependent on Russian gas because of its strategy regarding energy diversification and the links forged with Western Europe in the 1990s (Jirušek – Kuchyňková – Vlček. 2020: 121–22). Consequently, a significant part of its energy supply comes from other sources such as Norway, accounting for more than 20% of the total imported by the country (Kratochvíl – Kuchyňková 2010: 203–204). Although it is estimated that dependence on Russian gas is still between 40% and 50%, in terms of oil this figure rises to 90%, the bulk of which is transported through the Druzhba pipeline. Therefore, despite the efforts made so far, in one way or another, Czech energy insecurity is still patent, as the country's intelligence reminds us every year, clearly stating *'...it is necessary to try to reduce its dependence on Russian sources'* (BIS 2009: 4). In other words, Prague continues to face important limitations when it comes to rolling out policies that displease Moscow excessively. Perhaps for this reason, the radar referred to previously was not ultimately installed. This may indicate to what extent the Czech economic dependence is being exploited by Russia. The fact that some of the country's most important companies and infrastructures may fall into Russian (or Chinese) hands would increase the country's economic dependence. As said before, the use of economic means – in this case, mergers and acquisitions – to increase the political influence is an important characteristic of a GZ. In this sense, the successful pressure exerted by Russia would be a typical example of GZ 'public policy management' (Morris 2019: 68), despite the fact that some internal factors can prevent the GZ from displaying all the effects desired by its generator.

34 The company argued that there was no political intentionality, and that everything was due to technical problems, and that the fact it coincided with geopolitical issues was purely coincidental. But, interestingly, this took place parallel to official statements about the possibility of this radar system becoming a target for Russian missiles.

35 In other words, if the objectives were strictly economic, it is likely that Russia would not engage in these practices because of its short-term negative effects. In this way, the GZ theory is useful to deduce political or geopolitical intentions from apparently isolated and limited economic actions.

Furthermore, Russia is a good trading partner to the Czech Republic, as one of the main importers of its products, mainly automobiles, chemical compounds and food (Kratochvíl – Kuchyňková 2010: 203). Whether because of this reason or due to his affinities with Moscow, Zeman was very critical of the sanctions imposed by the International Community on Russia following the annexation of Crimea. Although he argued that bilateral trade flows would suffer, that sanctions would harm Czech industry and Russian countermeasures would harm the country's farmers, the fact is that they have had little effect on the country's income (Coufalová – Žídek, 2020: 99–100). Therefore, did these criticisms respond to legitimate fears or were they due to other factors?

With regard to military threats, we must bear in mind that tensions in Russia were triggered in around the year 2007, owing to the possible deployment of the US missile shield. Indeed, local experts point out that an era of cold peace was ushered in, which has not completely disappeared even today. When this agreement was signed in the summer of 2008, Russian political and military authorities launched threats against the country and its military facilities, in particular against the radar deployment base and its associated systems. Starting with newly appointed President Dmitri Medvédev (2008–12), not given to public outbursts, but who declared that there would be 'reprisals' if this project were implemented; continuing with a surge in Russian secret services activity (BIS 2009: 5); and culminating in the statements made by General Nikolay Solovstov, the then head of the strategic missile force, who suggested that these facilities could become targets for their vectors, words that coincided with the testing of the new intercontinental missiles, the RS–12M *Topol* (SS–25 *Sickle*) (Kratochvíl – Kuchyňková 2010: 198).

The credibility of these threats was increased – perhaps unexpectedly, projecting the shadow of events from 1968 (BIS 2009: 5) – following Russia's military operation in Georgia shortly thereafter. Even though the missile shield crisis came to an end a decade ago, the events in Crimea and Donbass have not helped to ease the situation. However, although these fears remain present in Czech society, the country has been a member of NATO since 1999, so such action would certainly cause the invocation of Article V of the North Atlantic Treaty. Hence the importance of the GZ remaining under the threshold of armed conflict: it allows Russia to maintain its strategic initiative, to keep its escalation control and makes the invocation of Article V – and even Article IV of political consultations – virtually impossible.

Finally, although the ambiguity, anonymity and ubiquity of cyberspace make it a domain widely used to project power in grey zones, the cyberactivities that can be attributed to Russia against Czech interests do not warrant this label for the time being. Although the country experiences cyberattacks on its infrastructure or services every year, none of them has been attributed to Moscow. But Russia has been proven to be engaged in numerous cyberespionage tasks

(though they affect data confidentiality and integrity, in fact they are not cyberattacks) and to have created a hub from which to launch cyberoperations against other European countries (BIS 2019: 8–9). Carried out by the *Advanced Persistent Threat* (APT–28) group of hackers linked to Russian military intelligence (Fireeye 2017)[36], these campaigns target military personnel, public administration (especially the ministries of foreign affairs and defence), the political class or the industrial sector, to expose sensitive data. In addition to being used for political, scientific, military or industrial purposes, they have also been used to slander, disinform or blackmail individuals and collectives (BIS 2017: 27), a standard Soviet active measure.

Likewise, although Russian cybercrime – often used to support the Kremlin's objectives (Galeotti 2017) – operates widely in the country, it seems to focus on lucrative activities. This would indicate that, while Russia is widely using the information environment to project its influence over the Czech Republic, its activities in cyberspace focus on intelligence (in some cases proving its authorship) and support for active measures. However, it is likely that, when Moscow deems it necessary, it will be able to use its cybernetic means to launch large-scale attacks on critical infrastructure and services, whilst plausibly denying its authorship.

Conclusions: Is a Russian grey zone being constructed in the Czech Republic?

When we refer to the possibility that a grey zone is being created, we cannot be satisfied simply by the isolated appearance of some of its ingredients. The possibility of creating a false positive means this would not be enough to verify the creation of a GZ. However, the combination of these ingredients would confirm this hypothesis. In that respect, what is happening in the Czech Republic does not appear to go unnoticed among analysts. The most relevant is the spatial and temporal combination (in this particular case, the last decades in the Czech Republic) of several of the best-known tools for a GZ. It is not only a matter of having 'Trojan horses' in the Czech Republic, but of having their discourse (the narrative promoted by those leaders) combined with economic and military pressures generated by the great power interested in creating that GZ.

In 2017 – nine years after Prague warned that Russia had taken up active measures once more to influence the country – a report commissioned by the European Parliament admitted the existence of irregular activities on Czech territory encouraged from Russian soil. It refers to cyber threats, links with political parties and leaders, and powerful propaganda generated mainly through

36 Paradoxically, Czech sources hardly refer to APT–29, which is linked to the FSB and it is the other relevant actor in the Russian cyberactivities.

Russian media broadcasting in Czech (Façon 2017). Although the activities of *Sputnik*, which garners a huge audience in the country and which acts as the Kremlin's conveyor belt, are mentioned, perhaps more important are the vast amalgam of online media that cover up their origin, build grey propaganda, and replicate fake news. The report also mentions the existence of organisations that, like the *Institute of Slavic Strategic Studies,* promote and participate in Pan-Slavic congresses, networking in favour of Moscow with a view to strengthening the growing network of NGOs aligned with its aims (Morris 2019: 67). The narratives that have been spread include the supposed existence of a 'nuclear cloud' from France, the imminent – but hypothetical – merger of Czech and German military units, and all manner of messages seeking to discredit the European Union and the Atlantic Alliance. Therefore, section (e) described in the theoretical framework is more than fulfilled.

However, it seems paradoxical that such reports, which discover with astonishment the hybrid threats coming from Moscow, seem to bypass the traditional recipes of political warfare and, above all, the long history of active measures to influence, subvert and destabilise societies. As the Czech secret services first warned in 2008, this technique seems clearly exposed, and not only for the Czech Republic: recruitment of collaborators, support for civil organisations (section f of the theoretical framework), parties and leaders acting as fifth-columnists, aggressive intelligence gathering, dissemination of narratives and support for activities that can divide and radicalise society, economic blackmail (especially with natural gas and oil, which fits in with section g of the theoretical framework) and even military threat (section h). What is new, however, in cases such as that of the Czech Republic, is that Russia seems willing to generate such pressure in pursuit of its national interests. Why? Given Zeman-Babiš's agenda – exploiting anti-European feeling in society with siren songs in the form of Czexit style referendums – it seems that the answer is clearly contained in a simple syllogism: weaken the European Union and the Atlantic Alliance to increase influence in the country as if it were a zero-sum game (which coincides with Russian ambitions to control the Czech agenda by influencing its choice of governors, explained in section b of the theoretical framework). For a decadent and insecure power such as Russia, Allied and European expansions are seen as a (false) offensive spiral initiated by the West, against which, given the lack of military response capacity, it has opted for soft measures, which do not cause an outbreak of hostilities (section c of the theoretical framework) even though the price to be paid is that the engineered influence is achieved very slowly (section a of the theoretical framework).

However, each GZ scenario has its own characteristics. Some make the development of a GZ more complicated, or more laborious, or more time-consuming, while, in other cases, they can facilitate its development. In the case of the Czech Republic, there certainly are such facilities. Indeed, many political scientists

argue that one of the country's problems lies in the sharp contrast that has been maintained between government and opposition positions, whenever relations with Russia, the United States and the European Union are discussed. Some sources already flagged more than a decade ago that Russia would try to take advantage of this, and time has proved them right. The moral of the tale is clear: political fragmentation on State matters has been excellently exploited by Russia, and perhaps also by China, which seems to be using similar tactics to increase its influence in the country (BIS 2018: 9).

Whether or not the creation of a GZ is a guarantee of success is another matter entirely, quite simply because it is not. The effects of such events are not automatic, but they are usually noticeable in the short and medium term. In the case of the Czech Republic, we know that a significant part of the population remains pro-Russian. We just have to look at the MPs that have joined the ranks of the Communist Party and the Social Democrat Party, the audience garnered by *Sputnik*, or the results obtained by Milos Zeman in the last presidential election. However, other sectors of the population, of the administration, and the local elites have, for obvious reasons, become more suspicious of the Kremlin.

Pressure stemming from Russia may be having a boomerang effect. Growing anti-Russian feeling may have less to do with the Prague Spring and much more to do with coverage of its campaigns of influence. But the Czech authorities of the time reacted against Russia, claiming that Moscow still considered the Czech Republic to be a Russian satellite (Kratochvíl – Kuchyňková, 2010: 199). As a result, in June 2019, some 250,000 people took to the streets demanding the resignation of the Prime Minister, reeling off slogans that denounced him as a threat to democracy. These demonstrations took place in Letna Park, and protesters repeated Havel's old slogans (such as 'truth and love' will conquer all). It is important to note, therefore, that a GZ is not demonstrated by its results, but by its intentions/purposes and tools/means.

Our analysis could end here, having tested hypotheses through a case study. However, as we have announced in the methodological part of the article, we do not settle for this. Case studies can also be used for improving existing theories. Along these lines, authors such as Kapusta (2015: 9) leave the door open for a State to develop GZ activities, but without developing a 'real' GZ with all its attributes and effects. What would be the *raison d'être* of this approach? That the revisionist State using this strategy might seek, above all, to compare the level of alarm (and response) that these activities generate among the *status quo ante* powers. We understand that the logic inherent in the 'probing behavior' theory advocated by Grygiel and Mitchell (2017) should be interpreted as the next step in the interpretative line barely hinted at by Kapusta.

In this way, experiences such as those of the Czech Republic could also be interpreted as a partial, incomplete or *in fieri* GZ. Or, if preferred, as a limited grey zone (LGZ). Because, notwithstanding some major successes, the measures

adopted appear to be aimed at matching the degree of alarm and response – but also, in the opposite sense, the doubts and shortcomings of the lack of resolve – of the defenders of the *status quo*. All this, of course, without detracting from the societal erosion resulting from the deployment of these GZ activities. This thesis could, moreover, constitute an appropriate development of the theories from Kapusta, Grygiel and Mitchell.

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Municipalities without elected councils. Causes of insufficient fulfilment of candidate lists in some municipalities in local elections in 2018[1]

PETR DVOŘÁK AND STANISLAV BALÍK

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Abstract: *By means of a qualitative analysis of the sixteen municipalities in the Czech Republic in which additional elections were held in 2019, five variables were identified which may explain why additional elections occurred. For analysis, we used data from the Czech Statistical Office (municipal elections 1994 to 2019), the Ministry of Interior of the Czech Republic and information on individual municipalities from media analysis. We have identified the following possible variables which may affect whether additional elections are held: end of elites, non-stand as a candidate again, the end of municipal representatives, incumbent decides not to defend mandate (variable Non-defend mandate) and personal disputes within the municipality. Conversely, the financial situation of the municipality, the age of the representatives, the voter turnout in the municipality, the number of voters, the number of candidate lists or associations and candidates proved inconclusive in most municipalities. A significant increase in new candidates is a consequence rather than an explanation of the holding of additional elections.*

Key words: ***local elections, additional elections, The Czech Republic, quality research, candidates***

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Introduction

Recently, local policy research about the Czech Republic has enjoyed considerable interest, whether it is the debate over the direct election of mayors (Jüptner 2012), the preferential votes of voters (Šedo 2009), the causes of early elections (Jaroš – Balík 2018), verification of the argument of efficiency from the economic point of view in the smallest municipalities in the Vysočina region (Burešová – Balík 2019), coalitions at the municipal level (Jüptner 2004), the influence of history on the set up of local (self) government institutions after 1990 (Klimovský – Pinterič – Jüptner 2019), politicisation of municipalities (Ryšavý 2006) or individual characteristics of candidates in local elections and their influence on election results (Bernard 2012).

The theme of continuity and discontinuity in the development of political representation was discussed by Jaroslav Čmejrek and Jan Čopík (2009), who pointed out the significant change in the composition of the councils during the changes of political regime in 1918 and 1989, as well as 'local breakthroughs', such as extraordinary elections to the council. However, the topic of additional elections remains on the edge of researchers' interest and cannot be directly linked to existing theory or research on the Czech or foreign level. On the other hand, the possibility of managing one's own municipality is an important part of democracy. At the level of municipalities, especially in the smallest municipalities, people can directly influence the operation and direction of the municipality. However, in some municipalities people voluntarily give up the opportunity to manage their municipality. Municipalities without elected representatives subsequently stagnate in their development and provision of public services. Due to the high number of small municipalities in the Czech Republic, there is a high probability that this situation will occur in other municipalities in the future. The main goal of our study is to identify variables that are repeated within a selected sample of 16 municipalities in which additional elections took place in 2019. It is not clear whether this is a situation specific to each municipality or it is possible to identify a set of variables that lead to additional choices.

When are there additional elections?

Local elections are regulated by Act No. 491/2001 Coll. on elections to municipal councils in the Czech Republic. Since 1990, a proportional electoral system has been used in elections to municipal councils with free candidate lists, with the possibility of selecting individual candidates (Balík 2009). The electoral system itself is criticised because of its incomprehensibility and lack of clarity, as the voters often don't realise that the preferences of a particular candidate gives the primary voice to the party for which the person is standing (Lebeda 2009).

If a municipal council is not elected, the Minister of the Interior has to declare repeated elections, repeated voting or additional elections within 30 days of the official announcement of results. The Minister of the Interior is obliged to convene additional elections in the case that 'the total number of candidates listed on all registered lists of candidates does not reach the absolute majority of the number of members of the municipal council to be elected or this number is less than five'. During a period when a municipal council has not been elected, municipal affairs are conducted by the appointed administrator (Act No. 491/2001). At the same time the performance of self-government stagnates, as the administrator is only tasked with maintaining the operation of the municipality.

Theoretical background and determination of variables

According to Vráblíková, there is no consensus among authors on what can be considered political participation (2008: 369). Why some people's political activity is higher than others can be broken down by the factors used to explain political participation. These are micro (individual characteristics), meso (social networks) and macro (national) variables (e.g. Vráblíková 2008: 373–4; Krishna 2002: 438).[2]

From the micro level we use the age of candidates, knowing that the youngest and oldest groups in society have less willingness to actively participate in political activities (Vráblíková 2009: 874; Armingeon 2007). Jaroslav Čmejrek also speaks of the distrust of candidates between the ages of 20–29 and 60 and older, despite the fact that they are the most represented people in society (2008: 73).

From the meso level, which we later divide into three types of mechanisms, we use the basic idea that persons involved in some associations are more politically involved (Vráblíková 2008: 378). Alexis de Tocqueville claimed that 'the technique of association becomes the mother of every other technique' (as quoted in Teorell 2003: 50). This can be linked to the first of the three types of mechanisms – civic skills[3] (Teorell 2003; Verba et all. 1995). On the importance of facilitating political mobilisation, the second mechanism, Rosenston and Hansen claim that 'people participate in politics not because of who they are, but because of the political choices and incentives offered to them' (as quoted in Vráblíková 2008). It can be said that 'access to such networks increases the probability of being exposed to appeals for political participation' (Teorell 2006: 799–800; Verba et all. 1995). The third mechanism, the role of social capital, is predominantly associated with R. Putnam, who defines it as 'the relationship between individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trust that arise from them' (as quoted in Vráblíková 2008: 379).

2 For more details see, Vráblíková 2008.

3 'E.g. the ability to write official letters, organize meetings etc' (Vráblíková 2008: 378).

In a study we also work with the typology of four local models (level of rivalry (formation of candidates lists) and format of the party system (plurality index)). For the purpose of this study, the most important is Model A: non-participatory model in which the lack of interest of inhabitants threatens the formation of their own council of municipality. According to the authors, these are municipalities in which there have been a high level of indebtedness and no one wants to be associated with these problems. For this reason, the same representants stand as head of the village for a long time. Typical for type A municipalities is a smaller number of candidates than the number of council members.

In the type B (apolitical-demarchist model) there are as many candidates (one political party) as there are seats in the council. It is therefore clear that the selected candidates will be elected as representatives of the municipality. Inhabitants are satisfied with the situation in the village and therefore they do not want to stand as a candidate in an election. But they are not indifferent to the independence of the municipality. The third model (type C – Cconsensual) is characterised by a larger number of candidates than the number of council members. A large number of parties are in an election as well as individual independent candidates. It is therefore predictable who will be elected as a representative of the municipality. The fourth model (type D – competitive) is characterised by a more intense rivalry between a larger number of parties (also traditional parliament party). At the same time, the number of candidates exceeds the number of elected seats. It is characteristic of a real political competition for a leading position within the municipality (for more details, see Čmejrek – Bubeníček – Čopík 2010: 155–166).

For the purpose of this work, it is verified whether the municipalities fall into the first type A using a simple calculation, where the number of candidates is divided by the number of elected seats (**plurality index**). If this number is less than one, it is a municipality that, according to the authors, tends to additional or recurring elections. In the case where the resulting number is equal to one, it is necessary to consider other variables (e.g. elites). When the resulting number is between one to two, it is a semi-pluralist case. In the case of a value higher than two, this is a pluralistic case (Čmejrek – Bubeníček – Čopík 2010: 156). **The formation of candidate lists** is verified by media analysis, which allows us to find out the pre-election atmosphere in the village. Specifically, this comes in the form of statements from Dan Rysavy and Michal Illsner (2006b), which talk about the potential problems small municipalities face in finding elites that follow the older generation and take over the reins in the leadership of municipalities. This unwillingness to participate in the running of the community is linked to both the contradictions on the personal level and the increase in bureaucracy, etc. At the same time, Ryšavý adds that in some villages the older generation prepares their successors and offers them a helping hand to the future (Ryšavý 2007: 123–4).

In connection with the phenomenon of continuity/discontinuity of the actions of persons in the municipal council, Čmejrek and Čopík concluded

that after 1989 there was a low replacement of representatives, with a gap approaching 1/3 of the council. According to the authors, the main reasons for this are the decreased willingness of members and non-party members to stand for a political party or the possibility that the candidate ranking on candidate lists was influenced by preferential votes, thus favouring one candidate (2009: 300–301). It can be assumed that often the same individuals are chosen for a longer period in municipal elections (Čmejrek – Bubeníček – Čopík 2010: 83, Hornek 2019: 236). This is why we use the elites variable. Other variables are associated with the willingness of members and non-party members to stand as a candidate in elections. We are interested in how many political parties created its candidate list for municipality elections, as we expect that a higher number of parties, as well as the number of associations, automatically brings a higher number of candidates and therefore reduces the risk of holding additional elections. According to Čmejrek, Bubeníček and Čopík, political participation cannot be directly separated from public life in municipalities with around 100 inhabitants. The existence of the association (beekeepers, the fire brigade, hunters, sports clubs or organisations (Sokol) etc.) is therefore crucial for the development of the village (2010: 83–5). The political sphere is also affected by personal disputes, local groups and families in the smallest municipalities (Keating 1995: 124–5, Illner 2006a: 22, Illner 2006b: 362–3). In a large municipality there are also more potential candidates and the public function is more prestigious (Illner 2006b: 362–3). According to Martins: 'the smaller the municipality, the greater the accessibility' between inhabitants and representants (1995: 453, Illner 2006b: 363). Inhabitants can also easily mobilise against the policy of the current representants (Newton 1982: 190, Swianiewicz 2002b: 10, Illner 2006a: 22). For this reason, we also use the 'number of candidates in the municipality' and 'size of the council and its transformation' variables.

Other variables can be combined with low councillor variability in terms of the chances of choosing new candidates in elections. Both Šedo and Bernard have shown that incumbents have a higher chance of re-election than newcomers (Bernard 2012: 635; Šedo 2009: 359). Those who have stood as a candidate but were not elected will be less willing to stand as a candidate again. This can be expressed by the "candidate fluctuation variable", which measures how many people did not repeat their candidacy in comparison with previous elections. At the same time, it is necessary to find out whether the conclusions of both authors also apply to the monitored municipalities. For this reason, the 'fluctuation of elected persons' variable is established.

The life of each municipality is closely linked to the political participation of their citizens. The basic indicator of political participation is voter turnout (Čmejrek 2008: 70; Čmejrek – Bubeníček – Čopík 2010: 77–8). In our study, we evaluate the "voter turnout variable" in terms of its variability and specificity within each municipality. The last variable we employ in our research is the

financial situation in the municipality. The assumption is that in the event of a bad financial situation in the municipality (indebtedness), the willingness of citizens to lead the municipality decreases (Čmejrek – Bubeníček – Čopík 2010: 157–8, Hornek 2016: 102). If it turns out in the investigation that more municipalities have a problem with finances, the assumption can be confirmed.

Data, variables and methodology

Because of the absence of relevant information to clarify what may result in additional elections, the main goal of our study is to identify variables that are repeated within a selected sample of 16[4] municipalities in which additional elections took place in 2019 (MICR, 2018). It is not clear whether this is a situation specific to each municipality or if it is possible to identify a set of variables that lead to additional choices[5]. For this purpose, a qualitative analysis is used that allows detailed insight into the life of each examined municipality. We also set the reference value at 50% for some variables, which is the value of a variable that is likely to be explanatory and must be taken into account when determining a given variable in a municipality.

We used data from the Czech Statistical Office and its website volby.cz, which provided information on local elections from 1994 to 2019. Specifically, voter turnout, number of voters, parties, candidates, age, candidacy or elected candidate (Volby.cz 2019) were used. Data on the municipal financial situation from 2010 to 2018 were obtained from the website of the Ministry of Finance of the Czech Republic and its information portal (Monitor 2019). A calculator for calculating municipal budget responsibilities until 2013 (Monitor. Universal calculator 2019) was used on the portal. We got information about organisations in the village from the website mistopisy.cz or from the website of the village (MPČR 2019). Direct insight into the life of the municipalities was obtained through a media analysis. Within the 16 municipalities where additional elections were held in 2019, the above variables could be examined from 1994 to 2019.

Number of regular elections

We observe whether there were early or additional elections in individual municipalities between 1994 and 2018.

4 A paradoxical situation occurred in the village of Němčovice (Rokycany), where Karel Ferschmann forgot to submit the candidate list for registration by the correct date. The reason for his omission was his participation at a children's camp (Pospíšilová – Vildová, 22 November 2018). For this reason, Němčovice was excluded from the analysis.

5 However, this is a small number of municipalities. Many authors mention a high fragmentation of municipalities (over 6,000) and a low number of people living there (e.g. Balík 2009; Illner 2006a). Smaller municipalities are also in France, Slovakia, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Luxembourg, Spain, Switzerland and Hungary (e.g. Illner 2006b, Martins 1995).

The size of the council and its transformation

In the period under review, we monitor the change in the size of the council (number of members) in order to see if a sudden increase in the number of members could cause the requirements of a candidate list to go unfulfilled. Elections held prior to 2018 in which the number of members increased compared to previous elections resulted in problems meeting the requirements for candidate lists.

Number of candidate lists and associations

According to the number of parties in the municipality, it is possible to determine whether there are at least two political camps and therefore a better chance of holding proper elections. With the increasing number of both parties and associations, there should be a higher chance of compiling at least one list of candidates which would be enough to fill the municipal council. At the same time, it is necessary to consider the size of the municipality when drawing conclusions, as some of the municipalities surveyed have about 100 inhabitants and we expect that there will be less chance of more candidate lists or associations being formed. We also consider the situation to be problematic when a majority or all traditional parliamentary political parties of municipality have ended in the same elections and citizens had to create new civic party/parties. The parliamentary political parties are characterised by good organisation and stability of members with a similar view of the village management (Čmejrek – Bubeníček – Čopík 2010: 65–8: 70–71).

Number of candidates in the municipality, plurality index and voter turnout

The variable is measured by the total number of voters against the potential number of candidates, and also it is measured by whether we can determine a decreasing number of voters that would cause a reduction in the number of people able to actively participate in the election (Hornek 2019: 236, Illner 2006a: 21). Subsequently, the actual number of persons who participate in the elections is monitored in relation to the number of seats corresponding to the number of representatives in the municipality. The variable also takes into account whether all of the candidates were nominated according to the number of members on the municipal council or whether the number of candidates was smaller or larger (see above plurality index – the number of candidates is divided by the number of elected seats)[6]. As evidenced by Dan Ryšavý and Pavel

6 The law regulates the candidacy of as many candidates as there are seats, with the difference that municipalities with a 7-member council (and less) may vote 1/3 more candidates (rounded down (Act

Šaradín, the number of municipalities where the number of candidates did not exceed the number of elected seats has been decreasing since 1998 (2011: 28). Jaroslav Čmejrek also connects the choice of the exact number of persons according to the elected places with a democratic deficit (2013: 183).

Voter turnout is seen as an indicator of political participation by citizens and we observe whether there is a decreasing or increasing tendency. In our study we evaluate the voter turnout variable in terms of its variability within each municipality. The variability in the elections that are under scrutiny is important, especially in the 2014 elections, which were the last regular elections before the additional ones in 2019. However, the gradual decline in turnout is not important, but a sharp slump signalises a sudden loss of interest in voter participation (Čmejrek 2008, 70) as well as in the political life in the village. As documented by Čmejrek, Bubeníček and Čopík, small municipalities without city status reach significantly higher voter turnout in local elections and the decline there is much smaller than the national average (2010: 79–80). On this basis we conclude that if voter turnout falls rapidly, the willingness of citizens to stand as a candidate in elections is also declining, and in connection with other elements additional elections may occur.

Age of candidates/non-stand as a candidate in the next elections

We examine whether there is a certain age at which candidates will not stand as a candidate in the next election. Candidates are divided into 4 categories: 18 to 22 years, 23 to 45 years, 46 to 60 years and 61 and over. With these categories it is possible to determine which category in the municipality prevailed in individual electoral periods, as well as which representatives, by age, decided not to stand as a candidate in subsequent elections. However, for the non-stand as a candidate in the next elections variable, the age limit of the first category was shifted to 22 to 26 years, corresponding to the age of first-time voters after the four-year term.

Elites

We observe whether the sudden end of elites (stood as a candidate/elected in 3 consecutive elections) in the management of the municipality can be connected with additional elections. In case that a higher number of elites (reference value

No. 491/2001)). The law regulates the candidacy of as many candidates by the political party as there are seats, with the difference that municipalities with a 7-member council and less may has 1/3 more candidates (rounded down (Act No. 491/2001)). Given the situation where 13 out of 16 investigated municipalities have 7-member and smaller councils, the given variable can still be considered relevant for determining conclusions. It is also important: *'If the total number of candidates listed on all registered candidate lists does not reach an absolute majority of the number of members of the municipal council to be elected, or is less than 5, elections are not held in this municipality'* (Act. No. 491/2001). Municipalities with 5-member council, Děkov (since 2002), Kluky (2002 a 2006), Litichovice (2002, 2004, 2006 a 2010), Němčice (2019), Roblín (1994), Střítež (since 1998), Ždírec (2019).

50%) decided not to stand as a candidate in the 2019 elections, we consider the variable to be relevant in the municipality. The variable primarily reflects if citizens of the municipality rely on the subsequent candidacy of elites and they do not have a need to engage politically.

Fluctuation of candidates

The variable is measured by the non-repetition of candidacy in comparison with the previous elections when the 50% threshold is taken as the reference value. One of the reasons that candidate lists were not filled is that previous candidates decided not to stand as a candidate again. A new candidate is also a person who previously stood as a candidate, but not in the last elections. In the second part, we examine how many candidates participating in specific elections had no experience with candidacy in previous elections (inexperienced candidates). The reference value is the 50% threshold, which sets the situation in which it was necessary to mobilise many people who have not yet had policy experience.

Fluctuation of elected persons

This variable covers the situation when we do not find elites in the village, but at the same time there has been an outflow of a larger number of elected representatives that need to be replaced. For elected persons, it is assessed whether the incumbents have defended their mandate or decided not to defend the mandate in subsequent elections. The reference value is the exchange of more than 50%. The output of individual municipalities is considered to be the openness and permanence of the representative body. The openness of the representative body is high when existing representatives have not defended more than 50% of the mandates and there is a good chance of electing new candidates, which can motivate them to actively participate in elections. The permanence of the representative body is linked to the decision of the councillors not to stand as a candidate again in the next election. The problem occurs when more than 50% of the councillors do not want to defend their mandate and it is necessary to look for new candidates who would be willing to stand as a candidate for the next election. For municipalities where the number of elected persons is similar to the number of candidates, the variables (fluctuation of candidates and fluctuation of elected persons) will be relevant or irrelevant at the same time.

Financial situation in the municipality

According to Hronek, the most important financial indicators are budget lability and total liquidity for examining the financial situation in municipalities.

On the other hand, these indicators only draw attention to possible risks in the management of municipalities and bad numbers do not automatically mean financial problems of the municipality. For this conclusion a detailed financial audit is required (Hornek 2016: 88–89). In our study we used these indicators in the municipality from 2010 to 2018. The first indicator, **the budget liability rule**, is calculated from 2013 to 2018. It is based on the assumption that a municipality, a city or a county manages in such a way that the debt level does not exceed 60% of the average annual income calculated over the last four years. If the municipality does not comply, it must reduce its excessive liabilities by at least 5% per year. **Total liquidity** is measured since 2010 (it determines the ratio by which the municipality is able to cover its short-term liabilities). The problem value is one or less.

Media Analysis

In the empirical part we analysed media outcomes in which mayors, members of the council and residents of the municipalities gave reasons why a sufficient number of candidates did not participate in the October 2018 elections. Their statements are compared with the data obtained from the history of local elections in municipalities as well as the facts stated by Ryšavý and Čmejrek, Bubeníček and Čopík (four local models).

For media analysis we used the Anopress database service of the Anopress IT Company. The key words used were the names of specific municipalities, with a search period of August 1, 2018 – February 26, 2019. This is due to the fact that, at the beginning of this period, information began to appear in the media space that in some municipalities local elections were unlikely to take place (on 5 and 6 October 2018). All media outputs that were searched by the database were analysed. There were about 120 relevant contributions concerning the local elections; some of them were overlapping, listed in more cases

In the case of municipalities for which the media outputs were not numerous, supplementary searches were used, where the name of the former or current mayor was given as the key word. It was not possible to use media analysis for the village of Kluky, because the municipality name means 'boys'. The necessary information was obtained by telephone conversation with the mayor of the village.

Results

In the following section, the results associated with each variable are presented. The basic summary of the results is provided in Table 1, which in a simple way, i.e. Yes (the variable has a meaning) and No (the variable has no meaning) allows the reader to see the relevance of each variable related to the municipality.

Table 1: Variables within municipalities[7]

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
The size of the council	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no
Voter turnout	no	no	no	no	no	no	yes	no	no	yes	no	no	no	yes	yes	yes
Number of candidate lists/associations	no	yes	yes	no	no	yes	yes	yes	no	no	yes	no	no	no	no	no
The total number of voters	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no
Number of candidates	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	yes	no	yes
Age of candidates	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no
Age of candidates/non-stand as a candidate in the next elections	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no
Elites	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	no	yes	no	no	no	yes	no	no	ono
Plurality index	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	yes	no	yes
Personal disputes	yes	yes	no	no	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	no	no	yes	no	yes	yes
Number of regular elections	yes	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	yes	no	no	no	no	no	yes	yes
Fluctuation of candidates																
Non-stand as a candidate again	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes
Completely new candidates	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	yes
Fluctuation of elected persons																
Non-defend mandate	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Non-stand as a candidate again	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	no	no	yes	yes	yes	no	yes
Financial situation in the municipality																
The budget liability rule	yes	no	yes	no	no	yes	no	no	no	no	yes	no	no	no	yes	no
Total liquidity	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no

Source: own drawing. Data: Volby.cz 2019; Monitor 2019

7 Municipalities (their district) are sorted: 1) Děkov (Rakovník), 2) Dlouhá Lhota (Blansko), 3) Hodějice (Vyškov), 4) Horšice (Plzeň-Jih), 5) Kadlín (Mělník), 6) Kbelnice (Jičín), 7) Kluky (Mladá Boleslav), 8) Lipovec (Blansko), 9) Litichovice (Benešov), 10) Němčice (Strakonice), 11) Roblín (Praha-Západ), 12) Skomelno (Rokycany), 13) Střítež (Žďár nad Sázavou), 14) Tatobity (Semily), 15) Víska u Jevíčka (Svitavy), 16) Ždírec (Havlíčkův Brod).

Municipalities in the study do not reach more than 500 inhabitants[8]. It is therefore clear that the additional elections concern municipalities with a smaller population. For this reason, it is possible to use the definition of municipalities according to the four local models set by Čmejrek – Bubeníček – Čopík (2010: 156). The results show that the plurality index was greater than 1 in most municipalities for all election periods (without elections in 2018). In the three municipalities of Děkov, Hodějice and Lipovec it reached well over two, which was caused by a larger number of parties and movements (two and more). On the other hand, traditional parties ČSSD[9] and KDU-CSL[10] didn't have a candidate list (on the contrary, KSČM[11] and the Mayors and Independents party had a candidate list since 2010 and 2014, respectively) in Hodějice in the additional election and the plurality index decreased from four to two. Also, traditional parties ČSSD, KDU-CSL and KSČM did not have candidate list in Lipovec in the additional election, but the plurality index remained the same. These political parties were replaced by the independent/civic parties in both municipalities in the additional election. In the municipalities of Kluky and Víska u Jevíčka (before the additional elections in 2014), the value of the plurality index was equal to one. In the village of Kluky, this could be due to the participation of one movement in the election in 2014, because normally two movements were in the 2006 and 2010 elections. In the village of Víska u Jevíčka, the reason could be the end of the ODS party, which had its candidate list in the elections in 1998 and 2006. In the village of Dlouhá Lhota, the value of the plurality index was equal to 1 in the last three elections preceding the additional elections (also in 1998) and could have been caused by the departure of the KDU-ČSL and KSČM parties and its replacement by the Association of Independent Candidates. At the same time, it is evident that only in the municipalities of Tatobity and Ždírec the value of the plurality index reached a value of 0.7 in 2014, which means a smaller number of elected persons than the number of seats in the municipal council and a potential problem for the municipality's own management. At the same time, the candidacy of independent individual candidates in most of the examined elections and the subsequent establishment of the Association of Independent Candidates for additional elections is typical for both mentioned municipalities. At the same time, it was possible to observe the inertial tendency in the value of plurality index in within the examined elections in all municipalities. Only in the municipality of Kadlín did the plurality index have a declining

8 Only Hodějice and Lipovec had significantly more than 500 inhabitants (around 900 in 2018). Only the village of Tatobity had over 400 inhabitants, and the village of Horšice had over 300 inhabitants. Seven municipalities had less than or just over 100 inhabitants. The remaining five municipalities had less than 200 inhabitants.

9 Czech Social Democratic party.

10 Christian and Democratic union – Czechoslovak People's Party.

11 Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia.

tendency, but in the elections in 2014 it had a value of two because two opposition independent political parties were formed within the municipality and it is possible to speak of a more significant plurality within the municipality. The plurality index also reached a value of one in six municipalities in the 1994 elections, which can be explained with the beginnings of the formation of a local party system (Čmejrek – Bubeníček – Čopík 2010: 158). When we focus on compiling candidate lists before the regular elections in 2018, which did not take place in these municipalities, we find recurring trends that may contribute to understanding which municipalities may have a potential problem securing a sufficient number of candidates/representatives.

Relevant variables

Elites

The number of elites in the village ranged from 15% to 26% of all candidates, except for the municipality of Litichovice. For the purpose of this work, however, it was important to determine whether the sudden end of the so-called elites could be linked to the holding of additional elections. From the data presented, it is clear that the possibility of additional elections can be directly linked to the sudden end of the so-called elites. Results in eight out of sixteen investigated municipalities say that at least 1/3 of the elites still stood as a candidate in 2014, but not in 2019, so the sudden end of the elites may have been caused by the additional elections. This confirms the authors' opinion that small villages have a problem finding new representatives due to personal disputes (see media analysis), despite the offer by older representatives train a new generation of representatives (Čmejrek – Čopík 2009: 300–301, Čmejrek – Bubeníček – Čopík 2010: 83, Illner 2006b, Ryšavý 2007: 123–4). The importance of the end of the elites is emphasised by three other variables: Non-stand as a candidate again, How many people did not defend the mandate and Failure to defend the mandate. In connection with the end of the elites and other councillors, or a more significant change of candidates may cause a situation where enough new candidates/representatives cannot be found in the municipality. At the same time, in villages where the same people regularly defend their mandate, a situation typical of a village type B arises. Citizens do not want to stand as a candidate, as they rely on existing representatives (Čmejrek – Bubeníček – Čopík 2010: 158).

Non-stand as a candidate again

In all 16 municipalities, six relevant elections (Děkov and Litichovice, seven elections) were examined in which it was possible to calculate the replacement of candidates compared to previous elections. The data show that in thirteen out of sixteen municipalities the candidates were replaced by more

than 50% in three or more elections. This means that more than 50% of new people have always participated in the electoral struggle. In addition, for the 10 municipalities, the candidates' largest changes were due to the additional elections in 2019. Thus, a large number of candidates can be one of the factors causing the non-inclusion of the candidate list and therefore the additional elections.

How many people did not defend the mandate

For all sixteen municipalities, six relevant elections (Děkov and Litichovice, seven elections) were examined in which the percentage of cases where councillors did not defend their mandate could be calculated. It is evident that in four out of sixteen municipalities there were three or more cases where more than 50% of the councillors did not defend their mandate. It is important for the purpose of the work that in twelve out of sixteen municipalities more than 50% of former representatives did not defend their mandate in the additional elections in 2019. For five municipalities it was more than 70%, which can be connected with a significant replacement of the entire representative body. The variable can be one of the explanatory reasons why additional elections were held in the municipalities.

Failure to defend the mandate

The results show that none of the sixteen municipalities saw a greater drop in previously successful candidates if they decided to defend their mandate. From this it can be concluded that incumbent candidates have a strong position within the municipality and have a great chance of re-election (Bernard 2012: 635; Šedo 2009: 359) and, conversely, the new candidates have less of a chance of being elected and are therefore not motivated to stand as a candidate at all. In the case that a larger number of members of the council with a minimum variation decide not to stand as a candidate, it may suddenly be a problem to find new candidates who would like to run for the town office because they do not feel they have a chance of being elected. So, the variable is relevant.

Personal disputes

From the media analysis results, it can be seen that in addition to confirming the significance of the variables 'elites' and 'non-stand as a candidate again in 2014', which are often associated with personal reasons (more time for family, exhaustion, health)[12], it is possible to determine another variable called personal

12 It was about Děkov (Elsnic, October 6, 2018), Dlouhá Lhota (Právo, 5 October 2018; Blanenský deník, 2018), Hodějice (Gajdošíková and Sapík, 18 August 2018; Baroch, 27 August 2018), Horšice (Štemberová, 4

disputes. At the same time, it is clear from the results of the media analysis that the surveyed municipalities fall into the type A or B category (in terms of drawing up candidate lists), as citizens do not want to stand as a candidate or they rely on existing representatives. This variable has been identified in 10 out of 16 municipalities, be it representatives or citizens, and in many cases, disputes have been a relevant reason that have forced former deputies to leave politics.

In Kbelnice there was an additional election despite the fact that former representatives 'agitated' residents through notifications to mailboxes and also promised to help new councillors (Fremuth, 5 October 2018). Mayor Michalčíková mentioned the lack of interest in events organised by the town hall. She said: 'everyone closes their entry gates door, and no one cares about situation in the village today' (Kovářová, 16 August 2018). The same situation is seen in Dlouhá Lhota, where residents said: 'I don't know, I don't have time for it' or 'Well, I'm not skilled enough for it' (Žítková, 5 October 2018). According to former mayor Michaela Gregorová (Kadlín), additional elections were caused by 'communication noise' among potential candidates (Votruba, October 5, 2018). The situation in the village was also worsened by the immigration of new people who wanted to lead the village or the relationship of the mayor's son with the daughter of the opposition representative (Ševela, October 12, 2018). Thus, immigration of new persons may not always help the future administration of the municipality, as Čmejrek, Bubeníček and Čopík said (2010: 157–8). Residents also said it was an ungrateful job they had no time or nerves to do (Ševela, October 12, 2018).

In Děkov, the situation had even gone so far that a criminal complaint was filed at Závorová (Elsnic, 6 October 2018; Nič Husárová, January 28, 2019). The same situation happened with Mayor Štourač in Střítež (Mašová, September 27, 2018). There was another problem in Střítež where the municipality lost ownership of the ruins of castle Bukov-Lísek, resulting in a loss of about CZK 300,000, and problems with the access road and land use plan (Laudin, October 5, 2018)). Mayor Semiánová (Kluky) said: 'There are discrepancies among inhabitants in the municipality, especially with one of the notoriously complaining citizens'. According to the mayor, this may cause difficulties in setting up candidate lists for the next election, as the new councillors need time to acclimatise, because they have not worked for the community for a long time (Semiánová 2019). According to former Mayor Miroslav Čepický (Horšice), there is no party or association of independent candidates, which may have contributed to the fact that citizens could vote only at the end of January 2019 (Štemberová, October 4, 2018). In Víska u Jevíčka, according to the residents, it is partly about the stubbornness

October 2018), Kbelnice (Fremuth, 2 October, 2018; (Kovářová, 16 August 2018), Kluky (Semiánová 2019), Lipovec (Svoboda, August 13, 2019), Skomelno (Meissnerová: 22. 8. 2018), Střítež (Mašová, 27 September 2018), Víska u Jevíčka (Mladá fronta Dnes, August 11, 2018), Ždírec (Laudin, 5 October 2018).

of the locals, because some of them stand by their own opinions and do not take into account the views of their opponents. Others said there was a division into different family clans in the village (Hofmanová, September 7, 2018).

People experienced somewhat of a misunderstanding and did not realise the necessity of resolving the situation after the announced resignation of Mayor Kopřiva in Lipovec (Hřebíková, 25 January 2019; Osouch, 22 November 2018). In Litichovice people rely on the fact that the current representatives will continue their work (Kellner, 26 October 2018), as do those in Roblín (Gavenda, September 30, 2018; Česká televize, 21 November 2018). The former mayor in Roblín said that another problem could have been the tightening of the conflict of interest act and related criminal and property liability, as well as the mayor and his representative's obligation to grant income and property in the public register (Právo, August 23, 2018). The same opinion is held by Mayor Dobrovolný (Ždírec (Laudin, October 5, 2018)). Despite these reasons, a candidate list under the leadership of Mayor Dobrovolný was ready to be registered for the autumn 2018 election, but unfortunately one of the members resigned her candidacy a few days before her appointment (Saadouni, August 2, 2018).

A seemingly paradoxical situation (typical for type B) occurred in the village of Němčice when none of the above-mentioned citizens were willing to take the post of mayor after the elections (Orholz, August 16, 2018). In the village of Tatobity, Mayor Malá said that several former representatives wanted to stand as a candidate again, but the deadline for submitting candidate lists had expired in the meantime (Fogl, September 25, 2018).

Potential variables

The variables listed below did not prove to be relevant for most of the municipalities surveyed but may contribute to additional elections in individual municipalities.

Number of candidate lists/associations

In four out of sixteen municipalities, in at least four out of seven or eight[13] elections, stood several independent candidates from only one party (which is a sign of village type B). For six out of sixteen municipalities, the candidacy of an independent candidate was typical (which is a sign of village type C)[14]. In the rest of the municipalities, there were at least two parties that ran for a seat in the municipality (which is a sign of village type C or D). Seven villages have a church and ten municipalities have a pub; these are places that increase the chances of active involvement in the political life of the village. Similarly, there

13 In Litichovice and Děkov there were 8 elections.

14 One independent party was created for an additional election in these municipalities (4 of 6).

were sports associations in four municipalities, and six villages had civic associations. On the other hand, the most critical situation occurred in the villages of Roblín and Kbelnice, where there was only a pub and citizens were standing as individual independent candidates for most of the time. In Kadlín (with a church and a non-functioning pub) and Kluky there were important political parties, but no association. On the other hand, one movement had a candidate list in the election in the village Kluky in 2014, even though there were normally two movements in the elections of 2006 and 2010. Other villages (twelve) had perhaps the most important kind of association for social life: the fire brigade[15] (MPČR 2019). In three municipalities (Hodějice, Lipovec and Dlouhá Lhota) all or most of the traditional parliamentary parties didn't have a candidate list in the additional elections, which means a more significant intervention in the normal operation of the municipality when compiling lists of candidates. It is evident from the results that this variable did not cause additional elections in ten villages.

Voter turnout

A possible explanatory variable causing additional elections is voter turnout. It was in five of sixteen municipalities that the voter turnout in the election in 2014 (Víska u Jevíčka in the election in 2010) was the lowest since 1994, despite the fact that the number of voters has been growing. It is true that the decreasing trend in voter participation is nothing unusual, since after the fall of the communist regime the voter turnout in most municipalities was at its maximum and in the following years it slowly declined (Vráblíková 2009: 868; Čmejrek – Bubeníček – Čopík 2010: 79). On closer inspection, however, we find that in four out of sixteen municipalities the decline was sharp, as turnout declined by at least 16% and at most by 26.5%, although it was high in previous elections. When comparing the average turnout according to the size of the municipality in terms of the number of voters (Table 2), a gradual decline in turnout can be observed in all types of municipalities, which supports the conclusions on the issue of a sharp decline in turnout as one of the elements causing additional elections.

15 The Děkov had listed on its website Myslivecký spolek Diana Horšice (Tolarová), the Lipovec had listed on its website Spolky a organizace (Obec lipovec) or pub in Kadlín (Gregorová 2018).

Table 2: Average voter turnout by municipality size (number of voters)[16]

Year	1 to 100 voters	101 to 250 voters	251 to 500 voters	501 to 1000 voters
1994	888 (87.57 %)	1899 (81.53 %)	1459 (77.08 %)	995 (74.92 %)
1998	856 (80.29 %)	1852 (72.39 %)	1503 (65.96 %)	1037 (63.14 %)
2002	808 (78.09 %	1834 (70.84 %)	1519 (65.62 %)	1065 (62.91 %)
2006	764 (75.30 %)	1802 (67.80 %)	1546 (63.26 %)	1095 (59.92 %)
2010	717 (74.01 %)	1750 (67.33 %)	1541 (63.70 %)	1144 (61.07 %)
2014	675 (71.47 %)	1726 (65.13 %)	1541 (61.44 %)	1171 (58.10 %)
2018	667 (71.02 %)	1706 (64.82 %)	1544 (60.45 %)	1187 (57.72 %)

Age of candidates/non-stand as a candidate in the next elections

It is not possible to determine with certainty from the data obtained whether the candidate's age is important in his/her subsequent candidacy, as candidates of different ages did not stand as a candidate again in individual municipalities. At the same time, however, it can be concluded that the so-called first-time voters (first category) and fourth-category (aged 61 and older) people, due to their limited frequency as candidates, are more prone not to repeat their candidacy in subsequent elections. At the same time, however, it cannot be said that people over the age of 61 will not automatically stand as a candidate for the next election, because in surveyed municipalities we can find candidates over the age of 70 who participated in the next elections. Thus, the age of candidates is rather one of the reasons why people choose not to stand as a candidate again but does not directly cause additional elections.

Number of regular elections

In the village of Víska u Jevíčka (2015) and Litichovice (2004–5) there were additional elections and in the village of Děkov (2015) early elections. Thus, one of the aspects of the type A local model is fulfilled in these municipalities (Čmejrek – Bubeníček – Čopík 2010: 157).

16 For each voter turnout, the number of municipalities is written.

Irrelevant variables

The size of the council and its transformation

There was no increase in the number of council members in any of the monitored municipalities before the regular elections in 2018. On the contrary, the number of members was reduced in three municipalities. The fact that there was no candidate list in the municipality could not be influenced by the increased number of members in the municipal assembly.

Total number of voters

The number of voters, i.e. persons potentially able to lead the municipality, in all municipalities, for the monitored periods, increased or did not change. Therefore, a total number of voters cannot be an explanatory variable.

Completely new candidates

Regarding the candidacy of the inexperienced people in the sixteen investigated municipalities, it is clear that in twelve of them more than 50% of inexperienced candidates participated in the additional elections in 2019. In half of the cases, this figure was more than 70%. In Víska u Jevíčka a similar element before the additional elections in 2015 can be seen, when more than 50% of the candidates were completely inexperienced. This suggests that the number of newcomers may be one of the consequences of additional elections, but it cannot cause additional choices. That statement corresponds to the claims of Čmejrka and Čopík, who combined the significant replacement of candidates with the so-called local breakthrough, which surely are additional elections (Čmejrek – Čopík 2009: 299). The citizens of these municipalities are not indifferent to the development of the municipality (which is a sign of village type B).

Financial situation in the municipality – The budget liability rule

The variable has long been unsatisfactory for four municipalities, two of them exceeded 100%, which pointed to the high indebtedness of municipalities. The reason for that is the construction of a wastewater treatment plant in Hodějice (Jihomoravský kraj: July 28, 2016), sewerage in Kbelnice (Fremuth October 5), water supply in Roblín (Obec Roblín) and Víska u Jevíčka (obec Víska u Jevíčka). According to Hornek, these causes of indebtedness are not so problematic (see Hornek 2016: 100–101). In addition, none of the municipalities had a problem with the liquidity ratio. The municipalities were therefore not over-indebted and the elected representatives could properly administer the municipality (even though they had to repay the loan (Hornek 2016: 102)).

Conclusion

The issue of additional elections has not yet been sufficiently addressed, so the main goal of the article was to define a set of variables that can be associated with additional elections. The main reason was the fact that in the case of a non--election of the municipal council, such a municipality is led by an administrator, who only keeps the municipality in operation but cannot further develop it. As part of the qualitative analysis, we came to the conclusion that individual municipalities can be classified according to some variables into one of four types of local models. However, in terms of the plurality of individual municipal systems, only two municipalities fell into the type A category, so the plurality in most municipalities was sufficient for type B to C or D.

Following the way in which candidate lists are formed in the municipality, the main problems turned out to be the end of elites, non-stand as a candidate again, and failure to defend the mandate, which is associated with a greater rotation of candidates, or the end of elites which no one replaced (caused by health problems, personal disputes, bureaucracy, long office management, etc.). Citizens also did not agree on the composition of the candidate lists due to personal disputes, or they did not to realise the magnitude of the situation and relied on existing representatives. The variable of Failure to defend the mandate also contributed to this situation, as the new candidates in the elections did not defeat these elites. So, in the municipalities, a situation has arisen that is associated with a type B municipality, i.e. citizens rely on current representatives to continue to run the office and thus loses interest in running the municipality, which can be also associated with a type A municipality, which the authors associate with holding additional elections. On the other hand, there is a variable (completely new candidates) against the assertion that municipalities fall into category type A. As there are many newcomers in the village who are not indifferent to the future of the village.

Voter turnout in the municipality proved to be a potential variable, because four municipalities had a significant decrease of voter turnout in the 2014 elections, which means a certain loss of interest in politics in the municipality. At the same time the additional or early elections in the history of three municipalities point to existential problems in the past. Conversely, the age of the candidates may have played a role in their decision to remain in politics. On the other hand, it was not possible to find an age limit at which individual elites are likely to leave politics. For Number of candidate lists / associations variable it was not possible to find any association that would shape life in the municipality only in the two municipalities. The question thus remains who is a member of these associations? Old representatives or the new generation? On the other hand, traditional parliamentary parties did not have a candidate list for the first time in the additional election in three municipalities and citizens had to form new

civic parties, which possibly influenced creating candidate lists in these municipalities. The size of the council, the total number of voters or, somewhat surprisingly, the financial situation in the municipality can be described as irrelevant variables. This is despite the fact that Čmejrek – Bubeníček – Čopík (2010: 157) claim that a poor financial situation is one of the basic indicators of a type A municipality.

The work thus proves that the additional elections are mainly due to bad interpersonal relationships and the departure of a larger number of former politicians, whether elites, councillors or candidates in elections. A more significant reduction in voter turnout, which means the loss of interest in the policy of the municipality or the demise of some organisation or parliament parties caring for the cultural life of the municipality can also cause additional elections. At the same time, additional elections may occur even in the event of a failure of the human factor, as in the case of the municipality of Němčovice.

As part of further research, it would be necessary to examine other municipalities in which there were additional elections and to confirm or refute the conclusions that we present. According to the plurality index, municipalities can be classified mainly as type B and C municipalities (only two municipalities were type A). For the compilation of candidate lists the most important variables are the departure of elites and other politicians and the reluctance of the population to stand as a candidate instead of departing representants. The main reason was personal disputes and not realising the seriousness of the situation (type B municipalities, eventually A). It is not also clear whether significant financial problems without other factors are sufficient for additional elections, as well as whether the non-existence of an association or the end of traditional political parties in the municipality is a decisive variable. In the event that the conclusions we present are confirmed, is there a risk of additional elections in other municipalities during the generational change of representants? Is this a established situation or is it an element that is typical of a certain segment of small municipalities?

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Sustainable development through morphogenetic analysis: The case of Slovenia[1]

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Abstract: *This article addresses Slovenia as a case of a post-communist country in terms of its sustainable development. It deploys an in-depth historical analysis and extensive empirical data while exploring Slovenian society through the analytical lens of morphostatic/morphogenetic approach (Archer 2017). The focus is on (1) the country's structural and cultural settings in each selected period in order to explore whether there has been a mutual reinforcement of the levels of both, contributing to the sustainable development; (2) ways in which agents respond to such changes reinforcing or changing the structural settings. The selection of quantitative structural indicators of sustainable development is based on the indicators of sustainable development that have a direct reference to the Sustainable Development Agenda of the United Nations 2030 and also adopted by the current Strategy of Development of Slovenia. The selection of survey data was based on their connection with the same sustainability issues and their availability for a longer period, particularly close to the time points of the cycles observed. The findings show that in terms of contributing to sustainable development, the presence of morphogenesis in the selected cycles turns out to be rather limited, and there is a severe lack of political reflexivity (cf. Al-Amoudi 2017) among actors.*

Key words: ***Slovenia, morphogenetic cycles, sustainable development, economy, governance***

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Introduction

In the article, we examine Slovenia as a case of a post-communist country that has undergone many social changes leading to specific developmental outcomes (Golob – Makarovič 2017). Through deploying an in-depth historical analysis and extensive empirical data, we explore Slovenian society through the lens of sustainable development indicators. We are inquiring whether Slovenia can be considered a country that has been effectively adapting sustainability goals (as proposed by the UN and also incorporated into national developmental strategies; Šooš et al. 2017) into national structural and cultural settings.

Addressing the issues of sustainable development seems to be more important than ever. The recent outbreak of the coronavirus has enormously underscored some severe weaknesses of the global social system, revealing contested and incongruent processes of modernisation. While human society has become increasingly connected in terms of consumption and cultural tastes, social integration is being loosened (Donati 2017). On the one hand, global economic flows are bound to the ideology praising continuous growth and atomised consumers, which has devastating impacts on the natural environment and social interactions. On the other, we still face the dominance of national authorities preserving their interests despite challenges whose consequences reach far beyond national borders.

The current threat of the pandemic for future economic performances and political legitimacy can only be seen as the tip of an iceberg of unsustainable politics and practices exercised on the global level and within national societies. For many decades already, human society has been facing severe social and ecological pressures. Social exclusion, inequality, and the marginalisation of particular social groups, on the one hand, and pollution, global warming, deforestation, loss of biodiversity on the other, have substantially degraded natural environment and social cohesion. Economic and political outcomes of the unprecedented situation caused by the current pandemic are likely to further deepen the cracks in the social systems caused by the unstable global geopolitical situation and destructive capitalist production. One can hardly dispute that there is a need for different social actions and reinforced solidarity among people and nations (Archer – Donati 2015; Donati 2017), which correspond to the sustainable performance on a macro level.

According to the Sustainable Development Agenda of the United Nations 2030, there is a strong need to align economic, political and technological processes with sustainable development goals. Unprecedented and rapid changes in the natural environment and technological advances require rapid and efficient adaptation to more sustainable practices. All societal levels have to be transformed and adjust quickly to be able to overcome risks and uncertainties and to assure a better quality of living for all.

In the present article, we question in what directions Slovenia has been heading in those terms. While exploring the country in a historical perspective, we draw on Archer's (1995) morphostatic/morphogenetic (M/M) framework of society. The main advantage of this approach one can find in analytical dualism advocating the emergence of structure, culture and agency, which cannot be reduced to one another. The interaction between all levels presupposes temporal sequences, in terms that social structures and culture always predate social action. Agents respond to given context by elaborating it and enabling structural change to occur. Social context, in which actors find themselves, is thus the outcome of their past social interactions (1995). The M/M approach can also be seen as the methodological innovation (Archer – Morgan 2020) enabling agents explore different ways of morphogenetic processes between structure and culture and corresponding elaboration from actors. On the other hand, instead of the morphogenesis, the process may also be morphostatic – resulting in the maintenance of the existing structural and cultural features. In that regard, we are interested in whether structural and cultural levels have been mutually reinforcing each other in maintaining a certain status quo and preserving unsustainable practices or are bound into synergy causing transformation, thus contributing to the sustainable performance of the country.

Nowadays, we can speak about morphogenesis or morphogenetic society as an emergent global form; however, there are different morphogenetic societies existing (Al-Amoudi 2017). Via a careful examination of the historical, political and economic processes in the specific case of Slovenia, we attempt to understand the adaptation of this society to various global social changes and the contribution to these dynamics through bottom-up active participation. By that, we aim to provide some insights into broader social transformations and outcomes caused by the interplay between both structural settings and agents who are nevertheless initiators of social changes (Archer 2017; Al-Amoudi 2017). Due to globalisation and the digitalisation of social processes and interactions, exploring certain national societies entails the simultaneous consideration of its attachment (or detachment) to the wider geopolitical environments. In that regard, the analysis of Slovenia could reveal important features of both emergent levels, thus providing insights not just into the past, but also into possible future (un)sustainable practices, which are always based on pre-existing structural-cultural settings. With our analysis, we attempt to represent the historical patterns of structure and culture relations underlying the transformation of Slovenian society, and on that basis also to sketch some possible future paths to which Slovenia is heading.

Sustainable development and social morphogenesis

Sustainable development is a complex and multidimensional concept. Despite various conceptualisations, its meaning remains blurred and torn between

scholarly definitions and political agenda. The broad explanation of its meaning has been provided by the Brundtland Commission, formerly known as the World Commission on Environment and Development, saying that 'Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (1987). In the article, we ensue from SOGESID's (2014) definition emphasising that sustainable development is the intertwining of environmental, economic and social sustainability. Those dimensions are also mutually interdependent. For instance, eliminating poverty among vulnerable groups calls for providing social justice and also for protecting the natural environment enabling food to grow (ISO 26000). Two additional dimensions have also been recognised, democracy and the value system of the society, which seem significant when considering sustainable development referring to the compliance of needs of present generations without hindering the possibilities of the generations yet to come (Plut 2010; Berardi 2013). What is most significant for sustainable development is its temporal, spatial and social dependence (Berardi 2013).

We are, however, aware that such definitions of sustainable development remain open to different interpretations mixing 'sufficientarian and egalitarian objectives" (cf. Boulanger 2013: 316). The present research might at first sight be seen as linked to the intragenerational dimension of sustainable development, thus promoting 'justice within the same generation' (Law 2019). However, while this study explores sustainable development through different time periods, one can see it is tightened to an intergenerational dimension as well. It has also been argued (Spijkers 2018) that Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which underline our conceptualisation of sustainable development, are giving reference to the 'future generations' in their orientation. What we find the most significant for sustainable development in our research is its temporal, spatial and social dependence (Berardi 2013).

To explore the interaction of social and cultural settings through time as the outcomes of morphogenetic processes leading to sustainable development, we deploy the analytical tool of the M/M approach. It has been argued (Knio 2018) that this approach is one of the most eminent accounts on exploring structure and agency interactions in social sciences, although there are not many empirical studies drawing on the M/M approach. It has been efficiently applied in post-communist transformations studies for the case of Estonia by Lauristin – Vihalemm (2020). By using it, they analysed the social change as a multidimensional morphogenetic/morphostatic process occurring in real time, by scrutinising the interactions between structure, culture and agency by creating new developments and transformative cycles. The approach served as a methodological toolkit for considering the emerging cultural and social differences as outcomes of morphogenetic processes. Our perspective here is focused on specifically identifying these elements of morphogenesis that con-

tribute to sustainable development. A few existing studies so far have already indicated that the M/M approach enables a diachronic exploration of the interaction between the social context and agents. In that regard, one may refer to the analysis of the historical emergence of sustainability initiatives at Rhodes University (Togo 2009). There is also a study (Pretorius 2020) on social development referring to communities in the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality and elsewhere in the Eastern Cape of South Africa.

There is always a precondition imposed by the structural setting which influences social action (Archer 2003; 2012). To understand the current situation (or predict a future one), the analysis of structural-cultural interactions and their interactions with agents in different periods is a key. The M/M approach implies that there is always a particular structural/cultural condition (existing at the moment of time called T1) that proceeds the social action that transforms it. Structural and cultural settings are seen as emergent properties enabling situational logics in which interactions take place. This approach allows us to explore how those settings condition actors' responses. In that light, structure and individuals are different emergent levels with their own ontological reality, each possessing causal powers (Archer 2003). Both levels mutually reinforce and change themselves through their interactions (taking place in the time period of T2–T3), while the approach allows us to move towards the contextualisation of these interactions. However, change occurs only through the elaboration (T4) of social context by social actors or agents who consider their intentions and future concerns through reflexive internal conversation (Archer 2003; 2007). Elaborated social context thus becomes a new T1. The repetitiveness of such dynamic elaboration between societal levels creates a morphogenetic cycle. However, if the elaboration fails and the old culture and structure are maintained, the cycle is morphostatic.

Due to the compression of time and space (Harvey 1989), accelerated digitalisation and mass communication, people have become increasingly embedded in novel social configurations and not-yet-tested solutions for effective action (Archer 2012; Al-Amoudi 2017). Accordingly, they are encouraged or even forced to become more reflexive in order to adapt successfully to rapid changes. It has been argued that the variety in ideas, techniques, skills, products and lifestyles (Archer 2017: 3) are contributing to the morphogenetic society, in which reflexivity is an imperative (2012).

Slovenia should be seen in the context of the wider (global) morphogenetic process, and it is thus not excluded from such transformations. However, there are also specifics in how the national society responds to such imperatives in terms of sustainable performances. Not everyone is capable of elaborating the social context, which is preconditioned with the structural and institutional aspects, such as 'human subjects require institutional help' to realise their concerns' (Maccarini 2017). For instance, it has already been shown in the

case of Slovenia that structure has a significant impact on the intensity and substance of reflexive outcomes (Golob – Makarovič 2019). In general, one can find substantial doubts that morphogenetic processes empower people. It has been argued that reflexive powers, enabling interpretation and acting upon the social configurations are not equally distributed (Al-Amoudi, 2017: 73).

In that regard, Archer (2007) has shown that there are four different modes of reflexivity that one practices: (a) communicative reflexivity, which needs to be confirmed and completed by others before it leads to action; (b) autonomous reflexivity, which stems from an unstable initial context; (c) meta-reflexivity, which critically evaluates previous inner dialogues, and is critical about effective action; (d) fractured reflexivity, which cannot lead to purposeful courses of action and only intensifies personal distress and disorientation. Reflexivity occurs within the inner dialogue of individuals. As Archer says, it is 'the regular exercise of the mental ability, shared by all normal people, to consider themselves in relation to their (social) contexts and vice versa' (Archer 2007: 4). While reflexivity is always a personal emergent power, the kind of social contexts in which one is deliberating his/her concerns and actions is important. As this article focuses on the elaboration of sustainable development goals referring to the individual and macro-societal adaptation to sustainable performance, the distinction between Al-Amoudi's (2017) social and political reflexivity seems to be crucial. Social reflexivity primarily addresses the question 'How should I make my way through life?', which is explored in detail in Archer's works. Political reflexivity, in contrast, refers to the question, 'How can we steer society together?' This perspective resonates closely with Donati's relational reflexivity, emphasising the importance of recognising common concerns and acting together in a certain way. Both kinds of reflexivity should be present within society to expect significant morphogenetic transformations, as they 'result from people performing the practices and respecting the rights and duties associated with their roles' (Al-Amoudi 2017: 68).

In that regard, when analysing different periods that distinctly characterised Slovenian society, we do not presuppose that each period has been morphogenetic in terms of sustainable development. The latter implies that mechanisms generating changes are prevailing over those that maintain social stability. As Al-Amoudi (2017) emphasises, in that term, transformational mechanisms are not exogenous but endogenous, which means that changes result from people performing the practices (Al-Amoudi 2017). While transformations can be induced from the external factors, which is quite obvious in the case of Slovenia, where the processes, such as marketisation and Europeanisation, reflected transformations in a broader context. However, what comes next is crucial, referring to the ways in which actors and agents respond to such changes, reinforcing or changing structural settings. There is an interaction between structure-culture-agency (SAC) that matters.

In this article, we explore the macro-level of Slovenia by referring to a variety of existing research, typically dealing with post-communist transformation, development and sustainability. While official statistics can provide some quantitative insights into the social structure, general attitudes of the population as measured by social surveys provide some quantitative proxy indicators of selected aspects of culture. The quantitative structural indicators of sustainable development that we refer to are selected in direct reference to the Sustainable Development Agenda of the United Nations 2030, which were also adopted explicitly by the current Strategy of Development of Slovenia 2030 (Šooš et al. 2017).

The selection of survey data is also based on their connection with the same sustainability issues and their availability for the longer period, particularly close to the time points that we observed, specifically the beginnings and ends of the cycles. These data should not be seen as 'objective' proof of our claims but as an additional reference that supports our analysis, which is otherwise more of an interpretative and qualitative nature.

We deliberately begin our analysis in 1992, right after Slovenia was recognised as an independent country and after multi-party representative democracy had been consolidated by the first democratic constitution. The period between the first signs of the crumbling of the Yugoslav communist regime and the consolidation of Slovenian statehood was so strongly focused on the basis of democratisation and nation-building that, other than the obvious general concerns about providing a good life in a new social order, no major focus could be given to either of the developmental issues. The year 1992 represents a turning point and a clear beginning of a new cycle from that perspective: with the representative democracy and statehood practically granted, the developmental issues could become the central focus.

The year 2008 can be seen as another major turning point. It represented the peak in terms of Slovenian economic development in relative terms. It symbolically concluded its 'Europeanisation' by holding the EU Presidency that year, thus reaching all of its goals in these terms. In contrast, that year marked the beginning of the global economic crisis that seriously affected Slovenia, not only in economic but even more so in terms of governance and institutional trust.

This brings us to the next major turning point of 2013. If 2008 could be seen as 'a peak' in certain ways, 2013 could be seen as the lowest point, characterised by austerity measures, political crisis, massive distrust towards the elites and the institutions, also manifested through street protests, even some minor elements of violence. However, it was also the beginning of the recovery and even the search for new paradigms. It is too early to speculate about the next turning point and the end of the current cycle, though it is very likely that it will be at least to some extent related to coronavirus-related changes.

In principle, we can thus distinguish between three distinctive cycles within our period or research that can be analysed through morphostatic/morphogenetic lenses:

- the Marketisation or Europeanisation Cycle (1992–2008) characterised by the consolidation of the market economy, following the references from the developed European countries and integrating into the European Union;
- the Crisis Cycle (2008–2013), characterised by economic decline, rising distrust towards the elites, towards political and legal institutions, and the crises of governance; and
- the Search for New Alternatives Cycle (from 2013), characterised by the post-crisis recovery but the lack of clear references or a broadly accepted developmental models to follow.

These cycles are not defined based on any particular quantitative indicators, but on the visible historical turning points. Thus, it is up to the further analysis in this article to test whether and how these distinctive cycles also correspond to the trends and shifts in terms of the aspects of sustainable development. We will also briefly indicate the links between developmental failures and governance crises.

It should also be noted that the national cycles we distinguish significantly, but not fully, correspond to some global cycles and turning points. While the 2008 crisis was global, the timing of the turning points in 1992 and 2013 were more nationally specific, but still resonating, ether more or less directly, some of the transnational phenomena inspired by the events such as the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 or the Occupy movement in 2011. Although the distinction between inside and outside may be quite blurred in the era of globalisation (Robertson 2014; Adam 2020), we should still distinguish at least for analytical purposes between the exogenous and the endogenous structural and cultural conditions affecting each of the cycles.

If we observe all of the dimensions of sustainability understood in holistic terms such as combining the economic, the social and the natural-environmental perspectives, we can observe both the elements of morphogenesis and the elements of morphostasis over the previous three decades. Furthermore, these three dimensions of sustainable development cannot be studied without considering the major aspects of governance, which involves both the participatory and deliberative consensus-seeking mechanisms and the capacities for the efficient implementation of the adopted decisions, which would be close to Amitai Etzioni's ideal of the active society (Etzioni 1968).

While some aspects of sustainable development in Slovenia were quite vibrant in the given periods, others were stagnant or simply neglected. We assume that the generative mechanisms that produced either morphogenetic or morphostatic outcomes in terms of sustainable development can be best understood in the broader context of the more general cycles of the Slovenian society as specified above.

Marketisation and Europeanisation Cycle

The initial structural conditions at the beginning of this cycle (time point T1 in Archer's morphogenetic/morphostatic analytical tool) was the industry inherited from the communist system and mostly unfit for global market competition. Nevertheless, Slovenia had some initial benefits at that time when compared to other communist countries. Enterprises were comparatively more autonomous due to 'self-management socialism', and some parts of the industry were already oriented towards the Western and other global markets (Adam et al. 2005; Crowley – Stanojević 2011: 275; Susan L. Woodward 1995). With comparatively low levels of social exclusion and high levels of ethnic homogeneity, especially when compared to the other ex-Yugoslav republics (Mrak et al. 2004), society was rather cohesive. Most of the business was formally 'socially' owned, which in practice meant state-owned but with high autonomy of the managerial structures, mostly holding their posts from communist times (Adam – Tomšič 2000: 144).

Despite the crises caused by the problems of the old uncompetitive companies and the first suspicious privatisation manoeuvres, the society remained comparatively egalitarian. This structural equality went hand-in-hand with the traditional cultural features of Slovenian society strongly supporting egalitarianism, described by Josip Županov as the 'egalitarian syndrome' (cf. Štulhofer – Burić 2015). In terms of general cultural conditions, there was comparatively broad and homogeneous support for the common national project, which could be described as 'joining Europe', which involved not only the ambition to join the European Union in institutional terms but also to adopt European qualities and European ways of life (Velikonja 1996; Golob 2013), which were seen as consistent with what the proper Slovenian way should be.

These initial cultural settings were rather consistent with the external cultural and structural conditions within the European Union at the time, which favoured eastern enlargement, and accepting guidance from Brussels was seen as acceptable from the Slovenian cultural and structural perspectives.

Like most other transitional societies, Slovenia underwent substantial structural transformations, while as Domazet, Marinović, and Jerolimov (2014: 20) argue, the shift towards sustainability should be seen as a process of adaptation, learning and action demanded upon by scholars to consider the dynamic relations between economy, society and the natural environment.

From the perspective of sustainable development, the initial conditions provided a strong generative mechanism towards increasing economic development (due to the broad acceptance of the marketisation/Europeanisation goals), not damaging the social cohesion (egalitarianism) but ignoring the natural environmental aspects (having no particular cultural or structural support). A strong cultural emphasis was placed on hard work and the reduction of lagging in terms of cognitive mobilisation (Adam et al. 2005), productivity and material standards.

The key political and other agents broadly shared these views. Significant political polarisation between the centre-left and the centre-right political actors was mostly defined in cultural terms, like an ideological-historical Kulturkampf (Adam et al., 2009; cf. Balázs et al. 2018: 278–279), but seldom regarding the key developmental orientations. This was manifested through strong continuity of these policies, which were run for most of the period by the centre-left governments, but never really changed in this regard when the government was taken by the centre-right first briefly in 2000 and then again from 2004 to 2008 (Adam et al. 2009). Despite the overall stress on economic growth, the balance between the key agents never allowed any significant move towards more radical market reforms and neoliberal economic policies. In this regard, the major role was played by the strong veto power of the trade unions within the established structure (and culture) of neo-corporatist arrangements, combined with the constitutional arrangement allowing to call a referendum against any undesired legal measures (Crowley – Stanojević 2011; Meszmann 2007). More radically neoliberal discourses promoted by the 'Young Economists' were only a brief variation in the dominant discourses during the first years of the centre--right government; however, they never prevailed as an actual policy despite getting some resonance in the Strategy of the Republic of Slovenia from 2005 (cf. Šušteršič – Rojec – Korenika 2005). The obvious emphasis of the key agents was thus on encouraging economic development while maintaining social sustainability, with the latter seen mostly as maintaining status quo through the highly regulated labour market, at least when compared to most of the other post-communist countries in Europe (Crowley – Stanojević 2011).

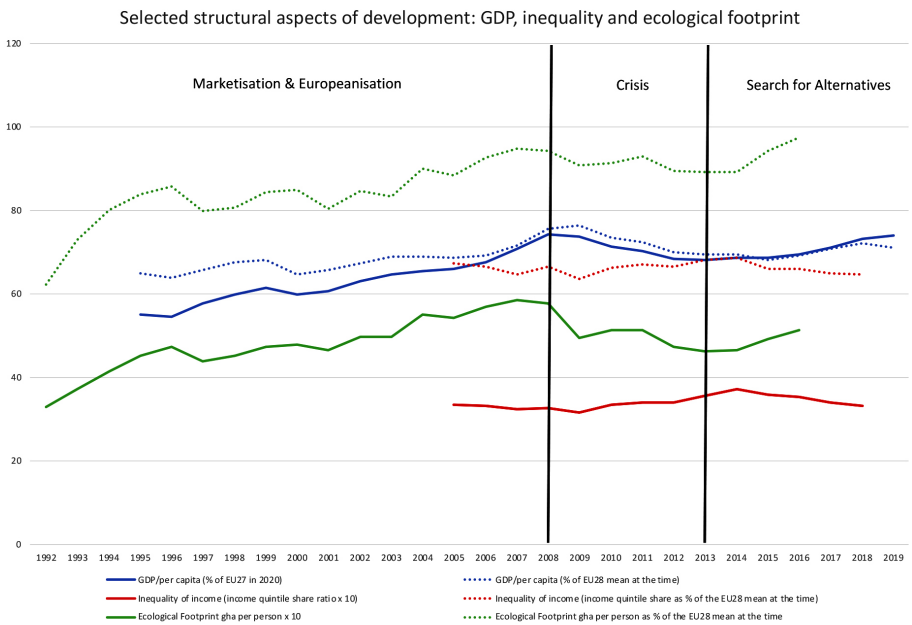
The focus on market reforms favouring economic growth was also expressed in the first major general strategic developmental document The Strategy of Development of Slovenia based on the Lisbon Strategy (Šušteršič – Rojec – Korenika 2005). Its strong emphasis on the economic aspects of development is more than indicative. While this was complemented with social (welfare) concerns, only the last of the five priorities explicitly mentioned sustainability but focused more on generational and regional disparities than on the natural environment. However, as indicated later (Republic of Slovenia, Ministry of Economy 2013), not even the existing environmental goals were met.

The lack of environmental concerns in this cycle was not only a result of structural and cultural conditions but also of the lack of agency. While the Greens of Slovenia were initially represented in the parliament and even a constituent part of the first democratic Slovenian government, their focus on closing-down the only Slovenian nuclear powerplant (which would have no sustainable alternatives) and the lack of other significant ecological topics they could enforce as a broader agenda led to their eventual political failure early in the 1990s. The environmental agenda thus became even more marginalised and limited to some relatively fringe elements of civil society.

However, as far at the economic and social dimensions of development were concerned, the cycle drew from the high levels of political reflexivity established in the late 1980s and elaborated through further reflexive considerations. They resulted from relatively participatory movements and subsequent consensus--building capacities regarding nation-state building, its democratisation and its political and economic integration in the European framework. The cultural and structural references were to a great extent exogeneous ('joining Europe'), but highly domesticated for the purposes of a morphogenetic structural transformation.

The agency that took place within this period (from T2 to T3 in terms of Archer's framework) thus clearly led to morphogenetic results at the final point of the cycle in terms of structural elaboration (T4), transforming Slovenian society into an integrated part of the EU system of the economy and governance quite competitive globally in the economic terms. Slovenians ended the cycle being significantly more educated and economically productive, both in comparison to the beginning of the cycle and to the European average. This can also be well observed in terms of GDP per capita growth from 1992 to 2008 in absolute and in relative terms when compared to the mean of the EU countries as indicated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Selected structural aspects of development



Sources: Eurostat (2019); Global Footprint Network (2019); own calculations.

However, while these shifts demonstrate the morphogenetic change during this cycle in terms of economic development and European integration of Slovenia, one cannot see it as a morphogenetic change providing a clear step towards an overall sustainability in terms of all of its three dimensions.

While the general (cultural) attitudes of the population supported economic change at the beginning of the cycle and expressed relatively positive views about the results at the end of it, the worries about social equality have persisted (obviously related to the concerns about the negative social consequences of the market economy). Both are indicated by the survey results on the attitudes towards the economic system and on inequality in Figure 2.[2] However, the levels of social exclusion have remained low, and quite impressive levels of income equality persisted (see the data on inequality in Figure 1). In terms of preserving the social status quo, the first cycle can be seen as morphostatic.

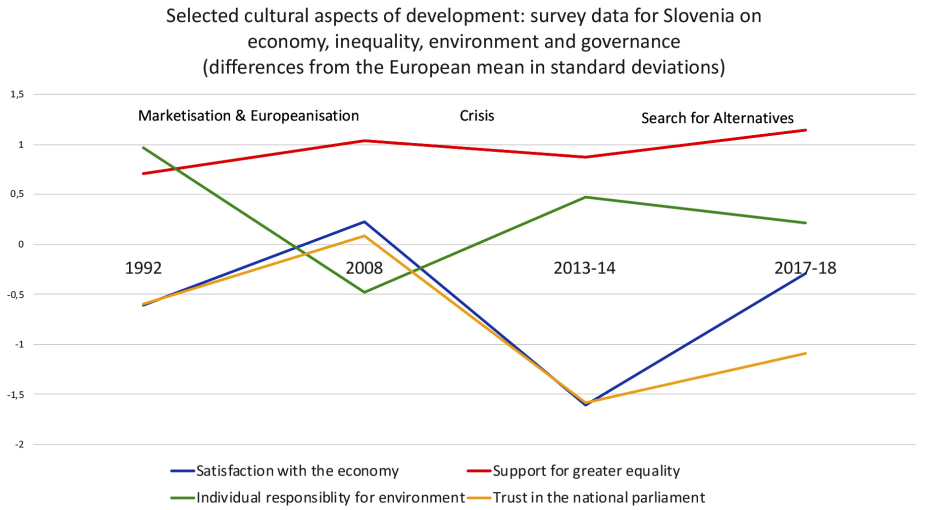
As indicated above, in terms of culture, structure and agency, environmental concerns were not a major concern in this cycle, neither in Slovenia nor in its broader European structural and cultural context. Moreover, while the feelings of (individual) responsibility for the environment have decreased during the cycle (see data about individual responsibility in Figure 2), the ecological footprint has increased consistently with the GDP growth (see Figure 1).

This is quite in line with the existing research. It has been argued (Pravdić 1997: 209) that transitional societies have struggled to accept the market economy as an open system embedded into a finite and closed global or regional ecosystems. Those countries, including Slovenia, were struggling to establish a new and different value system entailing also the proper concern for the management of natural resources. Even more challenging was devoting financial, technical means to implement such principles, to a large extent due to the lack of political will (Pravdić 1997: 201). Domzet – Marinović Jerolimov (2014: 35) have also observed that the post-communist central and east European regions are facing some specific and inherent obstacles towards the sustainability. The latter is hindered mainly by the specific structural flaws linked to the historical

2 In order to make the variety of survey data comparable, they are presented in terms of standard deviations from the means of the European countries included in a given survey. The means have been calculated from the Likert scales obtained through the surveys, namely:
– Satisfaction with the economy: 'Economic system needs fundamental changes' (reversed scale, EVS 1990–1992) and 'How satisfied with present state of economy in [country]' (ESS Round 4 2008; ESS Round 7 2014; ESS Round 9 2018)
– Support for greater equality: 'incomes should be made more equal' vs. 'there should be greater incentives for individual effort' (EVS 1990–1992), 'Government should reduce differences in income levels' (ESS Round 4 2008; ESS Round 7 2014; ESS Round 9 2018)
– Individual responsibility for environment: 'I would give part of my income if I were certain that the money would be used to prevent environmental pollution' (EVS 1990–1992), 'As an individual, you can play a role in protecting the environment in [our country]' (Eurobarometer 2008; 2014; 2017)
– Trust in the national parliament: 'how much confidence you have in parliament' (EVS 1990–1992), 'how much you personally trust…[country's] parliament' (ESS Round 4 2008; ESS Round 7 2014; ESS Round 9 2018).

socialist industrialisation in the past and to the more recent changes in the civil participation limited to economic activity.

Figure 2: Selected cultural aspects of development



Sources: European Values Study (1992); Special Eurobarometer reports (2008; 2014; 2019); ESS Round 4 (2008); ESS Round 7 (2014); ESS Round 9 (2018); own calculations.

The Crisis Cycle

While the integration of Slovenia into the European and Euro-Atlantic framework was a clear outcome of the match of the structural and cultural causal mechanisms and the deliberate agency, implementing the global and national ideas of a proper post-communist transition, the Crisis Cycle that followed was quite different. In Archer's morphogenetic/morphostatic analytical approach, the ending Point 4 of the previous cycle becomes the starting Point 1 of the new cycle. The Slovenian situation was quite consistent with that, as the key outcomes of the Marketisation/Europeanisation cycle became the major generative mechanisms of the new Crisis Cycle.

At least to some extent, it can be argued that Slovenian society paradoxically became a victim of its previous success (Spruk 2012; Tomšič – Vehovar 2012). Firstly, its successful integration into European and global markets made it even more susceptible to the global economic crisis in 2008 and the subsequent years. Secondly, the initial goals of nation-building, democratisation, functioning economy and European integration as a unifying narrative

transcending political, social and economic divisions were achieved and could thus provide no clear common guidance for the further (political) agency. Finally, despite the significant improvement of material welfare, there was also a kind of disillusionment with the Western ideals of prosperity and democracy, again contributing to the weakening of the previously unifying narrative. If the first element of this causal mechanism of the crisis can be seen as structural, the other two can be seen as cultural.

In the complex arrangements combining representative democracy with neo-corporatist social dialogue (Guardiancich 2011; Crowley – Stanojević 2011), the variety and political, economic and social actors attempted to maintain a balance between (delayed) austerity measures, maintaining social cohesion and economic recovery. The developmental goals of the Strategy of Development of Slovenia 2005–2013 have started to be seen as unachievable (Republic of Slovenia, Ministry of Economy 2013).

The Slovenian manifestations of the financial and economic crises caused an even more critical legitimacy crisis of political actors, which also became a legitimacy crisis of the institutions, such as the government, parliament and political parties in general and the judicial system (see the drastic decline regarding trust in the parliament from 2008 to 2013 in Figure 2). The public perception of both the political and the judicial actors, strongly encouraged by not only mass media and civil society actors but also by political actors themselves, increasingly became marked by inefficiency and/or corruption. Record low trust in the political and judicial institutions was one of the most obvious outcomes of the Crisis Cycle.

The institutional and political crisis culminated in the 'popular uprisings' against the 'corrupt elites' in 2013. While the narratives of the 'uprisings' sometimes even challenged the logic of representative democracy itself and vilified the elites, in general they were more specifically targeted against one of the mayors and the centre-right government at the time. Consequently, after the return of the centre-left actors to power, the protest movement quickly disappeared, and the political system seemed mostly re-consolidated.

The exhaustion of the classical nation building-democratisation-Europeanisation narratives during the Crisis, however, would require a higher level of political reflexivity. The crisis did not produce any major reflexive re-considerations, neither among the elite actors, within civil society, nor among the agency provided by the 'ordinary' people participating in the protests. What seemed to be 'critical' and protest-orientated seemed to be based more on a combination of the traditional culture of anti-elitist egalitarianism, pre-existing ideological polarisation, communist nostalgia and (but only to a limited extent) some resonance referring to the transnational phenomena such as the Occupy movement. As far as the 'anti-systemic' protests were reflexive, they were mostly led by communicative reflexivity (following what the others would confirm through

the conventional and on-line social media) and fractured reflexivity (feelings of disillusionment but with no clear search for alternatives).

Consequently, the disillusionment with marketisation and the problems with the economic crisis significantly affected governance legitimacy and even capacities but provided no viable alternative narratives. It was indicative that the new Strategy of Development of Slovenia 2014–2020 was only drafted, and that the centre-left government taking power in 2013 after the 'popular uprisings' mostly merely continued with the implementation of the austerity measures adopted previously by the centre-right government.

Far from surprising, regarding the developmental outcomes of this cycle, the economic crisis eroded the economic indicators, while the political-institutional crisis had devastating effects on institutional trust (see Table 2); thus, the governance capacities to intentionally steer any kind of sustainable development clearly decreased with this cycle. Despite some increase of inequality during the crisis, a comparatively high level of social cohesion based on egalitarianism and relatively high social inclusion was maintained.

The environmental issues were occasionally brought forward by particular NGOs and some local initiatives, but they never became one of the central narratives leading the key actors. The general feeling of civic responsibility for the environment increased when compared with the previous cycle, but, as this was not transferred into any consistent general policies, the structural improvement of the environmental indicators was more a result of the decrease in industrial production due to the economic crisis than of any deliberate environmentalist concerns, as became evident after the economic crisis was over (see the temporary decline/stagnation of the ecological footprint during the Crisis Cycle in Figure 1).

In terms of its outcomes, the cycle can thus be seen as morphostatic: despite the severe problems with the persisting narratives, the increase of disillusionment and protest, no viable alternatives were provided to the classical narratives from before 2008 (which is in stark contrast to the alternatives in terms of nation building-democracy-Europe provided at the end of the 1980s against the communist regime, which were quite clearly elaborated and also mostly implemented between 1989 and 2008). The failure of the governments in 2013 even to adopt a new overall strategic document was symbolic but highly indicative in this regard.

The Cycle of Searching for Alternatives

In terms of structural conditions, at the beginning of the new cycle Slovenia was still severely affected by the economic crisis, but the mass protests had dissipated, and the focus returned to the conventional institutions of representative democracy. In cultural terms, however, the confidence towards both political and judicial institutions was severely damaged and, with the declining institutional

confidence and the lack of any clear unifying narratives, the relations between the political agents were even more polarised than in the previous cycles.

Structural conditions indicated not just an economic crisis but also the exhaustion of the classical modernising narrative from the first cycle that focused almost exclusively on economic growth while maintaining the social status quo. Structurally, the issues were further complicated when the economic crisis was followed by the 'refugee crisis'. In general, the structural pressure to reconsider the relationship between the economic, social and environmental aspects of development and to combine them with participatory and effective governance became clearer than ever before. This definitely called for higher levels of political reflexivity.

However, neither the prevailing cultural conditions nor the composition of the (strongly polarising) political, mass media and civil society agents provided proper circumstances for this. It is indicative that the prevailing discourse as represented through the media was not about debating new visions but about searching for 'new faces'. Lacking the necessary political reflexivity, politics became strongly personalised (Cabada – Tomšič 2016). In the centre-right, this has been manifested by the continuing inseparability between the party and its leader, regardless of the circumstances. In the centre-left, it was manifested by establishing parties for a single-election use centred exclusively on the leader (indicatively with the party being named after its leader). Instead of a vision that could be reflected upon, the leader was typically idealised by supposedly embodying a certain personal feature, such as 'decisiveness', 'entrepreneurial efficiency', 'uncompromising ethic' or maybe just being close to the 'ordinary people' (Tomšič – Prijon 2013).

This combination of structural challenges with the cultural features of disillusionment, disorientation and institutional distrust in principle provided fertile ground for the rise of populism (cf. Adam – Tomšič 2019) that could provide non-reflexive shortcuts by responding with simplistic answers to complex issues, with the economic crisis providing new grounds for leftist populism, the refugee crisis for the right-wing populism and the broader systemic crises for both of them. However, despite certain integrations of some right-wing xenophobic agenda into the main centre-right party and the formation of a new party of the radical left, no new major actors were present that would make use of these factors to develop an extremist right-wing or extremist left-wing agenda. Despite the structural and cultural conditions there was, fortunately, in this case, the lack of significant agency that would build more on that. Populism was thus mostly present through the personification of politics, as mentioned above, not in any significant way in the form of political extremism.

There have also been some of the more positive exogenous structural and cultural conditions affecting this cycle in Slovenia. The global economic recovery has contributed to the post-crisis recovery of the Slovenian economy, though

Slovenia's economic GDP per capita in comparison to the rest of the EU, is still significantly below the level of 2008 (Šooš et al. 2017: 10). The global rise of environmentalist discourse provides another major cultural impetus for Slovenian society, though its actual adoption by the major actors is still very questionable.

The adoption of the Strategy of Development of Slovenia 2030 (Šooš et al. 2017) in 2017 has been an encouraging sign because it clearly emphasises the synergy between the economic, social and environmental aspects of development, combined with the focus on governance. In the context of the above-mentioned exogenous structural and cultural mechanisms, the document draws heavily from the Agenda 2030 of the United Nations and EU documents. However, it is premature to predict whether these will be the start of another morphogenetic transformation in terms of actually implementing a developmental paradigm, or it will just be seen as an attempt at externally imposed discourse, suppressed due to domestic actors' vested interests.

The recent developmental indicators for this cycle thus far, in Table 3, confirm a moderate economic structural recovery and greater economic optimism in the cultural sphere as the current (but not necessarily final) outcomes of this cycle. They are combined with significant scepticism towards digital technology in comparison to the European average, but it cannot be predicted if this will also lead to any significant politically reflexive deliberations (some have been present in the debates on the health effect of G5 technology but not as a major political issue). Egalitarianism and social cohesion have remained comparatively high in structural and cultural terms, while no major improvement can be seen regarding the structural and cultural aspects of protecting the natural environment (see Figures 1 and 2).

We cannot speak yet about any clear end of this cycle. It has thus far failed to produce any type of cultural and structural elaboration in term of morphogenesis, and it is still premature to describe it as fully morphostatic, though the status quo has clearly prevailed over change thus far. Likely, a global turning point starting a new cycle based on the coronavirus effects will also conclude the existing and start the next cycle, also in terms of sustainable development. Although the structural and cultural contours initiating the new cycle are becoming clearer, what the actual effects of this future cycle for sustainable development will be is mostly a matter of agency, especially of the globally powerful actors.

Conclusion

This study has provided insights into the transformative processes in Slovenia as a post-communist society from the perspective of sustainable development. Focusing on a post-communist country is of particular relevance in this regard as the transformative nature of these societies may provide some significant features potentially relevant for sustainable performance in general – due to

their specific historic heritage and path-dependencies (Domazet – Marinović – Jerolimov 2014). The key innovative contribution of the text is therefore in applying a morphostatic/morphogenetic approach to such a concrete empirical case, thus enabling to observe how the interaction between structure and culture contributes either to a morphogenetic social change or to the status quo maintenance. The role of the political elites and other actors in the elaboration of the given circumstances has been taken into account. Consequently, we have been able to explain which of the historical periods were actually morphogenetic in terms of sustainable development.

We can speak of various aspects of social transformations in terms of morphogenesis over the previous three decades in Slovenia. However, while social morphogenesis is needed for the shift from the existing non-sustainable practices, clearly morphogenesis often does not produce greater sustainability.

Thus, in terms of contributing to sustainable development, the presence of morphogenesis in the cycles that we have analysed turns out to be rather limited. Based on this result, we can conclude that morphogenesis undoubtedly occurred in the first cycle of Marketisation and Europeanisation, but only in terms of economic development and European integration. In this period, Slovenian society aligned itself with the EU standards of governance and developed a functioning market economy, while at the same time the social aspects of sustainability were not compromised in any significant way. The previous 'socialist-style' model was replaced by the model that produced impressive economic results, while still maintaining comparatively high levels of equality and social inclusion. The continuation of the common nation-building narrative, further elaborated in the 'Europeanisation' narrative based on broad popular support made the agency predominantly endogenous. We can thus clearly see this as a case of morphogenesis. Moreover, we can see it as morphogenetic change contributing to greater economic welfare. However, we should also mention in this regard that the social aspect was limited to the maintenance of the status quo, while the environmental one was largely neglected both in cultural and structural terms.

In the two other cycles that followed, we observe that factor of social change was more exogenous without the ability of the wider population to become engaged in the elaboration of structural settings. The impetus for change came almost exclusively from outside (for example through the crisis and post-crisis recovery in structural terms or the discourses of anti-elite protest and greater environmental awareness in cultural terms. Political and economic elites have mainly adjusted to external circumstances to maintain the status quo, mostly restoring the previous situation, which was particularly clear with the shift from the second to the (to date) final cycle, when typically only 'new faces' (clearly symbolising the superficial nature of political change) were offered instead of increased political reflexivity that could lead to any kind of paradigmatic change in terms of sustainable development.

Nevertheless, these do not indicate that Slovenian society is not sustainable at all, as the results are often ambivalent, indicating that the future is uncertain. It depends significantly on the broader Slovenian population, whether it is (of course, while still being influenced by exogeneous factors) reflects the new paradigmatic shifts and support new visions of sustainable development, balancing the economic, social and environmental aspects, which depends strongly on the mode of reflexivity, especially the predominance of meta reflexivity (Al-Amoudi 2017). While the latter seems to be quite present at the micro-level in people's everyday concerns, as indicated by previous research (Golob – Makarovič 2019), there seems to be the problem of transforming these everyday life concerns to broader political concerns. Understanding this gap would require further research.

There are serious concerns regarding all of the aspects of sustainable development. Even the economic achievements from the Marketisation and Europeanisation Cycle cannot be taken for granted as the highest GDP per capita in Slovenia relative to the EU average was achieved in 2008 (90%), while in subsequent years the gap between Slovenia and the EU average has only increased; Slovenia even fell from the first to the second place in economic terms among the post-communist EU members (with Czechia taking the lead) (Eurostat in Lauristin – Vihalemm 2020).

The environmental dimension is even more ambivalent. On the one hand, we can observe an increased culture of individual responsibility manifested not only in survey data (see Figure 2) but also in everyday behaviour such as very prevalent care for waste separation and, structurally, in terms of persistently high water-quality. On the other hand, severe structural barriers and strong vested interests, typically focused on coal extraction, import and use as a source of energy, are preventing any significant structural transformation in terms of decreased carbon emission. This can be exemplified by the persistent reliance on domestic and imported coal. It is also strongly related to the confusion about the alternatives, with the decision of building another nuclear power plant potentially postponed until 2027 and with having no large-scale alternatives available to coal as the major source of electric power (cf. Reuters 2020). Despite some good results in the present, the future thus remains highly uncertain.

This can also be argued for social sustainability that seems impressive when we focus on egalitarianism, low exclusion and low poverty (Government Communication Office 2019). However, the ageing of the population and the lack of more consistent immigration policies (also as a broader EU problem) may jeopardise this sustainability in the long run. In addition, the strong culture of egalitarianism may contradict the meritocratic principles (Adam 2020). This kind of 'absolute equality' may block the development of 'far-reaching equality' as a condition for a good society (Sayer 2011, in Archer 2017) based on the idea

of joint participation in the creation of the relational goods that can only be truly enjoyed through participation (Archer 2017; Donati 2017).

This kind of broad participation, especially based on bottom-up initiatives and strengthening of the intermediate institutions (Archer – Donati 2015), would also provide the best way of morphogenetic change towards a more sustainable developmental model. Its actual potential in Slovenia, however, would need to be assessed through further research.

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The Visegrad Group countries: The United Arab Emirates Perspective

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Abstract: *This manuscript analyses the role and importance of cooperation between the Visegrad Group (V4) countries and the most globally active member of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which is the United Arab Emirates. In view of the V4+ concept implemented with partners from the Middle East, Israel or Egypt, the presented analysis is important and meets the lack of this element in the scientific debate. This study is based on empirical research and its findings are the result of not only observation but also 10 years of direct participation of the author in many activities related to the cooperation of the Visegrad Group countries and the UAE, including as ambassador, senior advisor to Dubai Expo 2020, especially responsible for strategies and dynamisation relations between Central and Eastern Europe (except Poland) and the United Arab Emirates. According to the author's opinion, presented in the conclusion, there is now a huge opportunity to present V4 projects, including as a part of the broader strategy of the Three Seas Initiative (3SI) during World Expo Dubai, which will take place from October 2021 to March 2022, and make this initiative a globally recognizable project. However, coordinating and accelerating joint actions is required.*

Keywords: ***Visegrad Group, United Arab Emirates, V4, European Union, GCC***

Introduction

2021 is the 30th anniversary of the Visegrad Group and the year of the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). In 2010, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), of which the United Arab Emirates is an active member, was recognised by the V4 as a priority region of cooperation.

The Visegrad Group (V4) is a regional cooperation platform of four Central European countries, i.e. Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, which are connected by neighbourhood, history, tradition, culture and geopolitical situation as well as similar strategic goals of foreign and security policy. In order to support each other in their implementation, especially in the context of integration with Euro-Atlantic structures, on February 15 1991, in Visegrad, Hungary, the presidents of Poland and Czechoslovakia, Lech Wałęsa and Václav Havel respectively, and the Hungarian Prime Minister, József Antall, signed a joint declaration setting out the goals and conditions for enhanced mutual cooperation. In 1993, after the emergence of the two sovereign states of the Czech Republic and Slovakia (from Czechoslovakia), this Visegrad Triangle turned into the V4, i.e. the Visegrad Group. In 2004, all V4 countries became members of the European Union, gaining the opportunity to co-shape the EU, pursue their own national interests within it, as well as co-decide about its future and the role and importance of the European Union in the world. In the new geopolitical situation, the Visegrad Group countries, in addition to cooperation in the areas of education, science and culture, have adopted as strategic goals the development of transport infrastructure and strengthening energy security in the region. Within the framework of the Visegrad Group cooperation, there is a network of diverse entities involved, with presidents, prime ministers, ministers, parliamentarians, various governmental organizations, NGOs, education, science and culture institutions. In addition, since 2000 the V4 has had an International Visegrad Fund (IVF) based in Bratislava. An important form of cooperation at the highest level is the presidency of the Visegrad Group, which is rotated to one of its members for a period of one year, which implements the program adopted by all leaders. From July 1 2020, to June 30 2021, Poland holds the presidency of the V4. The Visegrad Group should be seen not only from the perspective of cooperation between the four countries but also in the external dimension of both the EU and each country of this initiative. The effective implementation of the interests of the Visegrad Group means that the region has more to offer, and thus increases the possibilities of their influence in international relations, including with non-European partners such as the United Arab Emirates.

The article aims to present the results of research on the significance of the GCC for the Visegrad Group, especially the bilateral relations between the V4 countries and the most dynamic member of the Gulf Cooperation Council, which is the United Arab Emirates. Moreover, the presented article answers the research question regarding the dynamics of the development of relations and its sources between the UAE and the countries of the Visegrad Group, and what the challenges and prospects are for this cooperation. Moreover, it answers the research question of what the role and significance are of this cooperation for a broader geostrategy, including the Three Seas Initiative as well as the United

States of America and Israel. The topic of this article has an exceptional research importance, as it is the first such study on the Visegrad Group countries from the perspective of the United Arab Emirates, which significantly intensified their relations with this geographical area after 2010. These empirical studies and their findings are the results of not only observation but also 10 years of the author's direct participation in many initiatives regarding cooperation between the V4 countries and the United Arab Emirates, including as an ambassador, senior advisor to Dubai Expo 2020, also responsible for the strategy and dynamisation of all Central and Eastern European countries (except Poland) in relations with the United Arab Emirates.

V4+ and GCC

The establishment of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in 1981 and the Visegrad Triangle (later Group) in 1991 had similar intentions, but in different circumstances. The creation of the GCC was a response to drastic changes followed by the later appearance of the Islamic Republic of Iran, as well as the strengthening of Saddam Hussein's power in Iraq. The impetus for the establishment of the V4 was the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the collapse of the Soviet Union, which created a certain security vacuum in the area of Central and Eastern Europe. In view of this situation, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary decided to jointly support each other in new strategic processes to ensure security and economic development by establishing the Visegrad Group. This was to be achieved by the V4's adoption of the same two pillars of foreign and security policies, i.e. integration with NATO and the European Union. It is worth mentioning that during the establishment of Visegrad cooperation, the war in the Persian (Arab) Gulf was beginning. Therefore, during the founding summit of the Visegrad Triangle (Group), its members analysed the war in the Persian (Arab) Gulf (Grabiński 2020).

The weakening USSR contributed both to the establishment of the Visegrad Group and influenced the war in the Persian (Arabian) Gulf as well acting as an impulse for new initiatives of the Gulf Cooperation Council. It should be noted, however, that the V4 and the GCC operate in a completely different geopolitical environment. The countries of the Visegrad Group are members of NATO, the most powerful military alliance, and the European Union, the most developed trading bloc in the world. By contrast, the Gulf Cooperation Council operates in one of the most volatile international environments in the world, with conflicts in which terrorist organisations operate, with failing states such as Iraq, Syria and Yemen, as well as with major tensions with Iran. The Visegrad Group and the GCC have great potential for cooperation that is not currently being used. Due to certain limitations in the deepening cooperation between the EU and the Gulf Cooperation Council resulting from the lack of an agreement

that has been awaiting negotiation for 20 years, the V4 countries should, first of all, strengthen relations at the bilateral level. The V4 countries have strong agricultural. By contrast, the Gulf Cooperation Council must import about 90% of its food. In addition, the Visegrad Group countries are oil and gas importers, while in the GCC countries have large quantities of these resources. In the view of contemporary challenges and the 2030 UN Agenda, all countries of both groups are implementing economic diversification programmes, putting more and more emphasis on the green economy and renewable energies. It is worth mentioning that the capital of the United Arab Emirates has become the headquarters of the International Renewable Energy Agency.

The V4 is involved in a number of issues both within the European Union and outside the EU (Cabada – Waisová 2018: 9). It should be emphasised that the Visegrad Group, having the same number of votes in the EU Council as France and Germany, together has great potential for shaping the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy. Therefore, attention should be paid to the activity of the Visegrad Group in the V4+ format, under which relations with Benelux, the African Union, the Scandinavian-Baltic States, South Korea and Japan were initiated (MOFAT 2017). The Visegrad Group also started its activity in the Middle East, initiating dialogue with countries such as Egypt, Israel and Lebanon. In 2010, the Slovak Presidency of the V4 set cooperation with the GCC as one of its priorities (Slovak Presidency 2010). The next presidency, held by the Czech Republic, also identified the Gulf Cooperation Council as a strategic partner, especially in attracting tourists to the V4 countries (Czech Presidency 2011). Then Hungary, which held its presidency in 2013–2014, emphasised the need to conduct promotional activities for tourists from the Visegrad Group countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council region (Hungarian Presidency 2013). As a result, on May 6 2014, during the Arabian Travel Market (ATM), a promotional event which was the largest tourism fair in the Persian (Arab) Gulf in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, was organised as a part of the cooperation of the Visegrad Group. The party responsible for this event was the Hungarian National Tourist Organisation. Representatives of the V4 national tourist organisations (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia) presented the tourist attractions of their countries. Cultural tourism, SPA and medical tourism attracted particular interest. The presentations were followed by workshops of tour operators from V4 countries with local travel agencies. Representatives of around 30 local tourist offices and about 10 local media outlets participated (POT 2014). Then, in February 2015, representatives of the tourist authorities of the Visegrad Group countries signed a Marketing Plan and a protocol regulating the joint promotion of inbound tourism to the countries of the V4 (Gąsior 2015).

In 2017, the Visegrad Group established relations with Israel. On July 19 2017, the prime ministers of the V4 countries met in Budapest with the Prime Minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu. The summit in Budapest was the first

meeting of the Visegrad Group with Israel at the level of heads of government. On the occasion of the summit, bilateral meetings of the prime ministers also took place. Netanyahu's visit to Budapest was the first visit by an Israeli prime minister to Hungary since the fall of communism. Hungary, which held the V4 presidency from July 2017–June 2018, actively used the V4+ format for meetings with non-European countries. In early July 2017, V4 prime ministers met with Egyptian president Abdel Fattah al-Sisi. Through meetings with both the Prime Minister of Israel and the President of Egypt, the V4 wanted to strengthen its argumentation in the debate on the migration crisis and the fight against terrorism, which should be accompanied by cooperation with the countries of the region. As part of the Middle East Peace Process, the Visegrad Group advocates a two-state solution, as expressed both in the joint statement of the V4 countries and Egypt on July 4 2017, and in the statement by V4+Israel of July 19. Summit participants stressed the need for cooperation in the field of security and innovation. They announced the creation of working groups for combating terrorism and for supporting technological cooperation, which could be co-financed by the International Visegrad Fund. In the area of security, cooperation will concern, among others, cybersecurity, counter-terrorism and border protection. In terms of innovation, countries have declared their intention to strengthen cooperation in the high-tech sector, including digitisation, start-ups and scientific. The V4 states have also committed themselves to improve EU-Israel relations, in particular, to update the EU-Israel Association Agreement which entered force in 2000. The energy sector offers prospects for cooperation. Israel has started producing natural gas from the Mediterranean Sea. The V4 countries are interested in the diversification of energy sources, and could be natural recipients of Israeli natural gas, also in liquefied form (LNG). The increasing expenditure on the defence of the V4 states is also an attractive market for the Israeli arms industry, as evidenced by, for example, the decision made in 2016 by the Czech government to purchase Israeli radar systems. The experience in cooperation with Israel so far may encourage the V4 to initiate a similar form of dialogue with other Middle Eastern partners or interest in participating in projects also under the Three Seas Initiative, of which V4 countries are a part (Ogrodnik – Wojnarowicz 2017). After the V4–Israel meeting in Budapest, two working groups were set up concerning security and combating terrorism, as well as on research, development and innovation. On June 18 2018, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed on training cooperation in the field of innovation for entrepreneurs from the Visegrad Group countries. Another area of strategic importance is cooperation regarding the arms industry, the purchase of new Israeli technology and weapons, and conducting joint training (Dyduch 2018).

On July 1 2019, the Czech Republic took over the annual presidency of the V4 emphasising (as had Slovakia before) the dominance of EU issues in Visegrad cooperation. However, their position on European integration was more

conservative. Babiš's government highlighted more clearly the need for cooperation with the countries of the Western Balkans than with the Eastern Partnership. Meetings in the V4+ format were to serve the better positioning of the Czech Republic and the Visegrad Group in the European Union. Germany was considered as the preferred partner of the Czech Republic in this formula, which Babiš explained with their strong trade relations. The functioning of the Visegrad Battle Group (with the additional participation of Croatia) has been an added V4 contribution to EU security. Its next formation has been announced for the first half of 2023. Regional and European cooperation in the field of migration is of great importance for the ruling party, the Alliance of the New Citizen (ANO), both in domestic and foreign policy. The presidency programme narrowed the sphere of energy cooperation to nuclear power. The focus on it reflects the national assumptions of its development, i.e. the construction of subsequent blocks of the nuclear power plant in Dukovany and government plans to increase nuclear electricity production from 30% to 58%. The specificity of the V4 format with the leading role of prime ministers, Babiš's positive attitude towards the group, as well as his cordial contacts with other V4 prime ministers are conducive to efficient coordination of the group's positions in the EU. The postulate of building regional innovation corresponds to the assumptions of the Warsaw Declaration, adopted by Visegrad prime ministers in 2017 during the Polish presidency (Ogrodnik 2019).

Case Studies

The Visegrad Group countries established diplomatic relations with the United Arab Emirates at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s. This period was exceptional for all V4 countries, Europe and the world, with the visible role of Poland and its Solidarity movement in the fall of communism, including the fall of the Berlin Wall. Consequently, Poland, along with the other countries of the Visegrad Group, contributed to the construction of a new European and world order in the 21st century. In this atmosphere, the V4 countries began to build their new role and international position and to pursue their interests in the world with a new partner, the United Arab Emirates. The current history of relations between the Visegrad Group countries and the UAE is characterised by periods of completely different dynamics and significance. The first period was a time of hard work, signing the first agreements and identifying effective tools to achieve interests. Moreover, at the summit in Slovakia in 2010, the Visegrad Group countries recognised the GCC region, including the United Arab Emirates, as particularly important for the implementation of the V4 vision and strategy in international relations.

Czech Republic

In 1988, then Czechoslovakia established diplomatic relations with the United Arab Emirates. In 1993, diplomatic relations were again concluded between the UAE and the newly formed state of the Czech Republic. By 2014, relations were very good in the economic area, including tourism. However, there was a lack of official visits to both countries at the top level. Nevertheless, in March 2014, the UAE Foreign Minister, H.H. Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan came to Prague on an official visit during which the UAE Minister emphasised the need for top-level visits between the two countries. During the visit H.H. Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan met with President Milos Zeman, Czech Parliament Speaker Jan Hamáček, as well as his counterpart Lubomír Zaorálek. Throughout the visit, the interlocutors emphasised the need to accelerate co-operation, primarily in the field of renewable energy and the peaceful use of nuclear energy and tourism (MOFAIC 2014). Consequently, in February 2015, the President of the Czech Republic, Miloš Zeman, paid an official visit to the United Arab Emirates. It was the first visit of the Czech President to the UAE in history. In addition to official top-level meetings, the president visited the Hedayah, the International Center of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism and participated in the economic forum of the UAE-Czech Republic, co-organised by the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Confederation of Industry of the Czech Republic, and the UAE Federation of the Chambers of Commerce and Industry (Embassy of the Czech Republic in Abu Dhabi 2015a). As a result of the visit of President Miloš Zeman, the UAE government and business delegation came to the Czech Republic in April 2015, headed by the Minister of Economy Sultan Bin Saeed Al Mansouri, as well as representatives of the Dubai Chamber of Commerce and Industry. In addition, heads of seven major Emirati corporations participated in the visit. Members of the delegation showed interest in investing primarily in real estate, tourism, infrastructure and the construction industry. It was the first UAE economic visit to the Czech Republic in bilateral relations. During the Czech-Emirati Business Forum, UAE Minister of Economy Sultan Bin Saeed Al Mansouri presented Pavel Foubík with a certificate of membership for the Czech Business Council to the Dubai Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI). In this way, the Czech business organisation became the first member of Central and Eastern Europe in the DCCI (Embassy of the Czech Republic in Abu Dhabi 2015b). In response to the Emirate delegation's visit to the Czech Republic, in November 2015 the Minister of Industry and Trade of the Czech Republic together with the Czech Chamber of Commerce came to Dubai to continue enhancing and expanding cooperation. For the Dubai Chamber of Commerce and Industry, this mission was another opportunity to implement the strategy of promoting Dubai among partners from Central and Eastern Europe as a place of great opportunities for

their export and re-export. On September 26 2018, Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies of the Czech Republic Radek Vondráček came to the United Arab Emirates with an official visit. In addition to the meeting with his counterpart, he had a meeting with H.H. Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum – the Vice President, Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai (MOFAIC 2018). Additionally, in July 2019 another the UAE economic delegation arrived in the Czech Republic. On the basis of the innovation strategy in both countries, partners expressed their interest in dynamising and expanding relations primarily in the areas of smart city solutions, manufacturing, logistics, healthcare, tourism and artificial intelligence (Alghoul – Abubaker 2019).

Hungary

Diplomatic relations between Hungary and the United Arab Emirates were established in 1990. However, it is worth noting that in 1976, 5 years after the creation of the UAE, the Hungarian Trade Office was opened in Dubai. The historic, first official visit to the United Arab Emirates of Hungarian President Árpád Göncz took place in 1995. However, a Hungarian Embassy wasn't established in Abu Dhabi until 2006. It is also worthy of note that in June 2009 the historic first visit of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the UAE was undertaken by H.H. Sheikh Abdullah Bin Zayed Al Nahyan. To deepen political relations, in February 2012 Speaker of the National Assembly of Hungary László Kövér visited the United Arab Emirates. From 2015, political and economic relations began to enter a more dynamic stage. The UAE Minister of Economy Sultan Bin Saeed Al Mansouri paid an official visit to Budapest in September the same year. The goal of the minister's mission was to meet the Hungarian economy minister Mihály Varga and to give new dynamics to economic relations (Hanaa 2015). While in the following month of October, the Hungarian Minister of State for Economic Diplomacy Levente Magyar came to the United Arab Emirates to strengthen cooperation and identify new possible areas of mutual interest. During his stay in the UAE, an agreement was signed on political consultations (MOFAIC 2015). The following year, in March 2016, the first UAE-Hungary Joint Economic Committee (JEC) was held in Dubai, chaired by the UAE Minister of Economy Sultan bin Saeed Al Mansouri and the Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Péter Szijjártó. The talks focused on looking for ways to deepen relations in areas such as investment, trade, energy, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), agriculture and environment, water management, health, tourism, ICT, transport and intellectual property. After only a few months, in July 2016, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation H.H. Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan visited the Hungarian capital Budapest. The UAE Minister had a meeting with his counterpart Péter Szijjártó, Hungarian Minister of National Economy Mihály Varga and others. During the meetings,

topics were discussed, first of all concerning political and economic cooperation and involvement in investment partnership. In the course of his stay in Hungary, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the United Arab Emirates H.H. Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan expressed interest in deepening and expanding relations with Central and Eastern Europe, primarily in areas such as economy, trade, investment and cooperation in the field of security (MOFAIC 2016). Due to the new dynamics of relations between the two countries, the Embassy of the United Arab Emirates in Budapest was established in 2018. In November of the same year, the Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Péter Szijjártó, visited the UAE, during which two agreements were signed. One of them is MoU on security and counter-terrorism cooperation, which was signed between the interior ministries of the two countries, and the other, MoU on cooperation in academic research, was signed between the Emirates Diplomatic Academy and the Hungarian Institute for Foreign Affairs and Trade (MOFAIC 2018). Maintaining the dynamics of the visits, a few months later, in March 2019, the 2nd Joint Economic Committee was held in Budapest, chaired by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary Péter Szijjártó and the UAE Minister of Economy Sultan bin Saeed Al Mansouri. During the visit, the agreement was signed between the UAE Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Innovation and Technology of Hungary MoU on cooperation in science, technology and innovation. Besides, it was agreed to strengthen relations in areas such as investment, trade, industry, innovation, renewable energy, science, technology, telecommunications, aviation, tourism, education, culture, insurance and Halal accreditation (MOFAIC 2019).

Poland

At an exceptional time, in the year of the fall of communism in Poland, which contributed to changes in Europe, including the fall of the Berlin Wall, on September 41989 Poland established diplomatic relations with the United Arab Emirates. In the years 1989–2010, Poland's relations with the Middle East underwent very variable dynamics. This time should be divided into two periods: 1989–2003 and 2004–2010. Initially, the first period was characterised by a new opening to cooperation with new partners, signing first agreements and creating a cooperation framework. However, since 1995 there has been a drastic reduction in the dynamics of relations. Although after the start of the Iraq war in 2003, there was a renewed interest in the Middle East. Therefore, in 2004 the strategy of the Polish government was adopted, which initiated a new approach to this region. The Council of Ministers has identified the UAE as one of five of the most important countries of the Middle East for Polish foreign and security policy. During his second term of office, President Aleksander Kwaśniewski paid official and working visits to 10 Middle East countries, including the United Arab

Emirates. In addition, President Lech Kaczyński also identified the Middle East as a key region for Poland's foreign and security policy (Bieleń 2011: 392–394).

Until 2011, relations between Poland and the United Arab Emirates were positive, but they were not characterised by greater dynamics. However, their relations have changed significantly since 2011, giving them a strategic dimension. At the turn of February and March 2011, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development paid a visit to the UAE. As a result, a few months later Poland was one of the first EU countries to lift the ban on Polish beef imports. In May 2011, the first visit of the UAE Minister of Foreign Affairs to Poland H.H. Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan took place. At the invitation of Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, in January 2012 a visit to the United Arab Emirates was made by the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Economy. In April the same year, Prime Minister Donald Tusk arrived in the United Arab Emirates on an official visit both in Abu Dhabi and Dubai. It was the first visit of the Polish government's prime minister since 1994. In June 2012, the UAE Minister of Economy Sultan Bin Saeed Al Mansouri visited Poland, where he met with Prime Minister Donald Tusk, as well as the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Economy. This year the decision was made by Emirates Airline to launch a connection between Dubai and Warsaw. In February 2013, the first meeting of the Joint Commission for Economic Cooperation took place in Poland at the level of economy ministers. The President of the Republic of Poland Bronisław Komorowski paid an official visit to the United Arab Emirates in December 2013. It is also worth underlining that just a few months later on March 22, 2014, the obligation to apply for an entry visa to the UAE was lifted for Polish citizens. Moreover, in June of the same year H.H. Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, UAE Minister of Foreign Affairs paid an official visit to Poland again. Continuing the dynamics of relations between the partners, in April 2015 the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Economy Janusz Piechociński came to the UAE, where he met with the UAE leaders, and participated in two economic forums, both in Abu Dhabi and Dubai. Additionally, the second meeting of the Joint Commission for Economic Cooperation took place (Krzymowski 2017: 54–55).

Particularly noteworthy is the official visit to Poland by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum – Vice President, Prime Minister of the United Arab Emirates, and Ruler of Dubai – on 7–9 June 2015. It was the first historic visit to Poland at such a high level. The UAE side announced that Poland had reached the level of strategic partner for the United Arab Emirates. In addition to official meetings, the following agreements were signed during the visit: Agreement on cooperation in the field of innovation and small and medium-sized enterprises; Memorandum of Understanding in the fields of agriculture, food safety, research cooperation and marketing in agriculture and food; Memorandum of Understanding between Governments on Cooperation in Higher Education and Research; Agreement on cooperation in the field of

tourism. In addition, there was a meeting of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum with the President-Elect Andrzej Duda, for whom the Ruler of Dubai was the first foreign guest. His Highness emphasised that the fifth year of dynamic development of very close relations had begun and he expressed hope for the further development of these relations (Krzymowski 2017: 141–144).

However, when analysing the successive years of relations between Poland and the UAE, it should be noted that between 2016–2017 no official bilateral visit at the ministerial level or above took place. Moreover, trade began to decline drastically. After 2015, there was no meeting of the Joint Commission for Economic Cooperation. As a consequence of the decision of the UAE authorities in 2015 to grant Poland the status of the Guest of Honour at the International Book Fair in Abu Dhabi, which took place on April 24–27 2018, the official opening of this event was attended by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Culture and National Heritage Piotr Gliński. In February 2019, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Jan Ardanowski took part in the GulfFood fair in Dubai. In November 2019, the Minister of Infrastructure and Development Abdullah Belhaif Al Nuaimi came to Poland, where a maritime transport agreement was signed, the negotiations of which were completed in April 2015. On October 15 2019, the Ruler of Sharjah H.H. Sheikh Sultan Bin Muhammad Al Qasimi came to Krakow on a private visit at the invitation of the Jagiellonian University. This visit was the result of direct cooperation between the Jagiellonian University and the University of Sharjah, whose president is the Ruler of Dubai.

Slovakia

Diplomatic relations between Slovakia and the United Arab Emirates were established in 1993. They recorded different periods until the end of 2013 when the embassy was reopened after nearly ten years. Since then, and above all since 2015, there has been a dynamic development of cooperation between the two countries. In June 2014, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of Slovakia Miroslav Lajčák came to the UAE, where during a conversation with the UAE Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, H.H. Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, partners expressed their readiness to increase relations to the highest level of cooperation, both political and economic (MOFAIC 2014). In April 2015, in the capital of Slovakia, Bratislava, Minister Miroslav Lajčák together with the UAE Minister of Economy Sultan Bin Saeed Al Mansouri signed MoU on establishing a Joint Economic Committee to further deepen economic, trade and investment cooperation (MOFEA 2015). Besides that, also the MoU on security cooperation and counter-terrorism and the MoU on mutual recognition of driving licenses issued by the two countries

was signed. Following the dynamics of cooperation, in December 2015 Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic, Robert Fico came to the United Arab Emirates on an official visit, where he opened the Embassy in Abu Dhabi and the Agreement on avoiding double taxation was signed. Talks during meetings with UAE leaders focused on deepening economic and investment cooperation, promoting common interests in the international environment, as well as regional and global challenges, including those related to EU security policy (MOFAIC 2015). While on the occasion of the UN General Assembly in New York in September 2016, the UAE Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation H.H. Sheikh Abdullah Bin Zayed Al Nahyan and Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic Miroslav Lajčák signed a bilateral agreement on mutual protection and promotion of investment (MOFEA 2016). However, in July 2017, the UAE Minister for Foreign Affairs, H.H. Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan paid the first ever official visit of that office to Slovakia in history. During the meeting with his counterpart, both sides emphasised that apart from the development of economic relations, there is a need to dynamise relations in the area of security. Moreover, the position was expressed that it would be in the interest of both parties to sign a free trade agreement between the European Union and the GCC. During the meeting, the MoU on the mechanism of political consultations was signed (MOFEA 2017). It is also worth mentioning that the UAE Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation also met with Slovakia's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Robert Kaliňák and Prime Minister Robert Fico to discuss the international situation, including in the Middle East, and strategic elements of bilateral cooperation (MOFAIC 2017). In response to the deepened cooperation of both partners, in April 2018 the UAE Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior, H.H. Lt. General Sheikh Saif bin Zayed Al Nahyan paid an official visit to Bratislava. During the meeting with Speaker of the Parliament of Slovakia Andrej Danko, both parties emphasised their readiness to deepen the relationship and raise it to the level of strategic partnership. During the meeting with the Prime Minister Peter Pellegrini, MoUs on offering medical treatment in hospitals in Slovakia to UAE soldiers who were injured in Yemen as well as rehabilitation programs and aftercare services in specialist health institutions was signed. The UAE Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior were also accompanied by representatives of the Mubadala Group, Fly Dubai and Etihad Airways (Hazem – Hassan 2018) during the official visit to Slovakia. It is also worth noting that in July 2019, Slovakia, as one of the nine countries and the only country from the V4, participated in the first common security exercise of the International Security Alliance (ISALEX19). This initiative started in 2017 in Abu Dhabi as an international working group to combat organised, transnational and extremist crime. In the framework of this initiative, countries should combine security efforts in joint practices as well as expertise (Alfaham – Hassan 2019).

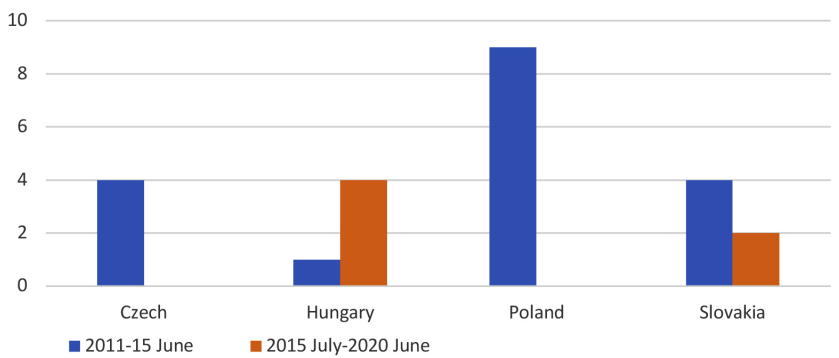
Empirical Findings

When carrying out a detailed analysis of official visits of the highest level of the Visegrad Group countries in bilateral relations with the United Arab Emirates from the last ten years, it should be noted that in the period 2011–2015 Poland was the clear leader. The Czech Republic and Slovakia show the same dynamics, which are much smaller than Poland. During this period, Hungary made only one visit at this level. However, in the period from July 2015 to June 2020 the situation completely reversed. During this period, Poland had/paid/register no visits, and the Czech Republic didn't carry out an official top-level visit. However, frequent economic missions took place at that time. Hungary, on the other hand, became the leader, and Slovakia tried to maintain the dynamics of visits.

The chart below presents the dynamics of the most important official bilateral visits, including visits at the level of heads of state and government, as well as Ministers of Foreign Affairs, the Economy and members of royal families in high state positions.

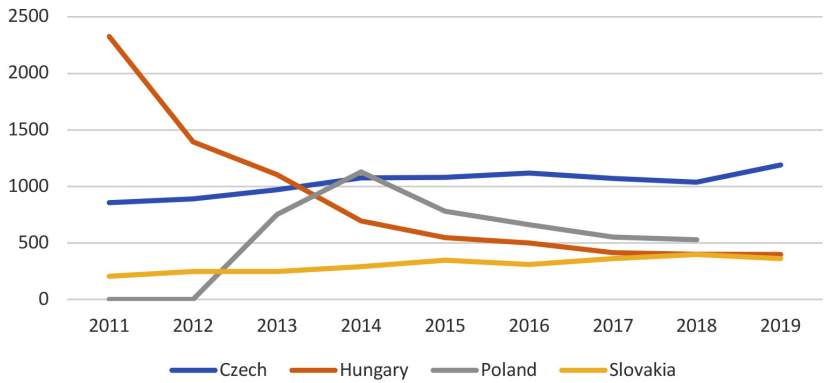
Analysing the trade exchange of the last 10 years, especially the exports of the Visegrad Group countries to the United Arab Emirates, it should be underlined that until 2014 Poland was the leader of growth dynamics and Hungary recorded the largest decrease at that time. The Czech Republic and Slovakia recorded a stable increase in exports. However, after 2015, Poland shows the largest decrease in exports. Hungary, on the other hand, began to contain negative trends and Slovakia had started a stable increase in exports. While the Czech Republic after 2018 shows a high dynamics of export growth to the United Arab Emirates.

Figure 1: The most important official bilateral visits of V4 countries with the UAE



Source: elaboration of the author – based on data from government institutions

Figure 2: Export of V4 countries to the United Arab Emirates in US $ (in thousand)



Source: elaboration of the author – based on data from government institutions

Comparing the findings of research on both the dynamics of the most important official bilateral visits, as well as the exports of the Visegrad Group countries to the United Arab Emirates, it should be stated that in the period 2011–2015 Poland was the clear leader. However, after 2015 the country fell to the last place. In the case of the Czech Republic, it should be emphasised that although no official top-level visit has taken place since 2016, the results show that the country is the export leader to the UAE, with the support of government economic missions. Moreover, since 2018 the Czech Republic has had great dynamic growth of trade exchange. Hungary, despite a large drop in exports, has slowed down since 2015. In addition, since then the country has been showing high dynamics of economic visits at ministerial level, including meetings of the Joint Economic Commission, becoming a V4 leader regarding visits. Due to the specifics of the United Arab Emirates, these official economic visits should also soon affect the re-growth of trade.

The research shows that the V4 countries and the United Arab Emirates, which emphasise the huge interest in strategic cooperation with Central and Eastern Europe, have great opportunities to establish and deepen relations in many areas. The United Arab Emirates is a country with a geostrategic orientation related to the transatlantic area. The UAE is an important member of NATO's Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, as the first country in the Arab world to have its ambassador at NATO headquarters. In addition, the United Arab Emirates is involved in deepening relations with the European Union by undertaking joint initiatives. In 2015, this small country became the seventh biggest recipient of goods from the EU in the world. And, for the United Arab

Emirates, the European Union has become the largest trading partner. Sustainable Development Goals have been an important element of cooperation since 2015 (Krzymowski 2020: 216). However, in order to deepen political dialogue, a cooperation agreement was signed in January 2018 between the European External Action Service and the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (EEAS 2018). Exactly a year later, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the European Commission, Federica Mogherini, stated that the United Arab Emirates is a strategic ally of the European Union. Moreover, in February 2020 the European Maritime Awareness mission in the Strait of Hormuz (EMASOH), with headquarters in Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates (Embassy of France in Abu Dhabi 2020), achieved full operation. It should also be remembered that since 2009 there is a permanent French military base in Abu Dhabi. The European Union and the United Arab Emirates have in the Middle East and North Africa a common interest in countering terrorism and ensuring stability. That is why the European Union got involved in establishing in September 2011 the Hedayah, the International Center of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism, in which the EU is one of the board members. It is worth mentioning that in 2015 the President of the Czech Republic also visited this organisation during an official visit. Additionally, since June 2014 Abu Dhabi has been the regional headquarters of the European Union Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear Center of Excellence.

The strategic goal of the Visegrad Group is the European Union, which can be an effective tool for pursuing V4 interests also outside its area (Krzymowski 2011: 46). It should be noted that the summit of the Visegrad Group with the participation of the President of Egypt, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, took place in Budapest on July 4 2017, so only two days before the 3SI summit, in which President of the United States Donald Trump participated. For Russia, Egypt is a key country with which it can become one of the main players in the MENA region. Thus, the V4 is an important part of a broader strategic plan, including shaping power in the Middle East and North Africa region. One should agree with Repetowicz (2017) that the Visegrad Group's cooperation with Egypt in this regard is the assumption by the countries of Central and Eastern Europe of responsibility for the Mediterranean. After the meeting in Budapest, the joint press conference focused on Egypt's role in stabilising the Middle East and North Africa, in particular in controlling and combating illegal migration. The talks also concerned Libya, in which the stabilisation efforts of General Haftar are supported by Egypt and the United Arab Emirates (Repetowicz 2017).

The arms industry is one of the potential areas for strengthening relations between the United Arab Emirates and the Visegrad Group countries. It is worth mentioning that in February 2017 in Abu Dhabi, during the largest defence trade fair (the International Defence Exhibition & Conference, IDEX), the Czech

state company VOP CZ signed an agreement with NIMR Automotive, which is part of the state-owned Emirates Defence Industries Company. The contract provides for the installation of the assembly line at the VOP CZ plant in Šenov near Nový Jičín and the installation of the Ajban 440A / N car service centre as well as other NIMR Automotive vehicles in the Czech Republic. Besides, the contract also offers armoured vehicles in the countries of the Visegrad Group (Multarzyński 2017). As a result of talks initiated in 2014, a decision was made after a year to sell to the United Arab Emirates 40 base chassis of Rosomak wheeled armoured personnel carriers, implemented by the Polish company Rosomak S.A. It is worth recalling that in July 2015 the prime ministers of Poland, Ewa Kopacz, and of Slovakia, Robert Fico, announced the selection of the Rosomak turret Scipio for the Slovak army. However, an agreement has not been finalised. In November 2019, the Polish company Rosomak from Siemianowice Śląskie obtained a license that allows cooperation on foreign markets, including offering a new platform to foreign markets. This in turn creates new opportunities for cooperation within the armaments industry of the Visegrad Group countries, including the United Arab Emirates (Muczyński 2020). Currently, the centre-right government of Slovakia led by Igor Matovič, sworn in on March 21 2020, is sending signals about new opportunities for Polish-Slovak cooperation and a return to the KTO Scipio project based on the Rosomak and the Slovak Turra 30 tower. Additionally, in foreign and security policy the new government strongly emphasises the Euro-Atlantic orientation and active participation in the Visegrad Group, including increasing its role. Prime Minister Matovič emphasises the need to deepen 'above-standard' relations with the Czech Republic and 'proven cooperation with Poland' (Dębiec 2020). Thus, there are favourable conditions for the Visegrad Group to achieve greater dynamics of cooperation after 30 years of operation, including the shaping of the international environment in the Middle East.

Conclusion

From 2010, relations between the United Arab Emirates and European Union countries began to gain greater momentum. This is primarily the result of a change in the geopolitical priorities of the US foreign and security policy, redirecting their strategic interests from Europe, as well as the Middle East, to East Asia. At that time, the Lisbon Treaty came into force, which further continued the creation of new instruments for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (Krzymowski – Krzymowska 2019: 25). Moreover, after a year of its operation, the so-called Arab Spring forced the EU to become more involved in the Middle East. In addition, it should be remembered that the world has just started to recover from the global economic crisis that originated in the United States. In such a situation, the European Union and the United Arab Emirates, the most

stable country in the Middle East, became a natural partner for enhance cooperation. It is also worth noting that a year after the war in Iraq started in 2003 by the US and its coalition partners, the UAE and Germany started a strategic partnership. And in 2009 a French permanent military base was opened in the capital of the United Arab Emirates, the first in an area that was not its colony. These new impulses convinced both the European Union and the UAE to the need to deepen and broaden their relations. Additionally, within the United Arab Emirates' strategy to transition to a green economy, abandon oil as one of the main sources of income and invest in renewable energy, the European Union has gained additional attractiveness as a partner and leader. Taking into account the concepts of the UAE's foreign and security policy consisting of the diversification of the alliance, the country has taken steps to establish and strengthen relations with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, including the Visegrad Group. From October 2021 to March 2022, the World Expo 2020 will be held in Dubai, the first in the region of Southwest Asia, the Middle East and North Africa. It will be a great opportunity to present joint projects of the Visegrad Group, as well as a unique opportunity to develop partnerships under the V4+ formula. However, it should be emphasised that despite the fact that the GCC has been recognised as an important partner for the Visegrad Group in 2010, no official meeting between the V4 and the Gulf Cooperation Council has taken place so far. Undoubtedly, closer cooperation between the two regions will bring tangible benefits, political, economic, cultural and in the area of security. Moreover, this cooperation could be an effective platform for solving common global challenges, including those related to climate change. The cooperation between the Visegrad Group and the United Arab Emirates should be an example and a model that will also be used by other GCC members. Active in the European Union, the Visegrad Group, setting the directions for the development of 3SI and being in a strategic partnership with the USA, may become an effective element of a broader strategy, of global importance, of economic, foreign and security policy, covering Europe, North Africa and the Middle East.

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Transitional Justice and Democratic Consolidation in the Post-Communist Space: A Comparative Review of the Czech Republic, Latvia and Slovakia

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Abstract: *In this comparative review, I first evaluate scholarly findings attempting to dis/prove a relationship between transitional justice and the consolidation of democracy. Second, I outline several criteria for 'democratic' transitional justice in order to be able to judge transitional justice policies. Third, I examine and judge transitional justice policies of the Czech Republic, Latvia and Slovakia by these criteria. Last, I argue that transitional justice is neither a prerequisite for the successful consolidation of democracy nor inherently democratic unless it is carried out in coordination with the ideals of liberal democracy, which might support the achievement of peace and societal stability in a transition period.*

Keywords: ***transitional justice, consolidation of democracy, the Czech Republic, Latvia, Slovakia***

Introduction

The skeletons in the closet of post-communist Europe represent many challenges. One such challenge is *transitional justice*, which addresses the legacies of human rights abuses of the past. Mark Arenhövel (2008: 580) claims that transitional justice is not only a matter of remedying human rights violations, but also is a process that shapes citizens' comprehension of justice and a re/foundation of democracy. Some people, particularly new policy-makers of

new regimes, defend transitional justice as a means to consolidate democracy. Citizens' broad participation in the process of designing and implementing transitional justice programmes is found to be of central importance (Arenhövel 2008: 580). As part of post-communist political and economic transitions, various kinds of transitional justice have been applied in Central and Eastern Europe, namely lustration, truth commissions, criminal prosecutions, reparations and various forms of institutional reforms. These phenomena have taken place in the context of democratisation, de-communisation, political and economic transformation, and the process of expanding the European Union. Central and Eastern European transitions to democracy are considered to be part of the third wave of democratisation (popularised by Samuel P. Huntington in 1991), as they share some features that enable them to be distinguished from early transitions. These transitions dealt with the consequences of totalitarianism and collaborators of the past communist rule through means such as transitional justice.

Central and Eastern European countries have applied transitional justice at different levels. The Czech Republic, East Germany (the GDR) and Hungary have implemented widespread and long-lasting lustration, whereas Poland, Romania and Slovakia have instituted insufficient lustration with multiple starts and stops; other countries such as Belarus and Albania can be characterised as non-lustrated (*de facto*) countries (Horne 2012: 422–423). This variation can be explained by successful/unsuccessful implementation of lustration, the partiality/impartiality of the act and the practicality/impracticality of the framework.

But is transitional justice a prerequisite for the successful consolidation of democracy? It seems to be a problematic question, as it raises tough judicial, political and ethical issues. This article critiques the suggestion of an inter--linkage between transitional justice and consolidation of democracy; however, it asserts that since transitional justice is carried out with the ideals of liberal democracy, transitional justice may assist inceptive democracies as a significant factor in attaining peace and societal stability. Transitional justice is not a requirement and this work refutes the idea that transitional justice is substantially democratic. But by treating the past in an equitable manner, transitional justice can be a moral privilege of liberal democracies. Firstly, this article will evaluate scholarly works attempting to prove/disprove an inter-linkage between transitional justice and the consolidation of democracy. Secondly, some criteria for 'democratic' transitional justice will be set out in order to be able to judge transitional justice policies. Thirdly, it will analyse transitional justice policies in three countries, the Czech Republic, Latvia and Slovakia. Finally, the paper will judge them by the criteria set out for 'democratic' transitional justice.

Inter-linkage between Transitional Justice and the Consolidation of Democracy

Proving/disproving relationships between transitional justice and the consolidation of democracy is a complex issue, as it faces many challenges. It is even more difficult to prove inter-linkage, which denotes the idea that transitional justice leads to the successful consolidation of democracy in the context of political and economic transitions. Arenhövel (2008: 570) points out that scholars still lack a complete theory about transitional justice, despite the fact that it is a fast-growing area of academic research, and many try to prove causal links rather than relying on theoretical principles. This research orientation can be caused by a sufficient understanding of the motivations and limitations for reconciliation in greatly fragmented societies. Democratic countries present quite an extensive diversity of ways of dealing with transitional justice. Some countries have been transformed successfully without confrontation with the past (Spain is one clear illustration), while others such as the GDR and the Czech Republic implemented the most immediate and extensive screening (lustration) policies (Letki 2002: 539). These aforementioned countries without doubt are democratic, but they have experienced different transitions and various factors have affected them. Hence, it is empirically impossible to prove a successful consolidation of democracy with only transitional justice.

In spite of the neglect of transitional justice processes, Spain's case, in which all perpetrators have been forgiven and forgotten, is considered a highly democratic result following a dictatorship (Hajji 2014: 84). Can one say that Spain is an undemocratic country? Obviously not, and Spain is not the only Mediterranean state coping with past injustices in such ways. Iosif Kovras (2013: 730) notices that Cyprus's model, as with Spain's, also contradicts the experiences of other countries, such as South Africa, Bosnia and Guatemala, where the focal element of the transition to democracy was truth recovery using transitional justice. These cases demonstrate the practice of peacekeeping and consolidation of democracy without lustration and disprove the direct causal relationship between transitional justice and the successful consolidation of democracy.

Nonetheless, post-communist Europe stands as a better case study than Latin America or South Africa for several reasons. First and foremost, it is a time frame of transitional justice applied in the Central and Eastern European region, from the early 1990s to the early 2000s. Secondly, the heritage of the previous communist system gives a solid understanding of the nature of the transition in Central and Eastern Europe. Thirdly, the geopolitical context of Central and Eastern Europe makes this issue clearer. Fourthly, post-communist countries were not generally socially fragmented. It can be observed by co-operative behaviour of the region's citizens. Finally, the existing literature, which tries to prove

an inter-linkage of transitional justice and democratisation in post-communist Europe, helps to compare the findings of different scholars. Accordingly, the relationship between transitional justice and the consolidation of democracy can be inferred from [specific regions like] Central and Eastern Europe more easily than in general. Thus, I will discuss the existing scholarly works (findings) which try to prove an inter-linkage between transitional justice and the successful consolidation of democracy in Central and Eastern Europe.

Natalia Letki (2002: 549) asserts that there exists a positive link between transitional justice and the consolidation of democracy in Central and Eastern Europe. In order to assess the extent of lustration she used a holistic approach and classified Central and Eastern European countries as 'lustrated' (the Czech Republic, the GDR, Poland and Hungary) and 'non-lustrated' (Bulgaria, Slovakia, Romania, Albania, Latvia, Estonia and Belarus). Letki also categorised the Czech Republic, the GDR, Poland, Hungary, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania as more democratic countries with 'advanced democracies' in comparison to Bulgaria, Slovakia and Romania, which had 'liberal democracies'. She based this distinction on the 'combination' of two variables, screening (lustration) and democratic consolidation. However, she failed to explain the disparity between countries with 'advanced democracies'. The actual level of lustration varied among Central and Eastern European countries. For instance, Poland's experience has been characterised by multiple starts and stops to lustration and is described as an 'insufficiently' lustrated country (Horne 2012: 422); whilst the Czech Republic (continuing the policy of Czechoslovakia) applied one of the most comprehensive lustration policies among post-communist European countries in the 1990s (David – Choi 2005: 392–435).

Letki (2002: 548) also claims that countries which have not achieved 'consolidated democracy' are at the same time 'non-lustrated'. However, she does not explain satisfactorily why Latvia and Estonia are 'advanced democracies' and simultaneously 'non-lustrated'. She merely states that 'although limited space does not allow us to investigate these two cases thoroughly, it may be stated that they also experienced a specific purification (...) and Estonian and Latvian problems of dealing with the legacy of the past focused on the Russian minority issue' (Letki 2002: 548). With regard to Lithuania, Letki decided to categorise it as a borderline case and described Lithuania as on the border between 'lustrated' and 'non-lustrated', but with an 'advanced democracy'. Letki (2002: 537) bases her decision on the fact that there were no confrontations with the Lithuanian communists and no negotiations with the Soviet government in Lithuania. Nevertheless, since Letki's research work finished in 1999, implementations of lustration have changed in the Baltic states. Moreover, her work overlooked lustration laws and programmes of all Baltic states (Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia), although some lustration laws were implemented in 1995 and 1999 there (Horne 2012: 423).

In a journal entitled *The International Journal of Transitional Justice*, Cynthia Horne (2014) has also questioned whether and how lustration has affected democratisation across 12 countries in the post-communist space. Horne argues that there is a robust relationship between lustration and the consolidation of democracy and the magnitude of this relationship is substantial. She proves this positive inter-linkage using both qualitative and quantitative methods, namely by constructing an original lustration typology to categorise lustration types across twelve Central and Eastern European countries and by applying regression methods to display a consistent and strong relationship between lustration and democracy. Horne's research arrives at three main findings: first, lustration highly supports democratisation; second, lustration, which includes obligatory and wide-ranging bureaucratic change, has greater influence on democratisation than voluntary and minor transitional justice mechanisms; third, there are considerable differences in democracy levels across the lustration categories. These findings are important for this article because in spite of the many contradictory examples of the effects of lustration on societal reconciliation and regime building, the results reflect that lustration may lead to democracy.

Nevertheless, the main weakness of Horne's (2014) study is the failure to draw a distinction between politicisation of transitional justice and the expectation of bureaucratic turnover or renewal. Horne (2014: 503) points out that 'lustration breaks up the patronage networks that existed under the communist system and continue to dominate many areas of economic and political life'. In doing so, her analysis does not take into account that political actors can use lustration as a tool to discredit or remove opponents. This case should be taken into consideration because it can also disrupt the legitimacy of steps towards democracy and menace a democracy's foundation. Furthermore, Horne (2014: 506–507) categorises twelve post-communist countries into four groups: (1) the Czech Republic, Latvia, and Estonia as instances of 'compulsory and wide' lustration; (2) Hungary, Poland, and Lithuania as examples of 'narrow and voluntary' lustration; (3) Bulgaria, Romania, and Slovakia as instances of 'public disclosure and symbolic' lustration; and finally (4) Albania, Russia, and Ukraine as examples of 'no change' lustration countries. Countries such as Russia did not try to apply lustration policies because of the legacies of the past. Only if policy-makers condemned former communist systems can it be said that lustration policies led to trust in public institutions. If the new elite of a hypothetical country has more widespread respect and admiration than the old one, it is more probable that this country can use lustration in its transition. Therefore, I would contest Horne's argument in which she (2014: 517) claims that 'democratic countries do not necessarily choose more extensive lustration or even any lustration at the start of their transitions' with the counter-argument that the Czech Republic and Slovakia did choose very different methods of lustration at the start of their transitions. There was a divergence between 'non-enforcement'

lustration in Slovakia and 'blitz' lustrations in the Czech Republic (Letki 2002: 545). Thus, the acceptance of lustration also depends on the position of the new elite of a country before and during its transition period. For instance, in the Slovakia's case, the new elite tolerated the communist system and did not allow the implementation of lustration.

Roman David's (2015) experimental analysis of the effects of lustration on trust in governments of Central European countries is research more worthy of attention. David proposes lustration systems (with the regional variant of *personnel systems*) as a theoretical concept of transitional justice and examines the effects that exposure, dismissal and confession have on trust in governments of the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary using three main methods of transitional justice: revelation, retribution, and reconciliation. David (2015: 8–9) argues that trust in government, e.g. confidence in its institutional designs, shows that lustration can be positively related to trust in new governments' policies during the democratic transformation. His findings are significant for proving an inter-linkage between transitional justice and democratisation. Lustration increases citizens' trust in a (new) government and its institutions, which contributes to the new regime's legitimacy and the likelihood of its successful consolidation of democracy.

However, David's three-country comparison work concentrates only on the vanguard lustration paths in Central Europe, and consequently restricts the possibility of proving and generalising the causal relationship between democratisation and transitional justice across the entirety of Central and Eastern Europe. As I mentioned earlier, many scholars have categorised transitional justice in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland as more lustrated countries compared to other countries in post-communist Europe. Accordingly, in the case of other Central and Eastern European countries, it would not be surprising if transitional justice led to distrust in a given government during its political and economic transformation.

Although there are some scholarly works attempting to prove an inter-linkage between transitional justice and consolidation of democracy in Central and Eastern Europe, these works have not (successfully) proved a causal relationship for several reasons. First of all, there exist normative and methodological challenges and various assumptions that remain empirically under-examined (Snyder – Vinjamuri 2003). Secondly, there is a lack of systematic research on lustration and vetting (Thoms – Ron – Paris 2010). Thirdly, truth commissions are characterised by less consideration for human rights and democracy, and also by the inconclusive effects of trials and amnesties (Olsen – Payne – Reiter 2010). Finally, research on transitional justice and democratisation faces many challenges such as historicism in the context of Central and Eastern Europe. Hence, the different forms of transitional justice like lustration, purges and public access to security files need additional research to prove a relationship between democratisation and transitional justice (Kritz 2009).

Criteria for 'Democratic' Transitional Justice

The implementation of transitional justice in Central and Eastern Europe and its role in a transition period is of greater interest to researchers. There are definitely fair and unfair ways of coping with the past. Different methods and analyses of transitional justice and democratisation in Central and Eastern Europe have resulted in mixed outcomes, both positive and negative, dis/proving a causal relationship between the two discussed phenomena. Although there is no completely proven inter-linkage between transitional justice and the consolidation of democracy, I argue that transitional justice may assist incipient democracies as a significant means of achieving peace and societal stability when it is implemented according to several criteria that demonstrate the ideals of liberal democracy. First, policy-makers should have significant control over transitional justice policies. Otherwise, policies might fail or achieve only a fragile democracy or tenuous peace.

Second, only if individual perpetrators are punished by transitional justice forms for offences they have in fact committed, then I argue that transitional justice can be called 'democratic'. O'Donnell et al. (1986) see transitional justice as key to protecting and sustaining new democracies in democratic transitions. This is because past criminals in the new regime can destroy democratic consolidation if they are not lustrated. As reported by the United Nations High Commission on Human Rights in 2006, transitional justice protects against this kind of abuse of power by applying institutional and/or symbolic changes to the residues of the *ancien régime* (www.ohchr.org). I agree with this argument, but I dispute that individuals should not be lustrated for crimes they have not perpetrated. The use of this practice in Central and Eastern Europe shows that many individuals were punished for collaborating with the Communist Parties or having access to secrets of the parties and for other activities. Therefore, through engagement with the principles of democracy such as respect for the rule of justice and law, lustration of individuals for individual offences perpetrated in the old regime constructs democracy.

Thirdly, in addition to the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and *The Charter of the United Nations*, transitional justice should be implemented in accordance with international criminal law, international human rights law, international humanitarian law and international refugee law in order that transitional justice be 'democratic' justice. Unless action is taken according to these international laws/standards, transitional justice can risk disrupting or conflicting with criminal accusations, whether these accusations are assumed to be at the national or international levels. Lyal Sunga (2009) asserts that the risk of such disruptions is specifically expressed in situations in which truth commissions use amnesties, and especially in the case of total amnesties to forgive offenders for severe crimes. Consequently, the neglect of international

standards can lead to the disruption of criminal prosecutions and therefore undermine the consolidation of democracy. Moreover, criminal accusations should be better adapted to place facts/events in the right perspective and to concentrate on victims in order for there to be accountability for past abuses without risking a smooth transition from the old regime to democracy.

Finally, political parties should not use transitional justice as a political instrument to remove or discredit enemies or as a consolidation of their own power. In other words, justice in a liberal democracy should be implemented in a way that avoids a *victor's justice*, in which political parties carry out justice on their own basis, employing various regulations to judge what is right and/or wrong for their own benefit. Otherwise, victor's justice could undermine the legitimacy of democracy and threaten its successful consolidation.

'Democratic' Transitional Justice in the Czech Republic, Latvia and Slovakia?

In this section, I will discuss transitional justice implementations in three Central and Eastern European countries, namely in the Czech Republic, Latvia and Slovakia. These three countries are chosen because all of them currently represent 'high' levels of democracy but implemented quite different transitional justice policies in their transitions to democracy.

The Czech Republic

Many scholarly works (e.g. Letki 2002: 539; David 2012: 762; Nedelsky 2004: 76; Cabada 2012: 55) mention that between 1990 and 2010 the Czech Republic implemented the most extensive, comprehensive and enduring transitional justice policies among post-communist European countries. The Czech Republic set up the framework for transitional justice in the beginning of its political reforms (1990 to 1993) as part of Czechoslovakia, and when it was dissolved, the independent Czech Republic continued to implement transitional justice using three groups of measures: revelation, retribution, and reparation (David 2012: 764).

Although Czechoslovakia was among the last countries in Central and Eastern European to overthrow communism, it was the first government in the region to enact the lustration law in the region on 4 October 1991. According to this law, the following groups of people, among others, were excluded from public employment: high officials of the Communist Party, members, informers and collaborators of State Secret Police (StB), members of People's Militias, students and researchers of certain high schools (Lustration Law 1991). Bílková (2015: 2) points out that this act, called the *Great Lustration Act*, is the first one of two lustration acts in Czechoslovakia. The second, the *Small Lustration Act*, was enacted in June 1992 and designed only for the Czech part of Czechoslo-

vakia. The Small Lustration Act is very similar to the Great Lustration Act and was 'specifically designed to apply to certain positions within the Ministry of Interior, the Police and the Penitentiary Service' (Bílková 2015: 2). However, both these acts operate in a similar way on the practical level in that they involve a screening of the former regime's people for certain public positions.

Kieran Williams (2003: 21) notices that the Czech Republic lustrated 402,788 of its ten million citizens, and about three per cent of those screened in 1991 and 1995–2000 did not obtain acknowledgment from the advocates of lustration. Nedelsky (2004: 76) also states that 'in 2001, 2.5 percent of the applicants did not receive such confirmation'. Furthermore, it was revealed in 1998 that there was 'a black market in fake certificates claiming that the bearer had not worked for or with the Czech State Security (StB)' in the Czech Republic and 'in 2001, it was reported that errors had been made by the interior ministry in 117 cases' (Williams 2003: 21). In 2002, 'a group of right-wing senators successfully initiated a bill to broaden access to StB archives (including express provision for the identification of informers referred to in reports only by their cover names) and publish the names of around 75,000 informers' (Williams 2003: 21). Williams (2003: 22) further argues that wider access to secret files in Czech Republic does not create 'the moments of confession and redemption that [...] have never arisen in the decadelong practice of lustration'. Instead, it raises ethical issues as it deals with the information of individuals. Legal scholars and political theorists have often raised debates on the dual role of the Czech Republic's lustration law in relation to violence, particularly Jochnick, Normand, Sarat, Brawn, Halley and Teitel (all authors cited in Leebaw 2008: 97), who argue that 'while law can be a tool for regulating violence and exposing abuses of power, law is also utilised to obfuscate and legitimate abuses of power'. Drawing on these arguments, I argue that transitional justice in the Czech Republic can be described as 'non-democratic' because of its unjust punishment of people for many years.

There were many 'non-democratic' transitional justice measures in the Czech Republic. If someone felt wrongly nominated as a potential lustration target, she or he could ask for re-examination before an appeal committee and by 1994, there had been filed 577 requests for re-examination (Nalepa 2010: 68). However, Monika Nalepa notes that in reality the Constitutional Court cancelled appeals because it seemed the appeals procedure collaborated with these targets. Tucker (2004 cited in Nalepa 2010: 69) contends that the StB files were 'edited' by the secret services in expectation of the fall of communism and therefore were less reliable. Vaclav Havel, president of the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic, was against any instances of revenge or fanaticism and thought that many people could be mistakenly listed in the StB's files or even have no idea 'whether, by accident, [they] might have stepped into something' (Michnik – Havel 1993: 22). Although the Czech Republic is indexed as having a high level

of democracy (Freedom House 2017; 2019), all these facts demonstrate that transitional justice in the Czech Republic was politicised and many innocent individuals were lustrated. These kinds of indicators do not meet the criteria for 'democratic' transitional justice that I listed before.

Latvia

Lustration (or more widely transitional justice) in the Baltic states is not as well researched as in the Czech Republic and few scholarly works specifically address lustration in the Baltic states. According to Freedom House (2017; 2019), Latvia is indexed as a country with a democratic level as high as that of the Czech Republic. However, the Baltic states' lustration policies represent exceptional features, as Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania were under totalitarian regimes after Soviet occupation and did not have their own politically autonomous institutions. Moreover, Latvia experienced so-called lustration 'with a Latvian flavour' and there was no centralised lustration law apart from 14 different kinds of legal acts; in addition, 'the KGB files have not been made available to the public, and no incentive-based lustration legislation has been adopted' (Zake 2010: 394). Although there was not a centralised lustration law, some people underwent criminal prosecution as informants of the KGB in Latvia. Horne (2014: 507) points out that there was a mixture of lustration and anti-Russian policies in Latvian transitional justice. Ethnic Russians were removed for their participation in the communist party of Latvia and even their descendants were made to answer for their ancestors. Hence, instead of dealing with past injustices, Latvia often used to blame 'colonial Russia' and its descendants.

Generally, Latvian lustration is also considered as an instance of restriction based on employment and political participation. Lustration in Latvia is characterised by evidence-based truth revelation, where someone's collaboration can be proven only when it becomes relevant using accessible information (Zake 2010: 395). This means that when someone runs for a public office or applies for a restricted job position in Latvia, this person's background is checked to show whether she or he was a collaborator. Ieva Zake (2010: 389–412) notes that this investigation is conducted by the Centre for the Documentation of the Consequences of Totalitarianism (TSDC – a state institution charged with guarding and studying the remaining KGB documents). This way of dealing with the past has been broadly challenged and debated by the proponents and opponents of lustration in Latvia. In Latvian lustration most politicians supported the lustration process, whereas intellectuals, namely academics, poets, writers, journalists and other representatives of the intelligentsia were against it and called for a stop to lustration as early as possible (Zake 2010: 389–412). This case shows two non-democratic transitional justice elements in Latvia. First, lustration was politicised and used as a political tool against 'others'.

Russian minorities, even their descendants, have been unjustly punished by the tyranny of the majority. Second, there was a distrust of the democratisation by the Latvian intelligentsia. Both these elements contradict the ideals of liberal democracy and reveal lustration 'with a Latvian flavour' as a non-democratic transitional justice.

Slovakia

Slovakia experienced transitional justice both as a part of Czechoslovakia and as an independent country. This country is chosen as a third case study because its transition contains some distinct features. According to Martin Kovanic (2012: 386–394), Slovakia adopted a *political silence* in terms of transitional justice after the peaceful dissolution of Czechoslovakia, allowing the old elites to maintain some effect in all of the transition steps in Slovakia. He further emphasises that lustration law was not enforced in Slovakia and it expired in 1996. Even in the Czechoslovak time, the federal lustration law was never applied in Slovakia (Nalepa 2010: 193). That is why transitional justice in Slovakia can be considered as an instance of symbolic lustration, which acknowledges unlawful suffering, although there was the federal lustration law. While the Czech Republic implemented so-called 'wild lustration', Slovakia's old and new elite did not allow the use of lustration. Cynthia M. Horne (2014: 506–507) categorises Slovakian lustration as 'public disclosure and symbolic change', whilst Natalia Letki (2002: 549) classifies Slovakia as a 'non-lustrated' country with liberal democracy.

One might ask why there was a lack of political will to impose lustration measures in Slovakia and why the Slovak political elite took this approach despite the fact that the lustration law was a federal act. These questions can be answered by delving into the repression and legitimacy of the communist regime in Slovakia and political opposition to the new regime in the transition period. Compared to the Czech Republic, 'Slovakia had a less negative view of the Communist regime […] and there was little interest among elites or the public in lustration' (Merryman and Tafel 2009: 10). 'The federal lustration law, as well, "had only a formal effect" in Slovakia' (Darski 1993 cited in Nedelsky 2004: 77). Drawing on the theories of transitional justice in the former Czechoslovakia offered by Huntington (1991), Nedelsky (2004: 80) explains this divergence by stating that the Czech Republic pursued a policy of 'prosecute and punish', while Slovakia chose to 'forgive', if not 'forget' its former officials. Nedelsky argues that the level of repression was higher in the Czech Republic than in Slovakia 'during the last twenty years of the communist regime's existence' (Nedelsky 2004: 80). She (2004: 81) further argues that a lesser level of repression resulted in a higher level of regime legitimacy in Slovakia and 'contributed to a lesser interest in transitional justice there than in the Czech lands'.

Another sound explanation for why the Slovak political elite did not impose lustration measures is that there was a lack of Slovak opposition to the regime during the transition period. In July 2002, the Parliament of Slovakia passed a law allowing citizens to access secret police files, but the law was overridden by 'a veto by President Rudolf Schuster the following month' (Nedelsky 2004: 79). Although, according to Freedom House (2017; 2019), Slovakia along with the Czech Republic and Latvia display a high level of democracy, it is certain that transitional justice policies were not consistent with the ideals of liberal democracy, as the new elite of Slovakia tolerated a communist system politicising transitional justice.

Discussion

Table 1 below illustrates several characteristics of transitional justice based on various scholarly works (e.g. Horne 2012; Zake 2010; Horne 2014; Nalepa 2010; Kovanic 2012; Letki 2002; Williams 2003). The table shows that some countries of the Soviet bloc, such as the Czech Republic, Latvia and Slovakia, have experienced different transitional justice policies (Table 1). As a result, these experiences led to different non-democratic transitional justice with violations of human rights and victor's justice in all three countries. However, the countries have consolidated democracy without any doubt and show a high level of democracy nowadays. My comparative case study results show that translational justice was not a prerequisite for the successful consolidation of democracy.

Table 1: Comparison of Transitional Justice and Democratic Consolidation

Countries / Characteristics	The Czech Republic	Latvia	Slovakia
Transitional Justice	widespread and long-lasting	with a 'Latvian flavour'	insufficient/ symbolic
Lustration Law	adopted and implemented	was not adopted; only 14 different kinds of legal acts	adopted, but was not implemented and expired in 1996
Unjust Punishment of Innocent Individuals	yes	yes	not applicable
'Democratic' Transitional Justice?	non-democratic: (1) politicised; (2) *black market* of fake certificates	non-democratic: (1) politicised; (2) against 'others' (*Russians*); (3) distrust by intelligentsia	non-democratic: (1) politicised by new elite
Contemporary Level of Democracy	high	high	high

Source: Own design based on scholarly works

If some countries, such as Slovakia, have consolidated democracy without any transitional justice, then we may doubt transitional justice's role as a prerequisite for the successful consolidation of democracy. Furthermore, non-democratic transitional justice may lead to unjust punishments of innocent people, become a political tool and/or can even result in political cleavages. To be a prerequisite for the consolidation of democracy, transitional justice should be applied in accordance with democratic criteria.

The comparison of transitional justice policies and their legal frameworks in the Czech Republic, Latvia and Slovakia indicates that transitional justice in these countries led to 'non-democratic' approaches and outcomes, despite all of them being high democratic countries these days. Without comparative analysis, which can work as a *litmus test*, it would be highly complicated to argue that transitional justice is not a prerequisite for the successful consolidation of democracy. I recognise that this comparative review deals with a small number of countries in the Central and Eastern European region, thus leaving more space for further research. This research could be extended by conducting comparative analyses outside of the post-communist space, for example, among Latin American countries. This would not only provide us with a better understanding of whether transitional justice is a prerequisite for the successful consolidation of democracy outside of Central and Eastern Europe, but would also give further depth to the comparison between the regions. Eventually, such comparison would allow scholars to make broader and more detailed conclusions regarding the consolidation of democracy through transitional justice.

Conclusions

In this paper, I evaluated various scholarly works, data and approaches to transitional justice in the Czech Republic, Latvia and Slovakia to examine whether transitional justice policies implemented in these three countries can be called a prerequisite for the successful consolidation of democracy. To strengthen this analysis, I also outlined some criteria for 'democratic' transitional justice that can be distinguished from 'non-democratic' transitional justice.

However, it should be noted that it is problematic to prove an inter-linkage between transitional justice and the successful consolidation of democracy, as it deals with injustices of the past. Therefore, the question as to what extent transitional justice can be a prerequisite for the successful consolidation of democracy is problematic too. If the given question asks to what extent transitional justice is a required stage or part in democratisation, then the answer is 'not to a great extent'. My investigation of the Czech Republic, Latvia and Slovakia indicates that there is no unique system of transitional justice that serves as a necessary prerequisite for the successful consolidation of democracy. The implementation of transitional justice is too country – and context – specific and a dis/proof

of a causal relationship depends on what kind of transitional justice policies were used and whether they were non/democratic transitional justice. Some countries have implemented widespread *blitz* or *wild* transitional justice policies and successfully consolidated democracy, and some *have forgiven and forgotten* their torturers and successfully become democratic too, while other countries despite many attempts to use transitional justice have still not fully consolidated democracy. When it comes to Central and Eastern European countries, transitional justice seems more a way of dealing with communist traitors rather than a prerequisite for the successful consolidation of democracy. I argue that transitional justice is not inherently democratic, but it can be a moral privilege of liberal democracies to cope with authoritarian crimes against humanity in an equitable manner.

Transitional justice can be a prerequisite for the consolidation of liberal democracy if it is conducted in accordance with the ideals of liberal democracy. Thus, transitional justice may support incipient democracies as an important means of achieving justice, peace, trust and societal stability in a transition period. Moreover, countries ought to deal with their past impartially, avoiding *victor's justice*.

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Central Europe between the Great Powers: contemporary foreign-policy orientation

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Abstract: *The main aim of this this study was to highlight the relations between the Central European countries (Slovakia, Czechia, Poland and Hungary) and the two great powers—the United States and the Russian Federation. We examined the importance of this region from a geopolitical perspective, analysing the relations between the Central European countries and the great powers through two of their critical manifestations: military bases and energy security. The selection of these themes was justified by the frequent centralisation of the abovementioned topics in political discussions and their role in underpinning the securitisation of political leaders. The analysis of government strategy papers, and politicians' statements and press releases, which included the views of three international relations experts, revealed diverse interstate relations. Each of the four Central European countries claims to be a responsible and reliable member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization; however, not all of them place the same emphasis on this partnership. Regarding the energy sector, we came to the same conclusion. The countries declare their independence, but the RF continues to have a significant or dominant influence. The geographical position of the four surveyed countries is probably an important factor in this situation and the great powers generally adapt their foreign policy towards them accordingly, as evidenced by the selected topics. The results of the analyses confirmed the importance of this region from a geopolitical perspective.*

Key words: ***Central Europe, U.S., Russia, energy, military bases, geopolitics***

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Introduction

The political crisis in Ukraine, and the subsequent annexation of the Crimean Peninsula by the Russian Federation (RF) in spring 2014, placed the international community in a difficult situation. These events affected, and still affect, a wide range of policies and issues that are important for the functioning of states and their mutual relations. The United States (US), the Russian Federation and the international community – the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) – play important roles in these relations. The EU member states and NATO are aware of their responsibilities towards the international community, which aims to maintain a united position regarding the above-mentioned events. The four Central European countries try to diplomatically express their own views on the situation without disrupting their bilateral relations with the RF and the US, but at the same time, both those countries attempt to manipulate the situation for their own benefit (Waisová 2020). In particular, the events in Ukraine of seven years ago intensified the interest and activities of both great powers in the region[2]. The four Central European countries were concerned and, naturally, reacted. As the title of the article indicates, we studied four selected Central European countries – Slovakia, Czechia, Poland and Hungary – and investigated the energy security and military bases in their territories as the means of shaping the relationships of these four countries with the aforementioned great powers.

Both topics are currently very attractive for both politicians and the media, because they are suitable for engaging voters. In both cases, money plays an important role. Presentation of the topics in the right light cannot only increase the desire for investment, but also infer financial savings for the public. Both options affect the stances of political actors. In the case of energy issues, the ecological approach is very typical (Waisová 2018), emphasising the reduction of the carbon footprint and promotion of renewable energy sources, with resulting changes in energy prices. People's own comfort is also an important factor; for example, in Slovakia alone, the 2009 energy crisis caused great concern among citizens regarding possible reduced gas supplies, and the population continues to be highly sensitive to changes in energy tariffs. The military theme also remains popular. Military bases, or the presence of foreign forces, are a constant topic in politics and among security analysts and the professional community. Opinions become heated during discussions about other countries' military bases in Central Europe – particularly those of the major geopolitical players,

2 We consider Russia in this article to be a great power, at least in the energy and military sectors. According to William Courtney and Howard J. Shatz (2020), Jeffrey Mankoff (2019) and Jeremy W. Lamoreaux (2021), the RF is still a great power, despite some problematic aspects (the economy, cooperation and the re-establishment of influence). Their statements are valid in relation to the energy and military (hard power) spheres of influence, and some of these authors have highlighted Russia's keenness to re-establish great power in all its aspects.

which arouse strong opposition. In the public's opinion, their presence can either increase or decrease potential security risks, and public opinion is both contradictory and polarised. This controversy prompted the choice of the variables for this study: military bases and energy security.

The main aim of this study was to examine the nature and background of the approaches of the RF and the US towards the surveyed countries and vice versa, and to highlight the geopolitical importance of the Central European region in the context of these relations. In terms of geopolitics, we expect that the Central European region will continue to be an area of great power interest, due to its strategic geographical location.

In the first section of this article, we describe the literature review we conducted and the theoretical geopolitical framework of Harold Mackinder (1904) and Nicolas Spykman (1938), which underpinned the study. We obtained data regarding the foreign policy activities of the great powers and examined it using content analysis and we carried out a series of structured interviews. In two thematic sections, we describe the methods and results of the content analysis, structured interviews[3] and comparative methods. In the final chapter, we draw conclusions and confirm the main premise of the study.

It may be asked why we did not include China's activities in the region. We chose not to investigate China's activities for two reasons. The first reason was that China is committed to pursuing its interests through economic instruments, which does not resonate in the societies of the surveyed countries as the topics of energy security and military bases do. Moreover, the relations of the selected countries with the two great powers, whether positive or negative, are more securitised than those with China.

The article covers three specific issues. First, it discusses the political approaches of the US and the RF towards the selected region, justifying the selection of the two issues (military bases and energy security) as topics for analysis. It then describes the chosen sectors, investigates national statements by the four Central European countries' representatives and explores the policies of the great powers. With regard to these issues, the opinions of Slovak analysts dealing with international and security policy will be presented. In order to achieve the most relevant and objective view of the research areas, we approached three independent analysts with different perspectives on the research areas. These analysts, from the non-government sector, had many years of experience, together with numerous publications and media appearances. The reason for incorporating their views into this work was to offer an opinion not influenced by security issues or the need to gain political points and voters' favour.

3 Structured interviews were conducted with experts on security from several institutions, emphasising their professional views on threats. All interviewees are experts in the areas of national and international security, with at least 10 years of experience.

The literature used in the study was drawn mainly from a large number of internet sources, including periodicals, publicly accessible official government documents, press releases and the opinions of state officials. Due to the dynamics of the topic under review and its time limitations (for the article-relevant period, from 2014 until the middle of 2020), it was more appropriate and convenient to explore the topic using internet sources. Books did not describe the topics of interest in detail and it was unlikely that we would find a book that offered a summary of political views and statements on the issues. Books were, however, useful for learning more about the geopolitical theories of H. J. Mackinder or N. Spykman and his followers, but the aim of the study was not to analyse and confirm or refute his theory. We referred to the part of it that geographically defined the Central European region and mentioned it as one of the key factors for gaining a dominant political and military position in the world.

The attitudes of the US and Russia towards Central and Eastern Europe

As stated in the Introduction, we did not analyse the theories themselves, but the main premises of the theories underpinning the overall conclusions and helped to provide a picture of what is happening in the field of international relations. Ištok analysed both theories in his publication *Halford J. Mackinder a jeho teória Heartlandu* (2014). The Heartland, according to the analyst's latest work, is a geographically delimited territory of the former Soviet Union (excluding the eastern part) comprising Western China, Mongolia, Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan. Eastern Europe plays an important role in this theory, according to which whoever rules Eastern Europe rules the Heartland, and whoever rules the Heartland controls the World Island. If a coalition of states or a great power emerges, it is likely to threaten global stability. Mackinder divided Eastern Europe into three parts: Germany, Western Russia, and the countries between them (Czechia, Slovakia, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Greece and the southern Slav areas). In the theory, Eastern Europe plays an important role in the balance of power, since it is an arena for both sea and land powers, providing access to continental Eurasia (MacKinder, 1904) and making an RF-Germany alliance dangerous for the US. Rimland, in Spykman's theory (1938), is a country that surrounds the Heartland, encompassing the entire European peninsula, the Arab countries, the Indian subcontinent and the Far East. In the future, there is a risk that this area will be dominated by a single power, or a coalition of the Eurasian Rimland forces, which will control the Heartland; therefore, the issue of who controls Rimland is vital (Spykman, 1938). The two great powers, the US and the RF, seek domination (or attempt to prevent each other from gaining it) over Heartland and/or Rimland.

Of course, every theory has its opponents. In particular, the American geographer M. I. Glassner criticised Mackinder for not taking into account the increasing power of the US, not explaining the contradiction of the powers controlling both the Heartland and the Soviet Union and ultimately failing to factor-in technological advances (Glassner, 1996). According to another American geographer, C. Flint, Mackinder created a theoretical basis for Cold War to justify the activities of one country (Flint, 2012). British geographer M. Blacksell criticised the simplification of such a complex phenomenon as the world order that has formed since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution (Blacksell, 2008). Polish geographer J. Barbaga pointed out the social Darwinism of Mackinder's theory and his overestimation of the political importance of large regions (Barbaga, 1978). The German G. Heyden also criticised Mackinder's theory, claiming that it was not scientific and that it aimed to provide justification for the British Empire conquering Russia (Ištok, 2014).

The abovementioned theories rest on the idea that the world's great powers – big geopolitical players – are trying to gain as much influence and control as much territory as possible, using all possible tools (in our case, military bases and energy security).

The US Security Strategy of 2017 declared that the RF is trying to weaken US influence in the world and subvert the US's alliances and friendships, because the RF perceives NATO and the EU as a threat. A strong and free Europe is very important for the US (Řádek, 2017a, 2017b). To counterbalance the negative effects of the RF, the US seeks to maintain an important position in the energy sector, where it is interested in diversifying energy sources. In the area of security, it is fulfilling its NATO commitments and expects the same from its European partners, which should allocate 2% of their GDP to defence spending (National Security Strategy…, 2017). The Strategy remains central to intelligence analyses that aim to assess world threats, and it identifies the RF as one of those threats. EU countries may become more susceptible to the influences of the RF and China after the UK leaves the EU, because of the economic fluctuations caused by its departure. The UK is a strong opponent of the RF, but some countries seek to soften the sanctions and look for opportunities to invest in the RF. Disagreements in the transatlantic environment, and an increase in the influence of anti-systemic political entities, could be used by the RF to the detriment of the US (Worldwide threat assessment…, 2019). In February 2019, US Vice-President Mike Pence, at a security conference in Munich, urged all partners to honour their commitments to NATO. This would strengthen NATO again and make the US stronger than its partners. NATO will face down any attempts to subvert its influence through political interventions or energetic blackmail. The US greatly appreciates European countries, as well any other countries that stand against

the Nord Stream II project[4] (remarks by Vice President..., 2019). Increased interest in Central European countries has also been confirmed by the visits of US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in February 2019 to Hungary, Slovakia and Poland. In addition, the White House hosting the Prime Ministers of Czechia, Slovakia and Hungary, and the Polish President, have clearly signalled that the US is interested in restarting and strengthening relations. At a press conference in Hungary, Mike Pompeo noted, that the prolonged absence of the US from the Central European region, which has been evident over the past few years, is unacceptable (Istrate, 2019).

Paradoxically, the RF also wants a stable and strong EU. They blame the US for over-engagement in NATO and involving EU countries in disputes resulting in economic sanctions. The RF's National Security Strategy declared that it advocates the consolidation of mutually beneficial cooperation with European states and the EU, the harmonisation of integration processes in Europe and the post-Soviet areas, and the formation of a Euro–Atlantic collective security agreement with a clear treaty and legal basis. Activities relating to the development of NATO's military scope, the strengthening of the military activities of member states, the potential growth of NATO and the proximity of military infrastructure to the RF border are major threats to the RF.

The RF is prepared to develop relations with NATO for the purpose of strengthening general security in the Euro–Atlantic region, on the condition that the interests of the RF are considered when conducting military and/or political planning, and that the provisions of international law are respected. At the Munich Security Conference in Germany, The RF's Minister of Foreign Affairs, noted that after the Cold War, no NATO-centrism existed. The commitment to not reinforcing the security of one country at the expense of another was also forgotten, even though it was approved by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the RF–NATO Council. The potential of OSCE was not used to enhance cooperation between the RF and the EU; instead, European countries were dragged towards a confrontation with the RF, which resulted in economic sanctions and billions of euros in losses. He also underlined the words of President Putin that the RF valued a strong and independent EU and understood the efforts of the EU to achieve self-sufficiency and sovereignty in defence and security. This is a legitimate idea in the context of strengthening the multipolar world order (Lavrov, 2019), which is one of the reasons why President Putin advocated the Nord Stream project to increase the energy security of Europe as a whole and both RF and Germany (Putin, 2019). Official energy documents have acknowledged the efforts of the EU states (including the four surveyed countries) to diversify energy sources and, therefore,

4 The Nord Stream II project is a pipeline that will bring natural gas to Western Europe from Russia, especially to Germany, the pipeline stretches across the Baltic Sea.

reduce the risk of disrupted supplies (by, for example, the conflict in Ukraine). Consequently, the RF is endeavouring to build a new gas pipeline to maintain its dominant position as a supplier. According to the energy company Gazprom, which is controlled by the Russian government, the European market is one of the key consumers of natural gas and the RF has been the largest exporter to Europe for last 50 years. It supplies gas to Central and Western Europe through long-term contracts at the intergovernmental level, based on the principle of 'take or pay', which guarantees financial compensation in the event of failures of energy supply. In 2018, Gazprom exported 9.9 billion m3 of gas to Poland, 6.5 billion m3 to Czechia; 7.7 billion m3 to Hungary and 5.1 billion m3 to Slovakia (Gazprom, 2019).

Based on the analysis of the abovementioned official government and state documents, and statements by representatives of RF and US we concluded that the two chosen variables (energy security and military bases) best represented the great powers' influence in the region. In the case of the RF, economic cooperation was prioritised; in the US, the military option. To a degree, the energy theme is an ace in the hands of President Putin. All the surveyed countries rely on RF energy providers, even if they pursue partial diversification. The RF comprehensively questions the importance of NATO and criticises its unnecessary expansion and proximity to the RF's borders. The US has a weaker position in the energy field, so it primarily plays with a military card. It benefits from the fact that all four countries are NATO member states. The fact that the US lacks energy dominance in the region was confirmed by President Trump's efforts to impose sanctions on the countries that are involved in the Nord Stream project.

The geopolitical theories have proven to be applicable even in today's world, and it is clear that the US and the RF are aware of the geographical importance of the Central European region and the individual countries within it. In the next two sections, we analyse the extent of the influence of the great powers on the four surveyed countries through the two specified variables.

Military bases in Central European states

Recently, discussions have revived regarding the establishment of military bases in Central European countries and, in our opinion, a certain level of awkwardness is involved. The US is negotiating possible defence cooperation agreements with individual countries, with contracts to be based on the modernisation and construction of their military infrastructure, which (if necessary) would be helpful and accessible to all NATO member states. This is one of the arguments in favour of contributing to NATO. It is difficult to say whether the US has a hidden agenda and the whole process is mainly due to power-orientated interests in the region or its interest in Europe's security.

In his article, Vladimír Šnídl (2015) presented the opinions of experts (Marián Majer and František Šulc) regarding the presence of foreign troops in Europe. US troops in Europe are subject to a dual-function commander, who is always American, while the NATO headquarters are located in Belgium. The commander commands US troops, but can also command NATO troops. NATO has neither its own army nor a military base; in a sense, every military base of a NATO member state is a NATO base. The organisation builds only headquarters or training centres consisting of representatives of the member states. In today's world of hybrid threats, having a permanent base with thousands of soldiers has no tactical importance; it is largely a symbolic gesture. The key to securing logistics for military units is to have both the financial and technical means to move the units around. The US had ambitions to establish missile defence facilities in Czechia and Poland, but eventually, after Barack Obama's accession to office, the US withdrew from talks due to the RF's objections. In the context of the Ukraine crisis and the annexation of the Crimean peninsula, the US and NATO preferred extensive exercises and Rapid Deployment Force commands (Šnídl, 2015).

The building of foreign military bases in Slovakia is a topic that incites heated debate among politicians. In relation to NATO, the establishment of NATO Force Integration Units (NFIUs) provoked this debate. The first NFIU was activated in Slovakia on 1 September 2016. All NFIUs are components of NATO's military structure (the NATO force structure) and answer to the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR).

Former Prime Minister R. Fico initially declared that he would not allow the establishment of NATO military bases in Slovak territory. However, he later softened the argument by conceding that, if the units' purpose was logistics and training, it would not be a major problem, but if NATO wanted to establish bases with combat personnel, the answer would be 'no' (TASR, 2014). The former President Andrej Kiska offered construct NATO a logistics centre in Poprad in 2014, which was meant to serve as an ammunition depot. Former Prime Minister Fico had already announced that, if the NATO tried to set up a base with soldiers, he would revoke the concession and he would initiate the referendum. (Slovak PM follows..., 2014). Currently, the topic of defence cooperation with the US is prominent in Slovakia. The conclusion of the agreement would benefit both NATO and the European Deterrence Initiative, and there have been suggestions that the provision of funds for the restoration of airports in Sliač and Kuchyňa would be a precondition of such an agreement. The draft treaty also mentions the construction of ammunition depots in Záhorie, which triggered stormy responses across the entire political spectrum. The Slovak coalition government's partners are not completely united; hence, they seek compromise and aim to please their voters. Minister Miroslav Lajčák believes that the adoption of such an agreement would increase Slovakia's foreign credit, and the US

understands that the treaty would only be a framework and that any proposals would have to be approved by the Government of Slovakia and the National Council of Slovakia (NCS). Meanwhile, the conditions are under discussion and nothing is certain. Other NATO member states have also concluded such agreements. Slovakia's former Prime Minister Peter Pellegrini confirmed the words of Former Minister Lajčák that nothing is agreed and that, if the conditions are disadvantageous and compromise Slovakia's sovereignty, nothing will be signed. Slovakia must not forget that it is a NATO member, which involves not only benefitting from the advantages, but offering something in return. The Slovak National Party has argued that the government has no mandate for a treaty that mentions the construction of ammunition depots and the expansion of airport areas (Pellegrini tvrdí, že..., 2019). The chairman, Andrej Danko, stated in one discussion that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is misleading citizens and will insist that the treaty is unacceptable for Slovakia (Danko v súvislosti..., 2019). In March 2020 Slovakia received a new, pro-NATO orientated government, but at the time of the COVID-19 crisis, the question of NATO military bases in Slovakia was not on the agenda.

In Czechia, the US wanted to set up a radar station as part of the US Missile Defence system. Although President Obama's administration abandoned this intention, President Milos Zeman opposed it, calling it unnecessary, and pointed out that the RF could perceive it as a threat to its national security and take countermeasures. If the Czech government had decided to go ahead, Czech president M. Zeman would have been a strong opponent, since he wanted no foreign army on Czech territory (Rozhovor prezidenta republiky..., 2015). Former Czech Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka would not have authorised a base with foreign troops or supported an increase of NATO's military presence in Europe (Slovakia and Czech, 2014), but the current prime minister is an advocate of Czechia's membership of NATO. At a meeting between the prime minister Andrej Babiš and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, A. Babiš was praised for promising to increase defence spending on 2% GDP by 2024 (Secretary General praises..., 2018).

Hungary seems to have settled the question of military bases. There is an air base on Hungarian territory, in the city of Pápa, which serves NATO's strategic air transport needs. Hungary, together with other SAC countries (Strategic Airlift Capability members' states), has invested in the development of this base to support strategic airlift capability. It is in Hungary's interests to continue to develop the base as an important, common, multi-purpose centre that can satisfy national and European requirements, as well as those of the NATO and SAC countries (Pápa Air Base..., 2019). A small NFIU, similar to the one in Slovakia, was established in Székesfehérvár in 2016. Although Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orbán considers NATO to be important, he believes that in matters of military security Hungary should mainly rely on its own capacity and deal with

military threats using primarily its own forces (Bayer, 2019). The Hungarian government signed a defence cooperation agreement with the US in Washington on NATO's 70th anniversary. This Treaty provides a suitable platform for further strengthening mutual cooperation in the defence sector. At the same time, the signing of the Treaty confirmed good mutual relations and trust between the two countries, and their confidence that they can rely on each other (MFAT, 2019).

Of the sample countries chosen for the research, Poland is without doubt the country with the highest number of military bases, whether they are NATO or US bases. Despite this presence, Poland plans to have approximately 200,000 of its own soldiers in active service by 2025 and is actively arming, since it is in a state of potential conflict with the RF. Poland's efforts to establish a permanent US base in its territory are understandable and they have been underlined by the offer of the Polish government to provide a 10-year 2 billion US dollar subsidy to support the presence of the US Army. These efforts are also supported, almost unanimously, by the political elites and the majority of the population. Poland plans to pay the operational expenses of the permanent US base from its defence budget (Kamiński, 2019). Even without these efforts, several NATO headquarters and training centres have been located in Poland as part of a deterrence and defence project. The Multinational Corps Northeast Headquarters is located in Szczecin and there is a Joint Force Training Centre in Bydgoszcz. The Multinational Division Northeast Headquarters is based in Elblag, coordinating and overseeing the training and preparation of four battle groups (Deterrence and defence, NATO…, 2019).

Opinions of Analysts' A, B, C during the structured interviews: Military bases in the Central European countries are also a sensitive topic in relation to the Ukrainian crisis. Yet again, Poland is the most evident example in this sphere, more active than other Central European countries. Czechia could have been part of the US Missile Defence system, but the previous government vetoed such a move. Hungary hosts a NATO air base and an NFIU logistics unit, as does Slovakia. Again, this situation relates to economic interests. From a long-term strategic perspective, it does not matter whether the specific bases on the countries' respective territories are populated by soldiers of other member countries or whether they are engineering units, artillery brigades or serve other functions. All these countries are members of NATO and, from the point of view of the RF, NATO is an 'enemy'. Regarding troop movements in the event of armed conflict, the corridor leading through the territory of Poland is particularly important. The second most important route is the Danubian route running through Hungary. Slovakia, and to a degree Czechia, are unimportant for this purpose.

With reference to the previously mentioned politicians' views and data, we have outlined the Central European region's overall significance from a military point of view, showing the most important country to be Poland, which strives

to be more or less a leader in this field. It hosts US troops and pays part of the cost on its own initiative. Slovakia and Czechia are more cautious, claiming NATO membership and calling themselves reliable partners, while the issue of NATO bases divides not only politicians, but the respective societies. The loss of prestige if these countries withdrew from NATO membership would harm both countries on several levels. The historical situation also affects the whole situation. Hungary, we concluded, 'plays on both sides' by hosting a NATO base and entering into cooperation, but declaring its intention to rely mainly on its own resources. Overall, individual countries seem to largely oppose the RF and favour the US.

Energy security issues in Central Europe

The gas crisis of January 2009 demonstrated the importance of energy security, which all four studied countries realised. After this crisis, the European institutions and the EU member states started to adopt and implement new measures to prevent supply disruptions. The persistent Russian–Ukrainian conflict once again raised questions about the stability of the natural gas and oil supply from the RF through Ukraine. Moreover, it is now necessary to analyse energy security in environmental terms. All four of the studied countries agreed on a declaration to diversify energy sources and the energy mix with regard to electricity production; however, each country more or less defines its own conditions (i.e. selects its own energy providers and manages its own electricity production in its own way).

Slovakia, in the event of a failure of gas transit through Ukraine, is ready to import gas from other sources, such as gas flowing from Czechia and Western Europe. A connection with Poland is also under construction, which will allow gas to be drawn from Norway, Qatar and the US shale regions. In 2015, pipeline connections with Hungary became operational, allowing Slovakia to draw gas from the Croatian LNG terminal in Omišalj. The meeting of Slovakia's Former Prime Minister Petr Pellegrini and Russia's Former Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev presented an optimistic forecast for Slovakia's energy security, since the Russian Prime Minister promised that Slovakia could count on the RF as a gas supplier after the beginning of 2020. Failure of the gas transportation would be unwelcome, not only for Slovakia, but for the whole EU, because EU gas consumption is increasing and the Nord Stream 2 project will not be completed until the end of 2020 (Medvedev assures..., 2019). Both sides are looking for ways to collaborate and connect the Nord Stream 2 and Turkstream infrastructure projects to Slovakia (Russia proposes..., 2019). Slovakia is 100% dependent on oil imports from the RF via the Druzhba pipeline, which starts in the RF and ends in Czechia. The transport capacity in Slovak territory is 20 million tons per year. An 8.5 kilometre stretch of the Adria pipeline, which starts in the Croatian town of Omisajl, crosses Slovak territory. It was built in

1980 as a potential diversion route for supply; hence, when flow from Croatia is not used, the pipeline transports Russian oil to the south under the aegis of Transpetrol, the Slovak oil pipeline company. The construction of the Bratislava–Schvechat pipeline has not yet started, due to opposition from self-government and activists. Slovakia is also entirely dependent on imports of nuclear fuel from the RF. Replacement by any other type of fuel would be technologically difficult and time-consuming, and would result in financial losses. After negotiations between Slovak and RF delegations, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Ministry of the Economy of Slovakia and the Russian company Rosatom, regarding the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, which include the fact that it is carbon-free and helps in the fight against global warming (MH SR, 2019). At the same time, a contract was signed between Slovak power plant companies and Rosatom's TVEL Fuel Company for the supply of nuclear fuel over the period 2022–2026, with the possibility of extension until 2030 (Rosatom will continue..., 2019).

Similarly, Czechia's Prime Minister Andrej Babiš identified nuclear energy as very important for the production of electricity for the purposes of reducing greenhouse gases and guaranteeing energy security. In this respect, Czechia also cooperates with the US (ÚV ČR, 2018). A. Babiš is also in favour of new types of nuclear units (for the Dukovany nuclear power plant) being financed by ČEZ Group[5], unlike the situation in Hungary, where new nuclear power units in Paks will be built by Rosatom with the help of a financial loan from the RF (Strojaščejesa AES, 2019). This initiative was defended by Czech President Milos Zeman, but it is a complex project, which involves the ČEZ Group and the State seeking the most appropriate way of constructing new blocks of nuclear power plants. At present, Czechia operates six units of nuclear power plants (two in Temelín and four in Dukovany) and imports nuclear fuel from the RF, even though it used fuel from the Westinghouse company in the past (Národní akční plán..., 2015).

Czechia is in a different position in terms of diversification and contracts for the importation of gas and oil supplies. In the medium term, despite the increasing amount of purchased gas on European exchanges, gas from Russia will continue to be Czechia's main source of supply. In the long term, the situation will affect the supply of LNG from the US and Canada, as well as increased gas imports from the RF. Depending on circumstances, it is estimated that Czechia may remain dependent on gas supplies from the RF until 2050 (Zpráva o očekávané dlhodobé, 2016). Czechia receives oil through two pipelines: the Druzhba pipeline from the RF and the IKL pipeline from Germany. In a 2016 report, the Czech Ministry of Industry and Trade stated that 64.6% of the oil was transported via the Družba

5 ČEZ Group is one of the largest energy companies in Europe, where the major shareholder of ČEZ's company is the Czechia.

pipeline and 35.4% via the IKL one. The origins of the oil were 64.30% from the RF and 27.96% from Azerbaijan (Ropa a ropné produkty, 2016).

Poland is dependent on gas imports from the RF under the Yamal contract, which expires in 2022. According to the statistics of Polish Oil Mining and Gas Extraction (PGNiG, the Polish state energy company), imports of natural gas in 2017 from the east amounted to 9.7 billion cubic meters (9.7 bcm; Integrated Annual Report, 2017); however, Poland has signed several contracts for imports of liquefied natural gas (LNG) from the US. This move has reduced Poland's dependence on RF gas and thus strengthened the country's energy security (US, Poland sign, 2019). Reduced dependence on the RF is also evident with regard to oil imports. As reported by the state-run ORLEN refinery, about 50% of the processed oil does not currently come from the RF. The exporting countries are Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, Angola and Norway. Saudi Arabia alone delivers 400,000 tons of oil per month (Half of crude oil…, 2019). Regarding nuclear energy, Poland is planning the introduction of six nuclear power plants, which should be operating from 2033 to 2043, with mainly Polish actors participating in the project. These nuclear power plants represent a commitment to producing carbon-free energy (energy policy of Poland until 2040).

Hungary's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Trade presented their opinions to Francis R. Fannon, the US Secretary of State and head of the US Bureau of Energy Resources on their meeting in December 2018. They stated Hungary's intention to meet its energy requirements from multiple sources – not for economic reasons, but for national security ones. Former Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Peter Szijjártó released a memo that the country had already taken the necessary measures and asked the US to cooperate with other Central European countries to improve energy supplies to the region (Péter Szijjártó holds…, 2018). The Minister also concluded an agreement with the Russian company Gazprom for gas supplies, even though the RF and Ukraine had not agreed on a contract that would expire at the end of 2019. Hungary takes a proportion of its gas from Austria and relies on future long-term contracts from the south suppliers. He pointed out that Gazprom is working with Bulgaria and Serbia to supply gas through the TurkStream pipeline (Hungary's gas supply…, 2019). Among other initiatives, Hungary either cooperates or negotiates with Slovenia, Croatia and Cyprus on bilateral energy projects.

Hungary imports a large proportion of its consumed oil via the Druzhba pipeline from the RF, and another proportion via the Adria pipeline. Crude oil production will increase in the near future, because new oil deposits have been discovered in the west part of RF. Regarding nuclear power, Hungary plans to put the Paks nuclear power plant into operation. Former Minister Szijjártó highlighted the cooperation between the RF and Hungary, thanks to which the power plant will supply about 80,000 households with energy (Hungarian-Russian relations…, 2018). Currently four nuclear reactors supply the country

and another two are planned for launch in 2025. All fuel is supplied by the RF through the TVEL Fuel Company. In preparation for the launch of two additional reactors, the EU's Euratom Supply Agency (ESA), backed by the European Commission (EC), commented that if the supply of nuclear fuel failed, there would be no available alternative fuel. The dispute has been resolved and a fuel supply contract has been signed for a period of 10 years instead of 20, with the expectation that, in the short term, alternative fuel will become available on the market. Hungary has started cooperating with other Central European Countries in the field of nuclear energy in terms of capacity and infrastructure (WNA, 2019).

Opinions of Analysts' A, B, C during the structured interviews: Regarding energy security, gas imports and the main energy providers were mentioned most frequently by the analysts. The RF holds an important position as a major exporter of gas throughout Europe, but the US is seeking, and in some cases concluding, agreements to export its shale gas and LNG. There is also the possibility of a South Stream pipeline; however, the price of such a pipeline must be competitive with RF gas and warrant the financial investment for the building of the infrastructure. Each country handles this issue independently, according to its main source of supply and choice of energy providers. The Nord Stream 2 project has polarised the international community; however, it does not jeopardise the supply of RF gas to Europe via Ukraine as has been alleged. Germany will not only be the destination of the pipeline, but also one of the main consumers of the gas. In less than 10 years, Germany will need alternative sources of energy, due to the closure of its nuclear and coal-fired power plants. The transmission capacity that will be provided by both the Nord Stream pipelines will not cover Germany's gas consumption; hence, gas will continue to flow from Ukraine.

Again, as with the previous section, it was possible to study the different intensities of efforts to cooperate with the RF or the US and, again, Poland was the most striking country in this respect. Hungary receives gas supplies from several sources, but in the field of nuclear power it primarily deals with the RF. Slovakia is dependent on Russian energy and long-term contracts have been agreed with the RF, but for the time being, this appears to be a stable and profitable arrangement.[6] Czechia is trying to lessen its dependence on the RF, but at least in the field of nuclear power, it is likely to continue buying fuel from the RF. Despite the relatively extensive diversification of resources, there continues to be a perceptibly strong influence of the RF in the Central European region. This influence in the region is also likely to be intensified by Germany's increased demand for Russian gas, due to its energy reform policies: when there is an available, cheap, and easily accessible supply, particularly of gas, the Central European countries will buy it.

6 Another fact that ensures the flow of gas from Ukraine is that the Slovak gas industry invested about 300 million euros in the Ukraine gas field and obtained a licence for this field for 30 years.

Conclusion

In previous sections, we discussed the various thematic areas in relation to the foreign policies of the surveyed countries. The thematic areas were analysed especially in the context of relations between the studied countries and the great powers of the US and the RF. We also paid attention to the opinions of members of the professional community who independently and objectively evaluated these relations and, thus, helped to provide a coherent picture of the relations and supported the achievement of the research goal. Based on the analysis, we concluded that the two great powers are aware of the importance of this region. The US is very active in the region, as confirmed by recent visits by the US secretary of state, Mike Pompeo, to three of the observed countries, as well as individual visits by these countries' prime ministers and the Polish president to the White House. The end of President Obama's term of office heralded US efforts to restore good relations with the Central European region. The US is engaged in both the areas addressed by this study. The military is a top priority, but the US is trying to increase its involvement in the energy sector through sanctions and by exporting LNG. By contrast, the RF is heavily involved in the energy sector, due to its dominant position in the Central European energy market. In most of the observed countries, it is also involved in the development of nuclear energy.

With regard to energy security, the surveyed countries clearly supported the diversification of sources and the reduction of their carbon footprints; the countries are collectively prepared for shortfalls in gas supplies. They welcome US activity in the area regarding gas supply, but it is important to determine who supplies whom, which countries are transit countries, and who the final customers might be. Ultimately, availability and price will be the determining factors of this, but the RF continues to be important as a supplier of both gas and oil. In three of the four surveyed Central European countries, the RF is the main partner for nuclear energy; however, Poland is likely to count on the Western countries, or Central European cooperation, with regard to nuclear energy.

The situation regarding military bases is quite different. All the surveyed countries claimed to be reliable and responsible NATO members. Approaches that confirmed these claims differed in each country and, sometimes, politicians made specific statements or took specific actions. Militarily, Poland is the leading and most active NATO member in the Central European region, followed by Hungary, Slovakia and Czechia. In Slovakia and Czechia, the historical context and long-term negative experiences associated with the presence of troops play an important role in the situation.

The aim of this article was to examine the approaches of the RF and the US and their relations with the surveyed countries (and vice versa), and also to highlight the geopolitical importance of the Central European region. Both great

powers have interests in the region and are affecting all four countries through energy and military 'cooperation', as declared in their official documents. The level of cooperation with the great powers differed in each observed country. It was also influenced by the historical development of individual countries, their current political situations and geopolitical developments. The terms of cooperation can be understood as efforts by both the great powers to gain influence within the selected countries. The US and the RF watch each other's moves in the field of foreign policy very closely and, according to the situation, adapt their foreign policies regarding countries in the region. This conclusion was partly confirmed by the analysts in the section concerning military bases, which also defined the importance of each country in respect of military campaigns. The most important geographical location is Poland, followed by Hungary, Slovakia and Czechia. The countries seem to be aware of this fact and approach the great powers accordingly. Poland has most negative attitude towards the RF and is most engaged in cooperation with the US. According to statements by Hungarian politicians about the two great powers, we assume they are in balance in relation with RF and US. Slovakia and the Czechia are committed to Euro–Atlantic cooperation, but some politicians' statements and actions cast doubt on this commitment. The Central European region is important for both powers, otherwise the US would not engage militarily in Poland and propose defence cooperation agreements with other countries in the region. In addition, the US is making an effort to challenge the energy dominance of the RF in the region, by exporting LNG to Poland and imposing sanctions on the countries involved in the Nord Stream 2 project.

This article stated that we did not want to confirm or refute the mentioned geopolitical theory. The study's conclusions highlighted that control of the largest possible area is very important. This was also confirmed by the recent activities[7] of both US and RF leaders and we concluded that the theory applied strict realism to international relations, with actors trying to control and influence as much territory as possible. In our case, we considered the territory (area) of Central Europe – which play, and will continue to play, an important role in either of the two great powers' overall dominance, since they use resources in their efforts to eliminate or partially restrict each other.

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In the text, refer to the author(s) name(s) (without initials, unless there are two authors with the same name) and year of publication. Unpublished data and personal communications (interviews etc.) should include initials and year. Publications which have not yet appeared are given a probable year of publication and should be checked at the proofing stage on an author query sheet. For example:

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BOOKS:

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Diehl, Paul F. (1994): *International Peacekeeping. With a new epilogue on Somalia, Bosnia, and Cambodia,* The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Two or more authors:

Degnbol-Martinussen, John – Engberg-Pedersen, Poul (1999): *Aid. Understanding International Development Cooperation,* Zed Books, Mellemfolkelight Samvirke, Danish Association for International Cooperation, Copenhagen.

EDITED VOLUMES:

Rittberger, Volker, ed. (1993): *Regime Theory and International Relations*, Clarendon Press.

CHAPTERS FROM MONOGRAPHS:

George, Alexander L. (2004): Coercive Diplomacy, in Art, Robert J. – Waltz, Kenneth N., eds., *The Use of Force. Military Power and International Politics.* Sixth Edition, 70–76, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.

JOURNAL ARTICLES:

Printed journals:

Haas, Ernst B. (1961): International Integration. The European and the Universal Process. *International Organization* 15 (4): 5–54.

Online editions of journals:

Judt, Tony (2002c): Its Own Worst enemy, *The New York Review of Books*: available at http://www.nybooks.com/articles/15632 (15 August 2002).

NEWSPAPER ARTICLES:

Printed editions:

Excerpts From the Pentagon's Plan: Prevent the Re-Emergence of a New Rival (1992) *The New York Times* (9 March).

Online editions:

Cooper, Robert (2002): Why We Still Need Empires, *The Guardian Unlimited* (7 April): available at http://www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,4388915,00.html (2 November 2003).

RESEARCH REPORTS AND PAPERS FROM CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS:

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