Kremlin Influence in Visegrad Countries and Romania: 
Overview of the Threat, Existing Countermeasures, and Recommended Next Steps

Kremlin Watch is a strategic program which aims to expose and confront instruments of Russian influence and disinformation operations focused against Western democracies.
About This Memo:

This memo provides a comprehensive overview of Russian influence activities, prevailing countermeasures, and recommended next steps for external allied assessments. Portions of its content are open source, deriving from a Kremlin Watch Report published in May 2017. Responsibility for the following assessment rests solely with the Kremlin Watch Program of the European Values Think-Tank.

Recommended Next Steps

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups of EU28 countries&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Groups E, F and D</th>
<th>Groups C and B</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Country categorisation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Countries where political establishment is more or less reluctant to this threat</td>
<td>States which begin to address this threat, with several policy initiatives, but no rock solid consensus among relevant majority of political establishment</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>What is mainly needed</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>PRIORITY STEP 1: Strong support of investigative journalism and fact-checking &amp; myth-busting activities</td>
<td>PRIORITY STEP 4: Support for non-governmental advocacy activities in order to push for a clear political consensus on this issue.</td>
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<td>STEP 2: Support for data collection and specialized polling in order to prove seriousness of this threat</td>
<td>STEP 5: Support for development of specific policy proposals &amp; assessments of existing policy initiatives implemented in other countries in order to set up national strategies</td>
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<td>STEP 3: Support dedicated to non-governmental advocacy activities to put this issue on the public agenda</td>
<td>STEP 6: Support for comparable data gathering and specialized polling in order to tailor policy measures</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Target countries</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>Romania</td>
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<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Bulgaria)</td>
<td>Poland</td>
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# Specification Of Suggested Steps

<table>
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<tr>
<th>STEP</th>
<th>STEP OBJECTIVES</th>
<th>EXAMPLES</th>
<th>PRACTICAL SUGGESTION FOR DONORS</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| PRIORITY STEP 1: Strong support of investigative journalism and fact-checking & myth-busting activities | • To boost national and international investigative journalists and projects which seek to expose background of disinformation outlets  
• To boost national and international fact-checking organisations which investigate content of disinformation stories | Respekt (CZ)  
Vsquar.org  
Atlatszo.hu  
Demagog (CZ + SVK) | SUGGESTION 1: Provide short-mid term grants to individual journalists and investigative groups on specific topics or periods of time (such as electoral campaigns in targeted countries)  
SUGGESTION 2: Provide long-term grants for in-house fact-checkers in major publishing houses in selected vulnerable countries  
SUGGESTION 3: Provide long-term grants to fact-checking organisations |
| STEP 2 & STEP 6: Support for data collection and specialized polling in order to prove seriousness of this threat & tailoring the policy responses | • Support projects which will bring credible data on structure and intensity of hostile disinformation campaigns  
• Support research on how far Kremlin-targeted narratives have penetrated into targeted society | GLOBSEC Trends Report,  
Vulnerability study by Latvian Defence Forces Academy  
Comprehensive outlook of Czech disinformation outlets done by European Values Think-Tank - www.dezinformatori.cz,  
Big data study by Semantic Visions on how Kremlin domestic propaganda portrays European leaders | SUGGESTION 4: Contract selected group of proven think-tankers which have experience with production of empirical studies in this field and have them prepare methodological handbook for practical research in this field, including definitions, criteria and methods  
SUGGESTION 5: Based on this handbook, create a granting scheme for support of empirical research projects in selected countries  
SUGGESTION 6: Directly subcontract development of vulnerability studies (based on model Vulnerability study by Latvian Defence Forces Academy) in countries in categories “B” and “C”.  
SUGGESTION 7: Set up an annual specialized polling program which would measure success of Kremlin narratives and messages in selected countries |
**STEP 3 & PRIORITY STEP 4: Support dedicated to non-governmental advocacy activities to put this issue on the public agenda, or to create political consensus on this topic.**

- Support activities which can push this issue onto public and political agenda by showing the urgency and complexity of this threat.
- Enhance activity where expert knowledge can be used for advocating towards selected policy-makers on an international level.

The Slovak project [www.Konspiratori.sk](http://www.Konspiratori.sk) which made 1400 Slovak companies to take down their advertisement from disinformation outlets.

Slovak Anti-Propaganda Forum.

**Work of Kremlin Watch Program at European Values Think-Tank (up to 600 media mentions a year), including STRATCOM SUMMIT.**

**SUGGESTION 8:** Set up granting scheme for advocacy-oriented projects in targeted countries (mainly in categories “B” and “C”).

**SUGGESTION 9:** Find regular platform for in-depth exchange of best practices among leading organisations in advocacy field. For example, specialized restricted sessions can be held at big leagues conferences like GLOBSEC, MSC, and WSF, or at specialized events like STRATCOM SUMMIT.

**SUGGESTION 10:** Contract small specialized team of proven think-tankers who will constantly brief key European and U. S. policy-makers at parliamentary and executive level. Enhance “tour de capitals” advocacy initiative.

**STEP 5 Support development of specific policy proposals & assessments of existing policy initiatives**

- Boost solid policy assessment policy development based on shared knowledge & experience in concerned countries which can be used and implemented into reality in other states.

Very limited work has yet been done in this field. At least two complex policy papers stand out:

- [CEPA: Winning Information War](http://cepa.instituteforadvancedstudies.org)
- [Full-Scale Democratic Response to Hostile Disinformation: A 50-measure policy toolbox](http://www.evetank.org)

**SUGGESTION 11:** Fund group of proven think-tankers to work for 12 months with several study trips in order to present a public and non-public assessments of already implemented policies with suggestion which steps to take and which to avoid.

**SUGGESTION 12:** Create community & capacity-building hub which will deliver regular trainings for the expert community, but mainly for the non-specialists (see proposal for “Training Centre” by the European Values Think-Tank).

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3 Based on experience of on-going activities of this kind in European cities, there are four reasonable training modules identified:

1) Basic Course for General Security-related State Officials: What is important to know on disinformation operations
2) Advanced Workshop for STRATCOM-related state officials: Discussing implemented practices and policies
3) Basic Course for Journalists: What is important to know on disinformation operations and good practices investigative journalism
4) Advanced Workshop for Activists and Experts: Discussing good practices and methods of researching & countering disinformation
Where do the V4 Countries Stand in Context of the EU28 in Their Responses to Russian Threat?4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>General position</th>
<th>Countries</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. The principled defenders</td>
<td>Have long maintained concerns about Russian foreign policy and are currently at the forefront of the European response to the Kremlin’s aggression</td>
<td>Denmark, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, United Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. The awakened</td>
<td>Significantly adapted their national perspectives and policies after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine</td>
<td>The Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, The Netherlands, Sweden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. The under-radar supporters</td>
<td>Have internal concerns about Russia but due to complicated historical relations and local contexts, typically avoid vocal criticism of Russian aggression</td>
<td>Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. No relations with Russia</td>
<td>Geographically distant from Russia and have little to no interest in the issue</td>
<td>Ireland, Malta, Portugal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Avoiding the issue</td>
<td>Due to historical, energy-related and/or economically favourable relations with Russia, do not feel threatened nor acknowledge the threat, except condemning Russian aggression against Ukraine</td>
<td>Austria, Belgium, France, Luxembourg, Slovenia, Spain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. The Kremlin’s fair-weather friends</td>
<td>Have had negative historical experiences with Russia, but use relations with Moscow either for domestic political or economic purposes or as leverage against the EU</td>
<td>Hungary, Slovakia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. The Kremlin collaborators</td>
<td>Do not feel threatened by Russia and advocate for better relations, often supporting the Kremlin’s foreign policy objectives despite any atrocities (e.g., halting sanctions on grounds of appeasement or alleged business ties)</td>
<td>Cyprus, Greece, Italy</td>
</tr>
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4 This classification derives from the analysis presented in the ‘Overview of Countermeasures’ (see ft. 1 above).
According to 2017 GLOBSEC Central European Vulnerability Index:

- **Poland** is the only country of the five profiled that has **consistently held concerned views of Russia’s foreign policy** and is **at the forefront of European efforts** to respond to Moscow’s aggression.

- **The Czech Republic** has significantly **shifted its strategy** over the last two years to accommodate growing concerns about Russian aggression in Europe.

- **Romania** is a step behind the Czech Republic, understanding the gravity and implications of the Russian threat but **not yet having taken pragmatic steps to develop a viable counterstrategy**.

- **Hungary** and **Slovakia** are the two countries **weakest in their response to Russia**, using relations with Moscow to their advantage in domestic politics and, especially in the case of Hungary, to exert leverage over Brussels.

**Common Themes:**

- Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014 was a major wake-up call for three of the countries: **Poland, the Czech Republic, and Romania. These countries have consequently prioritised their national defence**: increasing national military spending, modernising their military, investing in the defence industry, and cooperating more actively with NATO.

  - **Hungary and Slovakia** are less concerned about the **Russian military threat** vis-à-vis their own countries; since they are interested in preserving good relations with Moscow, they do not engage in defence-related activities that could been seen as a provocation by the Kremlin.

  - The US missile defence shield has long been a point of contention in the region, leading to threats and bullying from Moscow. There is opposition to it within the countries interested in appeasing Putin (Hungary, Slovakia).

  - Assistance efforts should focus on supporting domestic military and defence efforts in a variety of ways, e.g., investment, military training, and sharing know-how. It is also crucial to continue building confidence that NATO supports these countries’ efforts to build a more resilient defence infrastructure, even where (or particularly where) there is Russian opposition.

- **Energy dependence on Russia** is a recurring theme amongst the countries surveyed; only Hungary and Romania are less constrained in this respect due to domestic stores.

  - Russia uses ‘energy bullying’ to exert influence wherever possible; this is a **key part of Moscow’s leverage in the region**.
With the exception of Hungary, which engages in close 'energy diplomacy' with Russia (as a transit country, Hungary even cut off supplies to Ukraine on Russian orders in 2014), all the other countries prioritize the diversification of energy supplies to reduce dependence on Russia.

Assistance efforts should focus on how Moscow uses energy bullying to force compliance and how it courts politicians and political insiders to buy influence.

- **Trade and business relations are a crucial feature** of all five countries’ relations with Russia and a major point of vulnerability with respect to its influence efforts; Russia is a key trading partner and pursues investment in these countries as a means of influence and penetration.

  - In recent years, there has been some decline in trade due to sanctions and the devaluation of the Russian rouble; however, the problems of behind-the-scenes financing, business and industry investment, and attempted influence over politics via these ties remain a security hazard.

  - Russia also uses retaliatory sanctions against these countries in an effort to exert influence over their policy (e.g., the 2014 Polish produce ban).

  - Assistance efforts should focus, first, on exposing how Moscow cultivates business and industry ties in each country in order to increase its political influence, and second, on developing practical strategies to inoculate each country from the various forms of Russian economic and financial pressure.

- **StratCom is a priority for two countries: Poland and the Czech Republic.** Both countries are actively involved at the EU level to counter information influence.

  - Romania is committed these activities in principle, but so far lacks the expertise and policy experience to be practically effective on the issue.

  - Neither Hungary nor Slovakia actively participate in efforts to counter information influence at the European level.

  - Of the five countries, Romania is most receptive to and in need of assistance with respect to StratCom development. There is less political will and interest in this issue in Hungary and Slovakia.

- **Russian intelligence activities are prominent throughout the region,** in many cases the most active foreign agents in operation. Many of these spies operate under the diplomatic cover of Russian embassies.

  - The Polish, Czech, and Romanian intelligence services are highly involved in seeking to counter Russian intelligence activities on their soil. The Hungarian and Slovak intelligence
services largely ignore the issue (two key Hungarian agencies are even suspected of intimidating Hungarian journalists)

- An enduring problem in the region is the legacy of Soviet intelligence; the KGB was long involved with the national intelligence services of these countries, and Russian intelligence benefits from this history of contact. The Russian GRU and FSB are also known for undertaking efforts to recruit EU spies through ‘martial arts clubs’.

- Assistance efforts should therefore focus on strengthening immunity to this threat by cooperation with and training by counterpart agencies in Western Europe and the ‘A’ Category countries.

- Russian links to far-right parties and groups, as well as some mainstream politicians, are a concern throughout the region. For example, the Hungarian far-right has particularly close ties to Russia through the Jobbik party, while the Czech President, Miloš Zeman, is a popular Putin apologist and sympathiser within the Czech Republic.

- Exposing these connections and networks of activity is a priority; assistance should focus on providing support to domestic journalists and independent media who can incisively investigate these issues.

- Especially in Romania, Hungary, and Slovakia (to the extent that there is domestic interest), assistance efforts should focus on building up national defence strategies and specific policies to counter more targeted threats, such as information manipulation and cyberattacks.

- Assistance through all stages, based on lessons learnt from successful initiatives in Poland, the Czech Republic, and other countries in the ‘A’ Category, should be undertaken from development to implementation.

- It would be highly beneficial to European counter-efforts if, given its experience and expertise, Poland adopted a leadership position in terms of spearheading and coordinating deterrence and mitigation initiatives within Europe. Thus far, there has been insufficient political will in Warsaw for such initiative.
Czech Republic

Summary:

The Czech Republic is a member of the EU and was one of the first former Eastern Bloc countries to join NATO. Czech stance on Russia remains somewhat ambivalent, although outgoing government (2014-2017) is fully aware of the threat Russia poses. The country’s energy sphere remains highly dependent on Russian imports; Russia is also its largest non-EU trading partner. The presence of Russian intelligence in the Czech Republic is also significant, and the Czech intelligence services are appropriately cognizant of the issue. Overall, the Czech Republic remains committed to NATO; its close geographic proximity to Russia and historical experience with the Soviet Union translates to caution regarding the Kremlin’s foreign policy aspirations, particularly following the Russia’s aggression against Ukraine.

I. Relationship Parameters

Historical Context:

Due to the Soviet-era legacy, the Czech public has long been sensitive to Russian (or indeed other foreign) operations within the country. Russian attempts to rewrite or falsify history about the 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia are particularly ill-received by Czechs. For example, the documentary *Warsaw Pact: Declassified Pages*, which aired on Russian state television in 2015 and characterised the invasion as a defensive move against NATO aggression, deeply angered Czechs and Slovaks alike. More recently, a controversial memorial in Prague cemetery that was built by a group of Russian military veterans to honour Russia’s “fallen soldiers, internationalists, and peacemakers” was removed following public backlash.

At the same time, however, a sizeable contingent of the population holds pro-Russian attitudes. Despite problematic historical associations, the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM) is currently the third-most popular party in the Czech Republic and may conceivably return to power in coalition with the Social Democrats after the next parliamentary elections.

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Trade and Investment:

Russia is the largest non-EU market for Czech exports and an important investor in the country. According to the Czech Export Strategy, it is among twelve priority countries. The Czech Republic is also a common destination for Russian tourists. Recently, the economic exchange between the two countries has been declining due to the devaluation of rouble, Russia’s economic recession, and economic sanctions. Within the Czech government, the Ministry for Industry and Trade in particular advocates strengthening economic ties with Russia. However, the dark side of this relationship is the penetration of Russian capital with links to the grey market into the Czech economy and the growth of Russian political influence in the Czech Republic.

Energy Relations:

Considering that approximately 73% of Czech gas imports and 69% of oil imports come from Russia, energy dependence is a key security issue for the Czech Republic. Following a Russian cutback of oil supplies in 2008 over the prospective installation of a US missile defence shield, the Czech Republic negotiated increased supply terms via the Western European TAL pipeline in case of future problems with the Druzhba pipeline. Gazprom’s extant long-term contract with RWE Transgas runs through 2035.

The Czech Republic was active in the settlement of the Russia-Ukraine gas transit-fees dispute in 2009. This episode damaged Russia’s reputation as a reliable energy supplier. Consequently, during its presidency of the EU Council in 2009, the Czech Republic strongly advocated projects aimed at reducing the negative impacts of energy dependence on Russia, such as the so-called South corridor or the Third Energy Package. Over the last several years, Gazprom has continued its efforts to control energy transport, storage, and trade in the central and eastern European region. It has begun supplying Czech customers with gas through a subsidiary company, Vemex, and together with its Czech partner KKCG has increased the capacity of gas storage. The Czech energy sector is also a frequent target for Russian espionage in the country.

With respect to nuclear energy dependence on Russia, TVEL (a subsidiary of the Russian nuclear energy giant Rosatom) will be an exclusive supplier of fuel for the Temelin nuclear plant until 2020.

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11 Černoch et al. (2012), pp. 37.
12 See: <www.gazpromexport.ru/en/partners/czech/>
Military Relations:

The Czech Republic has traditionally sought to avoid exacerbating its already tense relations with Russia. In light of the Ukraine crisis, the Czech Republic has become more willing to increase military cooperation with its NATO allies.14 82% of Czechs approved of the NATO convoy (Operation Dragoon Ride) drive through the country.15

Dispute over the US Missile Shield:

In 2007, after the Czech government entered into negotiations with the US on deploying a radar system for a US missile defence shield, Russia threatened to place short-range nuclear missiles on its borders with NATO, pointing at the Czech Republic and Poland.16 Russian President Vladimir Putin claimed that the radar deployment would lead to “an inevitable arms race” and threatened to withdraw from the Nuclear Forces Treaty of 1987 if the deal went through.17 The day after the Czech Republic signed the agreement authorising the radar system, Russia curtailed oil imports to the country by 50% via the Druzhba pipeline, requiring delivery substitutions via the TAL/IKL pipeline.18 Ultimately, the plans to install the radar system were dropped, which Russia held to be a major diplomatic victory. The Czech public reaction to the outcome was mixed.19

View of Russia:

Neither the Czech political elite nor the public have reached consensus vis-à-vis the country’s relationship with Russia. The Czech international orientation is broadly transatlantic, but the Czech government has no definitive stance about whether Russia is a threat to national security or rather an important partner with whom cooperation should be deepened. On the one hand, President Miloš Zeman is vocally pro-Russian, to the contrary of the Czech government, which advocates the positions of NATO and the EU.20 According to the latest Eurobarometer, 39% of Czechs had a positive view of Russia.

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14 “Is the Czech Republic Shifting Toward the West?” Stratfor. 19 March 2015. <www.stratfor.com/analysis/czech-republic-shifting-toward-west>
The Pro-Russian President:

In the aftermath of Russia’s annexation of Crimea, Miloš Zeman publicly claimed that no Russian troops were present in Ukraine and endorsed the Kremlin line that Kiev had been taken over by fascists. He has repeatedly stated that the Czech Republic should call for a withdrawal of EU sanctions against Russia, specifically on grounds that they have been damaging to Czech farmers and industry. Zeman has close ties to the Russian company Lukoil, together with former Czech President Václav Klaus. Both men are friendly with Vladimir Yakunin, who is close to Vladimir Putin.

Counterintelligence Activities:

Russian spies are thought to be amongst the most active foreign agents operating on Czech soil. According to the Czech counterintelligence agency BIS, the majority operate under the diplomatic cover of Russia’s overstuffed embassy in Prague, which counts almost 140 employees. According to some estimates, two thirds of this number conceivably may be spies. In its 2015 annual report, BIS warned about these agents’ subversive activities, which involve operations in the context of information warfare as well as political, scientific-technical, and economic espionage. On a handful of occasions, some spies have been expelled from the country, but the Czech government did not publicly escalate the conflict due to concerns about possible retaliation from Moscow. The Russian secret services also seek to collaborate with the Russian expatriate community within the Czech Republic. Overall, the Russian Federation (alongside China) is considered to be the biggest threat in a state-run or state-supported cyber espionage.
EU Level Activities:

Normative Issues:

The Czech Republic is active in raising democracy and human rights issues at the EU level and supports a value-based approach on Russia, but it is rather passive in shaping EU policy on Russia. Activism is visible only when interests are at stake.

Eastern Partnership:

The Eastern Partnership was launched at the Prague Summit in 2009. The Czech Republic shows support for EU action in the region, including the Minsk peace process and related economic sanctions, but does not take an active role in shaping a common pan-European position.

StratCom:

The Czech Republic has a seconded national expert working at the EEAS East STRATCOM Team, and also had a national expert on the NATO STRATCOM COE during late 2016.

II. Expert Assessments

A Power Audit of EU-Russia Relations (2007):29

The Czech Republic is characterised as part of the group of ‘frosty pragmatists’, prioritising its business interests while simultaneously emphasising concerns about democratization and human rights issues. For example, in 2006, the Czech Republic brought together several European countries to support a potential peace mission in Moldova that was ultimately not even discussed at the EU level. In general, the Czech Republic also takes a stand whenever Russia violates its commercial interests or diplomatic norms.

National Perspectives on Russia (2013):30

The Czech Republic follows a pragmatic ‘business as usual’ approach. Fear of Russia in the country is vastly overshadowed by the countries’ bilateral economic and energy relations. The government is sensitive to attempts by Russian companies to buy strategic Czech firms such as Czech Airlines or Transgas.

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The Czech Republic directly supports the eastern dimension of the EU’s external relations program and prioritises its efforts on post-Soviet countries such as Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, and Belarus. There is a degree of a ‘Russia-first’ principle regarding support for their EU and NATO aspirations.

Anti-Russia/Russia-cautious political parties: The Civic Democratic Party (ODS).

Pro-Russia political parties: The Czech Social Democratic Party (CSSD).

European Foreign Policy Scorecards (2013-2016):\(^{31}\)

The Czech Republic is a leader in support for a strong declaration at the Riga Eastern Partnership summit and for ratifying and implementing Association Agreements with Georgia and Moldova (2016), supporting democratic reforms in EaP countries through bilateral assistance, promoting political freedom in Russia (2015), and pushing visa liberalization with Russia, Ukraine, and Moldova (2013).

III. Policy Documents

The Czech Republic’s Defence Strategy (2017):\(^{32}\)

The Czech Defence Strategy establishes that the security situation in Europe deteriorated considerably after 2012. The Russian Federation openly pursues its power ambitions in Eastern Europe, often with military force. Moscow furthermore does not hesitate to flout international legal norms, including violating the territorial integrity of neighbouring countries. It uses a set of hybrid campaign tools against NATO and EU member states, including targeted disinformation activities and cyber attacks.

Concept of the Czech Republic’s Foreign Policy (2015):\(^{33}\)

This document maintains that Russia seeks to destabilise the European security architecture, but as a permanent member of the UN, remains a significant player in addressing numerous international issues and therefore requires international cooperation. Czech policy towards Russia should accordingly depend on Moscow’s respect for international law and for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of its neighbours. Russia is considered to be a potentially important political and economic partner for the Czech Republic, as well as for the EU at large. In addition, the Czech Republic will seek to establish cultural cooperation and contacts with Russian civil society.

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\(^{31}\) See: <www.ecfr.eu/scorecard>


Security Strategy of the Czech Republic (2015): This document does not explicitly mention Russia, but makes indirect references to the threat it poses to Czech security. Declining security and stability in Europe’s flank regions and eastern neighbourhood are seen as a direct potential threat to NATO and/or the EU. This threat may be of conventional military nature or take the form of hybrid warfare. References are made to the attempts of some states (read: Russia) to carve out spheres of influence or achieve a revision of the existing international order through military as well as non-military means (e.g., disinformation intelligence operations, unmarked military personnel, etc.).

Annual Report of the Security Information Service (2015): As in previous years, Russian intelligence services have been the most active foreign intelligence services in the Czech Republic. Many Russian intelligence officers are active under the diplomatic cover of the Russian Embassy in Prague. Russian intelligence activities focus on the information war surrounding the conflicts in Ukraine and Syria and on political, scientific, technical, and economic espionage. Information operations are primarily aimed at weakening the Czech media, influencing perceptions, confusing the audience, promoting tensions, disrupting the transatlantic alliance, and isolating Ukraine. Russia and China pose the most serious threat to the Czech Republic as far as state-led or state-sponsored cyber-espionage campaigns are concerned. Russia is also known for offering information support to right-wing extremists, and for violating tax, regulatory and contract provisions by companies partly owned or directly controlled by the Russian state or affiliated officials.

Speeches by the Czech Foreign Minister (2015-2017):

According to Czech Foreign Minister Lubomír Zaorálek, Russian aggression and the Kremlin’s illegal annexation of Crimea are threatening Ukraine’s territorial integrity, sovereignty and stability. Accordingly, the Czech Republic supports reforms and the implementation of a visa free regime for Ukraine. Anti-Russia sanctions are effective.

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37 “FM Zaorálek: We Don’t Want War with Russia”. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic. 5 January 2015. [www.mzv.cz/jnp/cz/o_ministerstvu/archivy/clanky_a_projevy_ministru/clanky_a_projevy_ministra_zaoralka_2015/valku_s_ruskem_nechceme.html]
Hungary

Summary:

Like Poland and the Czech Republic, Hungary is a member of the EU and was one of the first former Eastern Bloc countries to join NATO. Although Hungarians for the most part have a hostile attitude towards Russia, not least due to two countries’ fraught past during the Communist era, the current government of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán uses positive relations with Russia as leverage in Hungary’s relations with Brussels. Hungarian politics are dominated by right-wing and far-right elements, which Russia actively supports. With respect to energy, Hungary does not fear dependence on Russia, but has used its transit status to cut off natural gas supplies to Ukraine (most notably in 2014). Russia furthermore has strong financial ties within Hungary. Despite these factors, however, Hungary remains dedicated to NATO in principle. Although its stance towards the EU is notably negative, Hungary has not vigorously opposed its Russia sanctions.

I. Relationship Parameters

Historical Context:

Russia’s image in Hungary has traditionally been unfavourable due to the communist past and memories of Soviet military occupation. Following attempted liberalization in the 1950s, Hungary was invaded in a joint military operation by Warsaw Pact troops. Thereafter, relations between the two countries were highly strained until the breakup of the Soviet Union. For twenty years following regime change, Hungarian left-wing parties maintained some contacts with Russia, but overall diplomatic relations were chiefly limited to trade. Every government was nonetheless forced to maintain a working relationship with the Kremlin due to Hungary’s energy dependence on Russian imports. Since 2010, there has been a considerable deepening of political ties between Hungary and Russia, known as the policy of “Eastern Opening” during the second Orbán cabinet. Current rapprochement between the two countries is justified on grounds of “recapturing eastern markets”.

38 “‘You were faster,’ Gyurcsány told Putin”. Origo. 28 February 2008. <www.origo.hu/ltthon/20080228-gyurcsany-a-deli-aramlat-megelozte-a-nabuccot.html>

Trade and Investment:

Russia is Hungary’s third largest importer and 13th largest trading partner.\(^{40}\) Hungary’s exports to Russia began to decrease in 2011, a trend that has been accelerated by EU sanctions and the nosedive of the Russian rouble, which reportedly decreased in value by more than 40 percent in 2015.\(^{41}\) However, as an chief buyer of Hungarian state bonds, Russia practically finances Hungarian state debt, giving it leverage over the government.\(^{42}\)

Energy Relations:

Hungary engages in intensive ‘gas diplomacy’ due to significant energy dependence on Russia. Approximately 57% of its gas and 89% of its oil demand is supplied by Russian imports. However, Hungary does not fear a sudden cut off of supplies because it enjoys the largest underground gas storage infrastructure in the region\(^{43}\) and moreover maintains a positive strategic partnership with Russia. To enhance its relations with Hungary, Russia offers discounts on oil and gas deliveries. The long-term gas procurement agreement with Gazprom currently guarantees supplies until 2019. Hungary agreed to build the South Stream pipeline in cooperation with Russia and Gazprom despite opposition from the European Commission. Hungary currently backs Nord Stream II, despite the prospect of economic disadvantage due to transit fee losses.

Hungary also has nuclear energy dependence on Russia.\(^{44}\) A nuclear deal on the expansion of Paks Nuclear Power Plant by Rosatom was concluded in 2014 without holding a tender. It led to infringement proceedings by the European Commission for failing to comply with EU public procurement, but after a lengthy probe, the Commission approved the project.\(^{45}\) This creates enormous economic interest for both sides.

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**Energy Blackmail:**

After a meeting in Budapest between Prime Minister Orbán and Alexei Miller, the head of Gazprom, in 2014, Hungary unexpectedly stopped sending gas supplies to Ukraine. This occurred at a time of growing tensions in eastern Ukraine and while Russia-Ukraine-EU gas talks were underway in Berlin. “Hungary cannot get into a situation in which, due to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, it cannot access its required supply of energy,” Mr. Orbán said in a statement. This claim followed threats from Moscow that it could cut off countries that had been re-exporting gas to Ukraine to circumvent Russian energy sanctions.46

**View of Russia:**

Russia is generally not seen as a threat by Hungarian political elites, and relations with Moscow are exploited for domestic purposes and to serve as leverage vis-à-vis the EU. Policy towards Russia is interest-based; Hungary does not have a conceptual approach to Russia that would provide a ground for a clear foreign policy programme. However, lately the approach has become more value-laden, seeing as Hungary adheres to the Kremlin’s emphasis on ‘conservativism’ and autocratic methods of power. Pragmatism is used to mask the shared value-set. Although elements of civil society are resistant to attempted Russian influence, they are largely constrained in their efforts. Hungarian public opinion towards Russia is mostly hostile and support remains for NATO membership, not least due to Hungary’s troubled past during the communist era. According to the latest Eurobarometer, 37% of Hungarians had a positive view of Russia.

**Putin’s Man:**

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán was once the most fervently anti-Russian politician in the post-1989 Eastern bloc. Nowadays, however, he is known as ‘Putin’s man’ for his open admiration of Putin’s leadership strength. After Russia’s annexation of Crimea, Orbán declared his support for Ukraine’s territorial integrity, but at the same time accused Kyiv of discriminating against ethnic minorities (namely the Hungarian minority in Zakarpattia Oblast) and claimed that the new government was not democratic. Accordingly, Orbán has sought to weaken European sanctions. During his tenure, Russia has gained greater influence over Hungarian politics.47

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<www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_hungary_in_the_grip_of_a_bear_hug_7019>
The Far-Right:

The Kremlin-friendly stance of the Hungarian far-right is due in large part to the Jobbik party, which initiated the 'Eastern Opening' after Béla Kovács entered the party in 2005 and steered it towards Moscow. Jobbik is the country's largest opposition force and the most vocal proponent of the Kremlin within Hungary. The party reportedly receives Russian financial support. MEP Béla Kovacs is considered to be a Russian lobbyist in Brussels, where he allegedly spied on EU institutions on behalf of Moscow. In addition, he was invited by Russia to monitor the Crimean independence referendum in 2014.48

Counterintelligence Activities:

The Hungarian counterintelligence services are not especially active when it comes to Russia. Indeed, members of the two key agencies, the Constitution Protection Office and the Information Office, are sometimes suspected of influencing or even threatening Hungarian journalists.49

EU Level Activities:

Eastern Partnership:

Hungary is not especially enthusiastic or proactive in this domain, focusing predominantly on Moldova and the partly Hungarian-populated Transcarpathian region in Ukraine.50 Hungary pushes for closer energy cooperation with Azerbaijan, and therefore ignores the human rights problems in the country.51 Above all, Hungary does not wish to alienate Moscow because of advocacy on part of the eastern neighbourhood.52

StratCom:

Hungary considers units like the EEAS East STRATCOM Task Force or the NATO STRATCOM COE to be relatively important, but thinks they have limited influence. Hungary has no experts at any of them.

51 See: <www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR73_SCORECARD_2013_AW.pdf>
II. Expert Assessments

A Power Audit of EU-Russia Relations (2007): Hungary is characterised as maintaining a policy of friendly pragmatism vis-à-vis Russia, typically placing business interests above political goals. Overall, Hungary supports EU’s role in the eastern neighbourhood.

National Perspectives on Russia (2013): Hungary is seen to hold a pragmatic, ‘business as usual’ approach vis-à-vis Russia, while simultaneously supporting the eastern dimension of the EU’s external relations. Prioritized countries include Ukraine and Moldova. A point of discord is support for the EU and NATO aspirations of certain EaP countries.

Anti-Russia/Russia-cautious political parties: Fidesz

Pro-Russia political parties: Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP)

EU-28 Watch (2015): The domestic party landscape in Hungary is broadly pro-Russian. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has turned the leading political party, Fidesz, into a vocal defender of Russia’s action in Ukraine. The second strongest right-wing party, Jobbik, pursues even closer engagement with Moscow. Meanwhile, public surveys indicate rather balanced views, including a more sceptical stance toward Russia. Overall, Hungarian foreign policy is determined by utilitarian considerations of economic ties with Russia. At the same time, Hungary supports a strengthened NATO presence to counter a potential threat from Russia. Hungarian defence and special forces have also started to pay closer attention to Russian hybrid warfare.

European Foreign Policy Scorecards (2014-2015): While Hungary was sceptical of the EU’s Russia sanctions, it eventually subscribed to the common approach (2015). Hungary is also a leader in relations with Russia regarding the EaP, supporting the European Commission in resisting Russian pressure on the EaP countries and promoting visa liberalization with Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine. However, Hungary does not advocate the diversification of gas supply routes to Europe (2015, 2014).

View from the Capitals (2016): While the Fidesz government opposes the automatic extension of sanctions against Russia, it would not veto this decision at the EU level. The government estimates that the sanctions have already resulted in lost export opportunities worth up to 4.5 billion EUR. Orbán has advanced his ‘Eastern Opening’ vis-à-vis Russia and bilateral meetings between the two countries’ political representations are now regular.

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56 See: <www.ecfr.eu/scorecard>

III. Policy Documents

Speeches by the Hungarian Foreign Minister (2016):\(^{58}\)

The Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Péter Szijjártó, has said that Russia is a priority partner for Hungary economically, specifically in terms of trade and energy. The Minister also expressed his dismay about the extension of sanctions against Russia, saying that “Hungary is of the opinion that this decision was made in an incorrect and anti-democratic manner, as the Member States should have discussed the matter at the highest possible level.” With respect to energy issues, he said that the Paks 2 project is the “single most important project” in context of Hungary’s energy security. He also emphasised that the long-term gas procurement agreement between Russia and Hungary has been altered, providing for the drawdown of 25 billion cubic metres of gas, as a result of which Hungary’s gas supply is guaranteed to the end of 2019. The pricing mechanism was shifted in Hungary’s favour, and the parties also decided on the purchase by Hungary of an additional 600 cubic metres over and above the contracted quantity.

National Security Strategy (2012):\(^{59}\)

Hungary presently enjoys an unprecedented degree of security thanks to Euro-Atlantic integration. However, military force may still play a primary role in a regional conflict in Europe and its neighbourhood. Therefore, the stability of Hungary’s eastern and southern neighbourhood and the spread of democratic values are of paramount importance for national security. Hungary pursues an active foreign policy and is highly interested in the EU and NATO continuing to pay eminent attention to these regions, offering membership, or at least the closest possible partnership. Hungarian communities living outside the borders of Hungary have a particularly important place in the country’s security policy.


Poland

Summary:

Poland is a member of the EU and, like the Czech Republic, was one of the first former Eastern Bloc countries to join NATO. Poland is notable for its high economic growth, strong military, and resolute favour of common EU policies. Poland’s already chilly relations with Moscow in the aftermath of Lech Kaczyński’s death in Smolensk have deteriorated further since Russia’s annexation of Crimea. Due to painful historical lessons, Poland is aware that international treaties alone cannot protect the country, leading to its prioritization of military might. Indeed, Poland commenced a significant military build-up following events in Ukraine. However, though long suspicious of Russia, Poland also has complex history with Ukraine that occasionally leads to tensions. Poland has demonstrated full support for sanctions against Russia, and has urged both parties to the conflict in Ukraine to respect the Minsk agreements. In addition, Poland advocates energy diversification away from Russian natural gas imports in favour of alternative import sources, primarily from Denmark and Norway.

I. Relationship Parameters

Historical context:

Extensive historical grievances continue to prevent the normalisation of Poland’s relations with Russia and generate distrust on multiple levels, from politics to economic ties. In particular, the crimes committed against Poles by the Soviets during WWII – e.g., the Soviet invasion of Poland in 1939, the Katyn Massacre in 1940 (which many Poles consider genocide, while Russians see it as a war crime), and its subsequent denial (the Soviets falsely accused Germany) – have had deeply negative repercussions on Polish-Russian relations. Meanwhile, Russia is resentful that Poles refuse to express gratitude for their ‘liberation’ from Nazi occupation by Soviet troops. An additional source of tension is Poland’s border with Kaliningrad. Following the suspension of small border traffic (SBT), travel to and from the Kaliningrad Oblast is permitted only on the basis of a valid visa.

Trade and Investment:

Despite the challenges of the bilateral relationship, Russia remains Poland’s most important trade partner outside of the EU and supports the EU-Russia Partnership for Modernization. Notably, however, Russia’s trade with Poland has halved since 2014. Following the implementation of sanctions against Russia in 2014, Moscow banned the import of Polish fruit and vegetables in retaliation. Russia’s food hygiene authorities claimed that Polish produce contained unacceptable levels of pesticide residues and

nitrates. In 2013, Poland’s agricultural exports to Russia were valued at 1.3 billion EUR (representing 6.2% of all Poland’s agricultural exports), according to which the Russian market was the third most important destination for such exports. In 2015, however, this value fell dramatically to only 398 million EUR. At the same time, Poland’s overall agricultural exports that year rose by 7.7%, to a total of 23.6 billion EUR.

Energy Relations:

Poland advocates decreasing energy dependence on Russia, both nationally as well as at the European level. To this end, Poland installed a liquid natural gas terminal (LNG) in 2015 aimed at reducing Russian imports. Poland also opposes the Nord Stream pipeline. The Polish government has decided against extending an agreement with Russia on the purchase of gas, due to expire in 2022; instead, negotiations have been initiated with Denmark and Norway regarding the construction of a gas pipeline from the North Sea to Poland’s new LNG port. In order to diversify its gas delivery routes, Poland is entertaining several plans for new connections in the region (e.g., Poland-Czech Republic, Czech Republic-Slovakia, Poland-Slovakia, Poland-Lithuania, Slovakia-Hungary, Hungary-Croatia and Hungary-Romania).

Military Relations:

Poland possesses the acute security concerns of a ‘frontier’ state with vivid memories of the Soviet takeover of 1939. In particular, Poland fears allied abandonment in a potential confrontation with Russia, and has therefore requested an increased NATO presence on its soil. It has also increased military spending from 1.6% GDP in 2013 to 2.2% in 2015. As part of the deterrence strategy of Operation Atlantic Resolve, US soldiers and heavy equipment have been deployed to Poland. The Kremlin sees this initiative as aggression along its borders and a threat to its security. As such, Moscow consequently deployed nuclear-capable Iskander missiles in Kaliningrad, which borders both Poland and Lithuania. The Russian media often exacerbates the already tense atmosphere between the countries by spreading fake stories, such as that of the alleged crash between Polish and Russian submarines, allegedly occurring in 2016. In fact, the Polish submarine in question was anchored in Gdynia at the time.

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Dispute over the US Missile Defence Shield:

Russia opposes plans to build part of the NATO missile defence system in Poland that is due to be ready in 2018. In response to the plans, Putin has said that Russia “will do everything needed to ensure and preserve the strategic balance, which is the most reliable guarantee from large-scale military conflicts”. In addition, the Kremlin has vowed to modernise the Dnepr Missile Launch Detection System located in Crimea. The Russian media also typically refers to the presence of the Iskander missile system in Kaliningrad whenever discussions begin about the NATO installation plans.

Investigation of Smolensk airplane crash:

Russia has been criticised for its failure to fully investigate all aspects of the 2010 Smolensk airplane crash, which killed 96 people onboard including President Lech Kaczynski and his wife Maria, the chief of the Polish General Staff, and other top military officers and politicians. The Polish ruling party Law and Justice has long challenged the conclusions of the official Russian investigation of the crash. Poland is considering the possibility of submitting a dispute claim regarding the investigation to the ICJ.

View of Russia:

In Poland, Russia is broadly viewed with suspicion and considered to be a security threat, primarily for reasons of historical experience as reviewed above. At the political level, there is general consensus about the Russian menace. In its foreign policy, Poland recognises Moscow’s ambitions to expand its sphere of influence and prevent further democratisation in Eastern Europe through hybrid attacks, including propaganda and disinformation. According to the latest Eurobarometer, only 27% of Poles had a positive view of Russia.

Counterintelligence Activities:

Poland is a high interest target for the Russian intelligence services, which operate the most extensive spy network in the country. A number of Russian intelligence officers are also expected to be operating under diplomatic cover. In 2014, for example, several Russian diplomats were expelled on suspicion of spying on behalf of the Russian intelligence services. In retaliation for this “unfriendly and unfounded”
step, Russia expelled several Polish diplomats. Most recently, Eduard Shishmakov, a former Russian military attaché in Poland expelled for espionage, has been accused of participating in the recent coup plot in Montenegro.

In 2006, Polish president Lech Kaczyński dissolved the Military Intelligence Service (WSI), which was considered the base for communist-era spies. A report on the operations of the WSI was subsequently published.

**EU Level Activities:**

*Migration:*

Poland is the EU’s most popular destination country for temporary migrants from Ukraine. Currently, most refugees applying for asylum in Poland come from Russia, Ukraine and Georgia.

*Eastern Partnership:*

The EaP was a flagship initiative of Polish diplomacy, promoting the eastern dimension within the EU as well as within the Visegrad countries. Poland strongly supports the EU and NATO aspirations of EaP countries, including commitment to Ukraine’s “European perspective”. Indeed, Ukraine has long been considered a priority country; Poland was active in supporting the Orange Revolution. At the same time, Poland is reluctant to provide Ukraine with lethal weapons; its military support instead mainly focuses on training Ukrainian soldiers. Poland unequivocally supports continued sanctions against Russia until full implementation of the Minsk agreement is achieved.

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StratCom:

Poland is a sponsoring nation of the NATO StratCom COE and also participates on the Finnish COE on Countering Hybrid Threats. It funds the European Endowment for Democracy, a donor organisation that supports democratisation and resilience in the European neighbourhood, including in the domain of counter-disinformation efforts.79

II. Expert Assessments

A Power Audit of EU-Russia Relations (2007):80

Poland is characterised as a 'new cold warrior', having an overtly hostile relationship with Moscow and being willing to use veto power to block EU negotiations with Russia. Poland furthermore believes Russia is waging a new cold war against the EU and is therefore active in shaping a more critical EU stance towards Moscow. These frosty political relations with Russia often spill over into the economic field (e.g., meat and produce embargo, disputes over phytosanitary norms). Poland also blocked negotiations on the new PCA with Russia.

National Perspectives on Russia (2013):81

Energy security, common neighbourhood and historical issues are identified as the key elements of the bilateral relationship between Poland and Russia. Additionally, national sentiments between Poles and Russians are a mix of admiration, envy, and disrespect, together with prevailing mistrust.

EU-28 Watch (2015):82

Polish-Russian relations have deteriorated due to the annexation of Crimea with no indications of future improvement. Poland is a leader in maintaining sanctions against Russia and supporting the Euro-Atlantic ties of EaP countries. However, its tough position on Russia is not shared widely within the EU. Ukraine’s association agreement with the EU remains Poland's long-term aim, but this objective is now viewed with a greater degree of realism given the state of conflict.

79 See <www.democracyendowment.eu/about-eed/>
Views from the Capitals (2015-2016):83

Poland’s national security concerns and the distrust exacerbated by Russia’s imperialist turn have knocked the bilateral relationship to its lowest level in 25 years. Official contacts between the two countries are limited. Poland believes that a conventional military conflict with Russia remains possible, and deterrence is therefore a central pillar of its national security strategy. Poland prefers sanctions to military operations and believes that the EU should reaffirm its commitments towards the EaP countries, whilst separately managing the conflicts in Ukraine and Syria. The political consensus vis-à-vis the appropriate approach to Russia is now seen as somewhat more contested than in the past.

European Foreign Policy Scorecards (2013-2016):84

Poland is a leader on the EU’s ambitious agenda in the eastern neighbourhood, including support for ratifying and implementing Association Agreements with Georgia and Moldova and promoting a tough sanctions policy and a response to Russian aggression in eastern Ukraine. Poland is a strong political, financial and military supporter of Ukraine (2016). The country is also a leader in efforts to diversify gas supplies away from Russia and authored the initiative for an Energy Union; it seeks to hold Russia accountable for its WTO commitments and advocates US-EU cooperation on Russia (2015). In addition, Poland pushes for the provision of EU assistance to the EaP region, including via visa-free travel, and supports the European Commission in seeking to resist Russian pressure on the EaP countries (2014). Poland also exerts pressure on Belarus regarding political liberalization (2013).

III. Policy Documents

Annual Address on Foreign Policy Goals (2017):85

According to its 2017 foreign policy goals, stability in the European neighbourhood and beyond is a key priority for Poland. Russia’s withdrawal from the deal on plutonium disposal with the US was seen as an opportunity to learn about its ambitions vis-à-vis Central and Eastern Europe (namely, achieving NATO’s de facto withdrawal from the region and drawing a dozen or so countries into a grey ‘buffer zone’, condemning them to instability). Poland refuses to accept such a vision of political order in Europe, and will not condone the degradation of the European continent into spheres of influence (e.g., Yalta/Munich). Poland sees Russia’s political actions as aligned with potential military steps: specifically, there is concern about the expansion of the Western Military District, to which three new divisions were added in 2016. The militarization of Kaliningrad Oblast also continues, with the deployment of new types of weaponry, such as medium-range missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads. However, at the same time, Poland continues to recognise the need for dialogue with Moscow. There are plans to take steps to develop civic dialogue, people-to-people contacts, and cultural cooperation, as well as to restore bilateral economic relations.

Annual Address on Foreign Policy Goals (2016):\textsuperscript{86}

According to this document, Russia aims to revise the post-Cold War European order and to this end is ready to use force, as demonstrated by its aggression against Ukraine. Russia aims to expand its own sphere of influence and inhibit the democratic transition of Eastern European countries that aspire to rapprochement with Europe and the West. This pursuit is supported by the expansion of Russian military potential and hybrid tactics, including propaganda and disinformation. Pragmatic and substantive relations with Russia are in the interest of Poland and Europe alike. However, rather than based on one-sided concessions, cooperation with Russia must be built via constructive dialogue, respect for bilateral agreements, and international law.

Eastern Policy on Russia:\textsuperscript{87}

Since 2013, relations between Poland and Russia have deteriorated, primarily as a result of differing attitudes regarding the architecture of the European security, controversies regarding the role and position of the countries of Central Europe, as well as differing interests regarding energy security. Differences between Poland and Russia have been exposed to their greatest extent since the onset of Russian aggression in Ukraine. In accordance with common EU policy, Poland limited its political contacts with Moscow, while at the same time keeping open other channels of dialogue and technical cooperation.

National Security Strategy (2014):\textsuperscript{88}

Poland believes that NATO-Russia and EU-Russia relations should be developed on the basis of unequivocal respect for international law, including the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states, as well as their freedom to choose their own path of development and political and military alliances. Russia’s reassertion as a major power at the expense of countries in its near abroad, as well as the escalation of confrontation, has a negative impact on overall regional security.

\textsuperscript{86} See: <www.msz.gov.pl/resource/601901dd-1db8-4a64-ba4a-9c80f2d5811b:JCR>
The ISA has confirmed continuing high levels of activity on part of the Russian intelligence services, linked with the Kremlin’s propaganda strategy. The Kremlin’s aims include discrediting the position of Poland and other NATO member states in context of the Ukraine crisis, highlighting the complex history of relations between Poland and Ukraine to increase mutual antagonism, and stoking divisions internally among EU and NATO members. The Pro-Kremlin media spread anti-EU and anti-American sentiments within Poland, especially by highlighting Eurosceptic politicians and voices speaking against further sanctions and a tougher policy against Russia. This strategy relied on Russian media as well as pro-Kremlin members of Polish civic society, in some cases paid by Russian state institutions.

Romania

Summary:

Romania has been a NATO and EU member since 2004. The country has long had tense relations with Russia, which have only deteriorated since the onset of the Ukraine crisis. Russia is explicitly identified as a threat to national security. However, while harbouring these concerns about Russia, Romania is rarely vocal in challenging Moscow, preferring to stay beneath the radar. Romania has high domestic energy reserves, which render the question of energy dependence on Russia secondary. Romania remains dedicated to deeper ties with the US and NATO, as well as with its Black Sea partners, such as Georgia and Ukraine.

I. Relationship Parameters

Historical Context:

Romania, like the other countries profiled, has a long and complicated history with Russia, particularly concerning Moldova and Transnistria. This history continues to fuel suspicion vis-à-vis Russia and its foreign policy intentions. Romania had a complex relationship with Russia even before the unification of the two voivodeships of Moldavia and Wallachia into one country in the late 19th century. Following WWI, Romania annexed Bessarabia and Bukovina from the Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires, but lost them during WWII. During the Cold War, Romania broke away from the Soviet Union and pursued an independent foreign policy under Nicolai Ceausescu’s regime, which was finally deposed in a violent revolution in 1989.

Moldova:

Romania and Russia both have a special relationship with the ex-Soviet Republic of Moldova. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, a Russian-speaking separatist region of Moldova, Transnistria, broke away and established its own illegitimate state with the support of Russian troops. Since then, the Russian-Romanian relationship has been shaped by the status of Transnistria and by the question of Moldova’s identity, either as a part of the Romanian nation or as belonging to the Russian sphere of influence. Romania remains Moldova’s main advocate in the EU, arguing for its deeper integration into Europe.

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Trade and Investment:

Romania retains reasonably good economic trade and business ties with Russia, while being careful not to develop vulnerabilities. There are some high-level contacts between ministers and officials on both sides and a number of economic cooperation commissions have been inaugurated (e.g., Business Council for Economic Cooperation, Intergovernmental Commission for Economic, Technical and Scientific Cooperation). At the end of 2012, bilateral trade between Romania and Russia was at 4.4 billion USD (up 1.8% from 2011). In recent years, Romanian imports from Russia have increased, while the value of exports has decreased. Russian financial and business penetration in the country is nonetheless a problem. Among other things, Russia invests considerably in Romanian heavy industry, which raises some concerns.

Energy Relations:

Romania is not energy dependent on Russia. Much of its gas is domestically produced, and imports from Russia are relatively limited by comparison to other countries profiled here. However, as they dwindle, the question of natural gas price hikes is of potential concern. Romania supports full energy unbundling and has long been critical of Russian energy policies aimed at subjugating client states. In Romania, there are some concerns about the Russian energy business taking over the Romanian energy sphere.

Military Relations:

Russia’s annexation of Crimea underscored the possibility of similar hostile takeover tactics in Transnistria, leading Romania to take dramatic steps to modernise its military, including older weaponry and equipment. In 2015, the country committed to increasing its military budget significantly, to 2% of GDP by 2017. The government also allocated state funding to defence companies and has emphasised the need to invest in the defence industry to protect Romania’s basic interests. Russia has meanwhile called Romania a ‘clear threat’ for hosting elements of the US missile defence shield. After Russia threatened to strike Romanian military bases, Romanian President Klaus Iohannis approved the
temporary deployment of 250 US troops to a military base on the eastern border and approved a request from the US to use the country’s largest airport in Otopeni as an alternate option for transport activities.97

View of Russia:

Romania’s view of Russia is predominantly characterised by suspicion, unease, and caution. In particular, the country is concerned about the possibility of Russian annexation of Transnistria, and the escalation of frozen conflicts in the Black Sea region. However, Romania’s response strategy is still nascent and relatively underdeveloped by comparison to other EU states like the Baltics and the Czech Republic. While these concerns have entered government statements strategy documents, they have not been effectively put into practice. According to Eurobarometer, 53% of Romanians have a positive view of Russia, while 41% have a negative view.

Counterintelligence Activities:

Russian intelligence services are considered to be active in Romania, as they are throughout the central and eastern European region. A few tit-for-tat expulsions of spies operating through their respective countries’ embassies have occurred between Russia and Romania. Much of this activity is considered to relate to the two countries’ disagreement over Moldova and their attempts to get an upper hand on the situation through intelligence gathering. Because Romanian intelligence services were long trained by the KGB, Russian influence remains embedded in the intelligence sphere.98

EU Level Activities:

Eastern Partnership:

Romania is actively supportive of initiatives in the eastern neighbourhood. It has been supportive of pro-EU and pro-NATO measures in Georgia, and with forming a common Black Sea partnership within Europe. Moldova, Transnistria, and EU expansion are the defining issues of Romanian foreign policy. As Moldova’s chief advocate in Europe, Romania’s interests in Moldova’s accession to the EU have clashed with Russia’s desire to maintain the frozen conflict in Transnistria.


StratCom:

Romania is committed to the mission of the EEAS East STRATCOM Task Force and NATO STRATCOM COE.

II. Expert Assessments

A Power Audit of EU-Russia Relations (2007):

Romania is characterised as a frosty pragmatist with respect to its relations with Russia, maintaining reasonably good economic ties while simultaneously speaking out against Moscow when necessary, even if it disadvantages the relationship (e.g., on human rights, democratisation, and other normative issues). Specifically, Russia's interference in Moldova’s affairs draws explicit criticism from Bucharest.

National Perspectives on Russia (2013):

History has shaped the bilateral relationship between Russia and Romania more than any other factor. Romania supports strengthening Black Sea partnerships and remains wary of the Russian threat, particularly in light of Russia’s heavy military presence in Moldova’s breakaway Russian enclave of Transnistria. Romania initiated the Black Sea Synergy cooperation in 2007 to demonstrate a more active role in regional partnership, and also showed support for the Nabucco project, which was intended to transport fossil fuels from Central Asia to Europe without using Russia as a transit state.

EU-28 Watch (2015):

Romania remains suspicious of Russia and shows enthusiasm for deepening ties with the US, especially following events in Ukraine. Romania supports measures employed to penalise Russia for violating international law. However, its own maritime border dispute with Ukraine and criticism of the Eastern Partnership, not including Moldova, render Romania’s situation special. The question of Moldova is particularly troubling for Romania, as it remains the main advocate for including Moldova into further EU extension plans.

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European Foreign Policy Scorecards (2013-2016): 102

Romania is considered to be a leader in maintaining the Russia sanctions in place following Moscow’s continuing aggression in Ukraine (2016) as well as pushing for EU-US cooperation on Russia (2015). Romania is also a leader in terms of offering bilateral assistance to the EaP countries (2015) and in seeking to develop a visa-free regime with Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia (2014, 2013).

III. Policy Documents

Speech of Foreign Minister Titus Corlatean (2014): 103

Recent months proved that outside the confines of the European Union a forged unstable context can ignite at any time, using any reason and questioning everything: from human life to EU integration aspirations. In these circumstances, the international law and human rights are recklessly violated. We have seen this in Georgia, six years ago, we have witnessed a similar situation in the Republic of Moldova, in the bloody month of April 2009, and this year in Ukraine. Such course of action sets aside the interest of the people and their chance for a better future. Together, we must stand against this manipulation by demonstrating that EU enlargement brings development and serves the interest of the people.

Speech of Foreign Minister Bogdan Aurescu (2015): 104

During the past years, we have seen significant negative developments, such as the financial crisis and the economic instability; energy supply disruptions derived from political turmoil and armed conflicts, not only in Middle East and Northern Africa, but also in our own neighborhood, in Ukraine. The recent events in our Eastern neighborhood have proved once more that access to energy is not just an economic issue, but a security one as well.

Speech of Foreign Minister Bogdan (2015): 105

We cannot ignore the fact that around the two organizations we are part of, a genuine belt of instability has emerged, with many hotspots, from the ingressions of the Russian Federation in Ukraine and the shift in the balance of security in the Black Sea region through the illegal occupation and militarization of Crimea in the East and the rise of the terrorist phenomenon, the growing challenges of illegal migration, various crises and state instability in the South.

With regard to the Russian Federation, the main features of bilateral relations should be predictability and pragmatism. We want a relation that should respect the legitimate interests of Romania, just as the

102 See: <www.ecfr.eu/scorecard>
103 See: <www.mae.ro/en/node/27503>
104 See: <www.mae.ro/en/node/31359>
105 See: <www.mae.ro/en/node/34702>
legitimate (I repeat, the legitimate) interests of Russia should be normally respected. However, the level of interaction with the Russian state will depend on its positive involvement in solving the Ukrainian conflict and on restoring the strategic balance in the Eastern Neighbourhood. Respecting all international commitments is an absolutely necessary prerequisite to intensify dialogue.

**National Defense Strategy (2015-2019):**

Today, the region is marked by active conflicts and the deterioration of relations between NATO and the Russian Federation, which is an important player in the European and Euro-Atlantic sphere. Russia’s actions in the Black Sea Region, infringing upon international law, questioning international order, preserving frozen conflicts and the annexation of Crimea, have again raised NATO’s awareness about fulfilling its fundamental mission of collective defense, as well as the validity of the security architecture agreed upon with Russia at the end of the 20th century. Russian Federation is trying to consolidate its status as a regional superpower, and its actions affect regional stability and the European path of Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, and Georgia.

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Slovakia

Summary:

Slovakia has been an EU and NATO member state since 2004. Though highly energy-dependent on Russia, Slovakia is a firm supporter of EU and NATO measures to counter Russian aggression in Europe, particularly in the aftermath of Russia’s annexation of Crimea. At the same time, Slovakia prioritises its economic ties with Russia, which sometimes leads to its backing down on certain security measures, such as the deployment of the proposed US missile defence shield. The country’s transit status for energy supplies from Russia destined for Western Europe is important for the Slovak government. Potential threats to Slovakia include presence of pro-Russian fringe elements in the political sphere and ex-Communist politicians who may harbor sympathy for Russia. Nonetheless, when it comes to the Eastern Partnership and EU and NATO expansion, Slovakia has expressed enthusiasm in including ex-Soviet states, which Russia considers to belong to its sphere of influence.

I. Relationship Parameters

Historical Context:

Despite its negative historical experience with the Soviet Union during the communist era, Slovakia established a pragmatic relationship with Russia after the dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1993. Following the ‘Velvet Divorce’, Russia came to be seen as a guarantor of Slovakia’s neutrality and an important economic partner.107 The government sought to promote Slovakia as a bridge between the East and West. In addition, Slovak intelligence services and security forces cooperated closely with their Russian counterparts. Due to perceptions of Slovakia’s democratic backsliding in the mid-1990s, Slovakia was the only V4 country not invited to join NATO in 1997. This snub was an effective reality check, and Slovakia subsequently shifted its policy focus to joining NATO and the EU, which it successfully achieved in 2004. Nonetheless, Slovakia remains one of the most pro-Russian countries in the EU.108 Unlike in the Czech Republic, Hungary, or Poland, negative issues related to the communist past are seldom raised by Slovak authorities.109 This corresponds with the presence of several former communists in the Slovak government. Moreover, several former StB officers and communist political Commissioners (‘politruci’) hold important positions in the country’s security structures.

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Trade and Investment:

Bilateral economic relations are a long-term priority of Slovak policy towards Russia. Key roles are played by the Intergovernmental Commission for Economic and Scientific-Technical Cooperation, co-chaired by Foreign Minister Miroslav Lajčák and Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin, who is banned from entering the EU. The main pillars of the Russian-Slovak economic relationship are gas and weapons. Russian investors with ties to the Russian government are interested in acquisitions in areas of strategic importance. Russian Railways are interested in Cargo Slovakia and Severstal is interested in the US Steel company.

Energy Relations:

Slovakia is highly energy dependent on Russia. Approximately 97% of Slovakia’s gas and 98% of oil demands are covered by Russia. Slovakia is also an important trading gas hub in the region. It opposes Nord Stream 2 on grounds that this would limit transit revenues. In order to diversify its gas deliveries, supply interconnectors between Slovakia-Hungary and Slovakia-Ukraine are now up and running, and a connection with Poland is under negotiation. Overall, diversification is a high priority issue, but commercial interests also play a key role in shaping policy. The Russian company TVEL is an important supplier of nuclear energy and is involved in the construction of the Močovce nuclear power plant.

Slovakia provided reverse flows to Ukraine during the 2014 energy crisis and in retaliation, Russia cut its supply by 50%. In 2014, Slovakia signed an agreement with Ukraine allowing supplies of Russian gas from EU countries to enter Ukraine through Slovakia. This step was criticised by Gazprom. Additionally, Slovakia has expressed interest in joining the ‘Turkish Stream’ project (intended to circumvent Ukraine) despite the consequence that this will deprive the country of lucrative transit fees.

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112 Ibid.

113 “Putin Ratifies Deal To Build Turkish Stream Gas Pipeline To Southern Europe”. RFE/RL. 8 February 2017. <www.rferl.org/a/putin-ratifies-deal-build-turkish-stream-gas-pipeline-southern-europe/28297156.html>
Military Relations:

Military relations between Slovakia and Russia are generally free of any serious security-related problems. The Slovak military notably remains heavily dependent on Russian armaments. Nevertheless, army modernisation efforts are in progress to reduce this dependence. The program includes the acquisition of nine pieces of Blackhawk helicopters, two Spartan transport aircrafts and replacement of Russian radar systems; replacement of the MiG-29 is also under negotiation. Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico opposes the deployment of the radar system for the US missile defence shield propose in the region.

View of Russia:

Slovakia’s approach to Russia is best described as a ‘pendulum policy’, as there is no clear conceptual or ideological approach to Russia underwriting a specific foreign policy programme. Slovakia balances between preserving close economic ties with Russia while following EU policy against Russian aggression towards Ukraine. During the negotiations of the Russia sanctions in 2014, Slovakia wanted to keep some of the high-profile Russian names off the sanctions list to safeguard its interests.

President Andrej Kiska maintains an unusually strict line on Russia by Slovak political terms, and believes that EaP countries should be offered membership prospects following their complete fulfilment of EU criteria. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Miroslav Lajčák, balances between strong support for Ukraine and constructive dialogue with Russia. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Robert Fico is the most vocal pro-Russian politician in the country. He has spoken against continuing sanctions against Russia and prefers to uphold trade ties and gas imports before punishing the Kremlin. Public opinion is divided on questions of affiliation with the West versus Russia. While a clear majority condemns Russia’s actions in Ukraine, support for sanctions is limited. According to the latest Eurobarometer poll, 49% of Slovaks had somewhat positive view of Russia and 12% very positive, with 28% somewhat negative and 8% very negative. However, the survey does not focus primarily on foreign policy.

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114 See: [www.congress.gov/crec/2016/03/22/CREC-2016-03-22-pt1-PgH1502-2.pdf](www.congress.gov/crec/2016/03/22/CREC-2016-03-22-pt1-PgH1502-2.pdf)


Counterintelligence Activities:

As noted above, the Slovak intelligence services cooperated closely with their Russian counterparts throughout the 1990s, for example by sending officers to Moscow for training and welcomed Russian instruction programs in Slovakia. This Russian penetration inhibited intelligence reform and remained problematic through 2003, threatening to block Slovakia’s NATO membership bid. More recently, reports have emerged of subversive Russian intelligence activities in Slovakia: notably, GRU- and FSB-linked martial arts clubs have sprung up throughout Slovakia (as well as in other EU states) intended to recruit European spies. These initiatives are described as a “well-thought-out, large-scale operation of the secret services with powerful government funding”.

EU Level Activities:

Eastern Partnership:

In context of the EaP, Slovakia’s priority countries are Ukraine, Moldova, and Belarus. Slovakia is a strong supporter of Ukraine’s and Georgia’s EU and NATO integration efforts, and is willing to aid these countries with implementing reforms to fulfil their EaP commitments. On the other hand, in relations with Belarus, Armenia and Azerbaijan, pragmatism prevails and human rights are sometimes overlooked.

StratCom:

Slovakia does not actively participate in efforts to counter disinformation at the European or international level. President Andrej Kiska has issued verbal warnings about the dangers of hostile information influence and the importance of strategic communication. However, the Prime Minister and the remainder of the political leadership do not consider this a priority.


II. Expert Assessments

A Power Audit of EU-Russia Relations (2007):\textsuperscript{122} Slovakia is described as a friendly pragmatist, tending to put its business interests above political goals and to oppose actions that might irritate Moscow. Slovakia is also influenced by almost total energy dependence and major bilateral energy deals with Russia. The country also shares Russia’s position on Kosovo. While Slovakia supports the EU’s role in the eastern neighbourhood, it has opposed the EU peacekeeping mission in Moldova.

National Perspectives on Russia (2013): \textsuperscript{123} Slovakia has sustained a pragmatic ‘business as usual’ approach; it is best labelled a ‘quasi-Russophile’ country. Slovakia strongly supports the eastern dimension of the EU’s external relations, also within the Visegrad Group. Its prioritised countries are Ukraine, Moldova, and Belarus. However, there is a degree of ‘Russia-first’ principles with respect to support for their EU and NATO aspirations.

Anti-Russia/Russia-cautious political parties: Slovak Democratic and Christian Union-Democratic Party (SDKU-DS), Most-Híd (Hungarian minority) and SaS (Liberals)

Pro-Russia parties: SMER and LSNS (neo-nazi party)

EU-28 Watch (2015): \textsuperscript{124} In Slovakia, a policy of friendly pragmatism is likeliest to prevail due to economic interests and almost total energy dependence on Russia. Following the conflict in Ukraine, Slovakia is seeking to find balance between securing its national interests tied up with Russia and simultaneously supporting common cause within the EU; there is thus a preference for encouraging political dialogue.

View from the Capitals (2015): \textsuperscript{125} Slovakia has traditionally sought strong economic cooperation with Moscow, considering that most of its gas deliveries and nuclear fuel (for its Russia-built nuclear power plants), together with some of its defence equipment, all come from Russia. Following the crisis in Ukraine, Slovakia has begun to change course on Russia, beginning to diversify its defence, economy, and energy away from Russian sources.

European Foreign Policy Scorecards (2013-2016): \textsuperscript{126} Slovakia is becoming a leader on diversifying gas supplies away from Russia; it also supports political reforms in the eastern neighbourhood through bilateral assistance, Ukraine’s efforts to implement a viable reform agenda and contend with Russian aggression, and visa liberalization with Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine (2014). However, Slovakia has been a slacker on sanctions, for instance attempting to protect Dmitry Rogozin, Russia’s Deputy Prime Minister, from being sanctioned by the EU. Slovakia eventually endorsed the common EU approach (2015).


\textsuperscript{126} See: <www.ecfr.eu/scorecard>
III. Policy Documents

Note: New security and defence strategies are currently under preparation.

**Focus of Foreign and European Policy (2016):**\(^{127}\)

In relation to the Russian Federation it is of importance to continue political dialogue without changing our approach to the annexation of the Crimea. We will also foster cooperation in the field of energy and in addressing open bilateral issues. From a political and military point of view it is not possible to find a solution to the current crisis in Ukraine without the RF. It is necessary to maintain an intensive dialogue within the EU on a common position and future arrangement of relations with Russia. The future of restrictive measures imposed against the RF for violations of international law remains an open question.

For the Slovak Republic, it is of high priority to maintain its potential as a transit country for energy carriers coming from the RF to Western Europe. Despite the difficult international political situation, we are interested in seeking new forms of bilateral cooperation. Following the military strengthening of the Alliance on its eastern flank Slovakia will gradually ease pragmatic dialogue between NATO and Russia with the aim of reducing mutual tensions and building trust.

**Report on SIS Activities (2015):**\(^{128}\)

With respect to Russia, the dominant trend has been the strengthening of conservative forces within the state leadership and their interest in maintaining a high level of regulation and control over the internal events in the country. In accordance with this trend, there was a further reduction in operations of the third sector, especially organizations with foreign support that the Russian leadership considers to be the forces prepared to organize the so-called color revolutions on Russian territory. In the foreign field, the Russian Federation continued in its efforts to keep Ukraine in its sphere of influence and to strengthen its positions in Central Asia region. Russia used the Syrian campaign and the fight against Islamic terrorism to distract the West from the Ukrainian conflict and to strengthen its great powers ambitions.


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