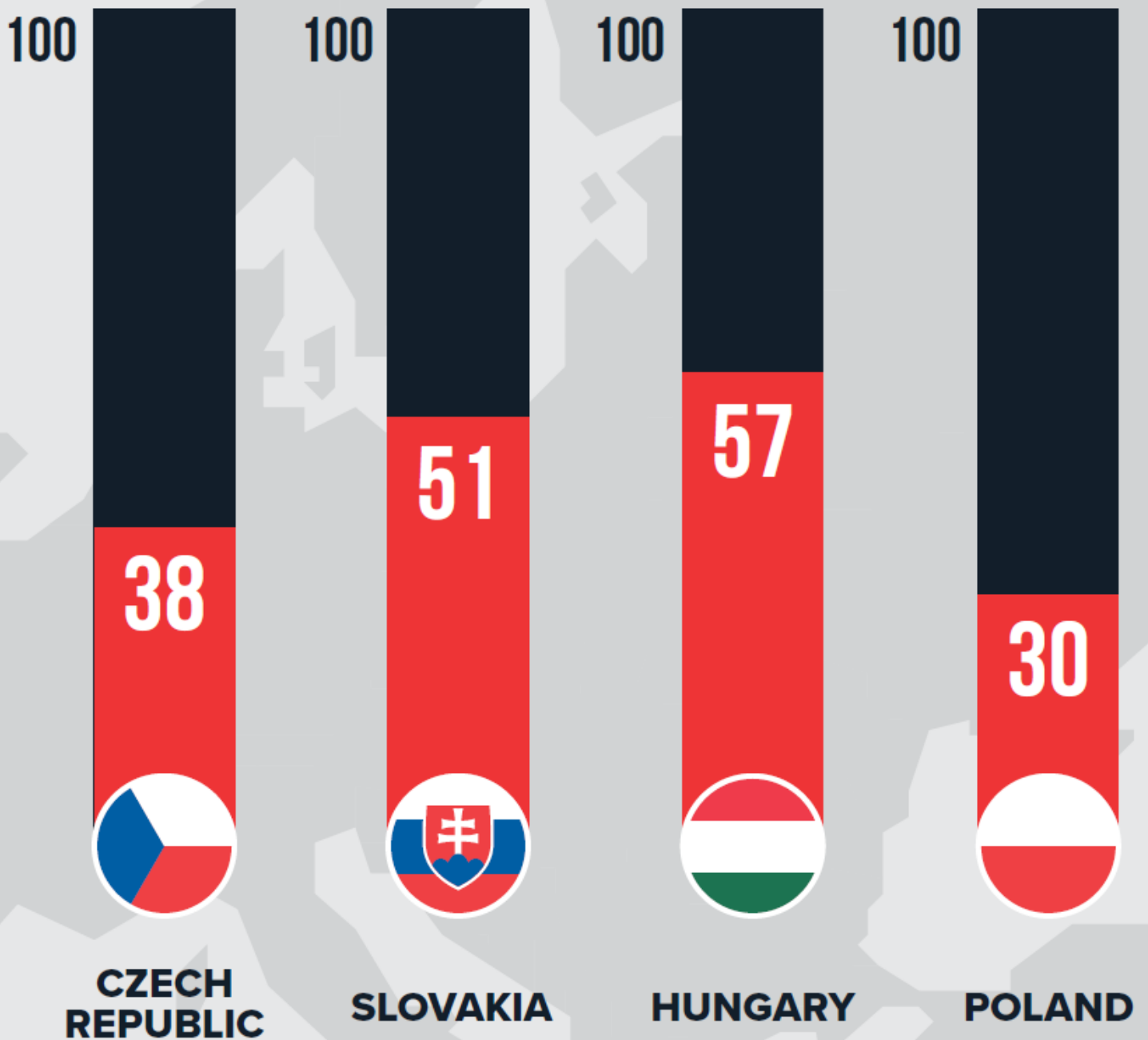


VULNERABILITY INDEX: HUNGARY

Subversive Russian influence in Hungary



This study was conducted as part of the research project “Vulnerability Index – Subversive Russian influence in Central Europe” commissioned by Globsec Policy Institute and supported by the National Endowment for Democracy.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Political Capital Institute's country report is based on desktop research and expert interviews. The study investigated how vulnerable Hungary is to Russian propaganda and influences in five areas.

- Results suggest that the Hungarian political landscape and state countermeasures make the country especially vulnerable to Russian influence, with scores of 4.11 and 4.19, respectively, on a 5-point scale. Desktop research and experts both concluded that the government has a firmly pro-Kremlin¹ view, based mainly on ideological, power political and economic-financial (including energy policy and allegedly corruption-related) reasons. One of the two most popular opposition parties, the far-right party Jobbik is also pro-Kremlin, anti-EU and for a long period of time it supported the separatists in Ukraine – including some of its senior politicians observing the “referendum” in Crimea. The largest left-wing party, the socialist MSZP is considered neutral due to the fact that the party is split on the issue., Minor leftist, green and liberal parties are fiercely anti-Kremlin.
- State countermeasures in Hungary are severely lacking mainly due to the government's pro-Russian views. Even though there are allegedly dedicated intelligence officers working on Russia-related issues, the political leadership however obstructs intelligence activities countering the Kremlin's influence because of domestic political interests and to avoid disrupting bilateral relations with Russia. Government leaders refuse to admit publicly that Russia poses any threat to Hungary, the EU and NATO. As a consequence, mentions of Russia are largely missing from public counter-intelligence documents and even with regards to the Ukraine it is hard to explain how the government evaluates Russia's role in the conflict. Hungarian leadership tends to use threats of ‘foreign influence’ for domestic political gains. The failure to reassuringly deal with the country's communist past (e.g., publishing the confidential dossiers on pre-1989 intelligence officers) gives way to potential blackmailing attempts. Overall, the lack of state countermeasures is a strong contributor to the vulnerability of Hungary to pro-Kremlin influences.
- The media scene was assigned a score of 3.38, which is largely a result of the lack of transparency of media ownership and the vast media possessions of pro-government oligarchs and entrepreneurs, who are – according to experts interviewed for this study – completely biased in issues related to the EU, NATO and Russia. Complete government influence over the Public Broadcaster (PBS), which also closely follows the administration's line - is also a factor that hit the media's vulnerability score hard, especially considering the role of the PBS in the anti-EU and anti-immigration campaign. Both PBS and pro-government media often broadcast openly pro-Russian propaganda and sometimes use RT and Sputnik International as a reference for their own content. Fringe media outlets are claimed to be able to influence a part of the population, however, their core audience is likely to be small. Besides pro-Russian propaganda being spread in Hungary, Russian disinformation targeting CEE and Western

¹ In our study, we use the phrases „pro-Russian”, „anti-Russian” and „Russian influence” often for the sake of simplicity and to facilitate understanding. These never refer to the Russian population or the Russian nation, but to the Russian state, Russian power and the polics of the Kremlin in every case.

European countries uses Hungary as a reference to dismantle Western political and cultural values. In addition, the Kremlin's propaganda uses the Hungarian community in neighbouring countries to incite ethnic tensions in the region. Overall, the media has a significant role in making Hungary more vulnerable to pro-Kremlin influence.

- Civil society was assigned a score of 2.79, which is largely the result of it not having a particularly strong influence on Hungarian society, although it is a risk factor that projects dealing with Russian influence are unable to reach the population. Governmental crackdowns on and continuous campaign against NGOs dealing with human rights, the rule of law, checks and balances and transparency in order to silence them and cut their funding clearly follows the Russian example. At the same time, Government Organised NGOs (GONGOs) have been created since 2010 to balance government-critical voices and defend the steps taken by the government. A wide range of relatively small pro-Kremlin groups and far-right paramilitary organisations actively spread the Kremlin's propaganda.
- Hungarian society is the least vulnerable among the areas considered by this study with a mean score of 2.25. Hungarians are generally pro-EU, pro-NATO and pro-US and rather critical of Russia. Despite that, the cabinet's close political and economic ties with Russia seems to have had an effect among the supporters of the governing Fidesz party. They resonate with both the pro-Russian stance of the government and its critical views on certain EU-related issues. Jobbik's voters are generally the most anti-US, anti-EU and anti-NATO, while the supporters of left-wing parties have a predominantly pro-West orientation.
- Two important best practices were identified in the course of this research project, both are mainly aimed at raising awareness about Russian influence in Hungary. One involves certain media outlets that publish lists of "Russian voices" (such as blogs, websites) and explain how they are connected to Russia and how they support the Kremlin's geopolitical narrative. The other one involves international cooperation, the result of which is then translated to Hungarian, which has the potential to show readers that Russian efforts at propaganda constitute a Europe-wide phenomenon.
- Overall, the government's pro-Russian stance and the dissemination of that viewpoint through pro-government media, combined with the lack of action in terms of state countermeasures makes Hungary, overall, relatively susceptible to Russian propaganda activities.

PERCEPTIONS OF THE EU, NATO, US, RUSSIA BY THE GENERAL PUBLIC

Russia has been an important factor in Hungarian history in the past three centuries, during which Moscow crushed the revolutions of 1848/49 and 1956. Hungary, after the Second World War fell into the USSR's sphere of influence and was dominated by Soviet troops until late 1989. Hungarians were for a long period aware and suspicious of Russian ambitions to dominate the region. The Carpathian Basin is dominated by Slavic nations, and Russia was always seen as the supporter of the demands of Slavic nations surrounding Hungary,² a feeling that has largely disappeared after the integration of the region into Europe, which could have played the role in the public's perception of Russia.

In 1992, on a 100-point scale, the sympathy index for the USA stood at 73% and that of Russia at only 36%.³ Although the public's views on the USA have deteriorated since then – while Russia's improved –, a recent survey⁴ found that 46% of Hungarians see the United States' role in the world positively, while only 39% have negative views on the issue. Pew Research Center found in spring 2016⁵ that 62% of Hungarian have favourable views on the US. The same survey concluded that Hungarians have more confidence in Barack Obama to do the right thing in world affairs than they do in Vladimir Putin. In terms of geopolitical orientation, the majority (53%) of Hungarians believe the country should be somewhere between the East and the West, however, only 5% favoured a clear pro-Russian stance, a minor amount compared to the 39% who favoured a clearly pro-West orientation.⁶ Based on Globsec's survey conducted in Hungary during summer 2016 by TNS Hoffmann⁷, it is those living in smaller settlements and those with lower levels of education attained who are less Western-oriented. In addition, it can also be concluded that Jobbik voters have very negative views on this issue, 53% of their supporters see the US's role in the world negatively. 51% of Fidesz voters see the United States' role positively, while MSZP's camp is strongly pro-US in this regard⁸. Noticeably, according to a study written on the Visegrád Group's response to the Ukrainian crisis, taking party preferences into account, Fidesz voters were found to be the most tolerant of Russia by a wide margin, meaning that almost as many Fidesz voters favour developing closer ties to Russia as there are who want a closer relationship with the US.⁹ According to the multipolarity¹⁰

² Kurharczyk, J.; Meseznikov, G. (eds) (2015) *Diverging Voices, Converging Policies: The Visegrad states' Reactions to the Russia-Ukraine Conflict*. Heinrich Böll Stiftung

³ *ibid*

⁴ Globsec Trends (2016) *Central Europe under the fire of propaganda: Public opinion poll analysis in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia*. Available at http://www.galerie9.com/blog/glb_trends_en.pdf Last downloaded: 4 November 2016

⁵ Pew Research Center (2016) *America's international Image*. Available at: <http://www.pewglobal.org/2016/06/28/americas-international-image/> Last downloaded: 4 November 2016

⁶ Globsec Trends (2017), conducted between 11-21 February 2017

⁷ TNS Hoffmann conducted the survey in Hungary.

⁸ Political Capital Institute's internal calculations based on TNS Hoffmann's survey.

⁹ Kucharczyk, Meseznikov (2015)

¹⁰ "Multipolarity" here refers to the usual need among Western-critical, Russia-sympathizer circles to advocate for a "multipolar" world instead of the mere hegemonic role of the United States and the dominance of NATO as a military organisation.

index based on six NATO/Russia/US related questions from the Globsec Trends 2016 survey, there is only a weak demand for multipolarity in Hungary. 11% of the respondents were categorized as multipolarist. This number is slightly higher in the Czech Republic (18%) and much higher in Slovakia (27%). While it seems that the Hungarian public opinion is overwhelmingly supportive of the West, the very high level of undecided respondents (36%) clearly shows that the situation is less rosy. The large ignorant group in Hungary is a big vulnerability, their attitudes can be easily shaped. Hungarians approved NATO membership in a referendum in 1997, where 85% of votes cast was in favour of NATO membership.¹¹ In July 2016 Pew Research Center conducted a poll¹² on NATO's popularity among member states. In that, researchers found that 57% of Hungarians have favourable views on the alliance, while only 30% are against Hungarian membership. In Globsec's survey conducted in 2017 81% of Hungarians said Hungary's NATO membership was important for our security, 68% agreed that the country should help defend an ally under attack, and if a referendum on Hungarian NATO membership were held, 76 per cent would vote for staying in NATO and only 11 per cent would vote for leaving. However, in the 2016 Globsec Trends survey, the relative majority also agreed that the US controls member states through NATO (39%) and that the USA and NATO are responsible for the Ukrainian crisis (37%). The Hungarian far-right party, Jobbik's voters have the most unfavourable views on NATO membership, but even within this group, almost every second person believes that it is a good thing (48%)¹³.

Hungarians have traditionally been one of the most pro-EU populations. In 2003, close to 84% of voters chose to join the European Union, although only 46% of the electorate turned up to vote. Before the Brexit vote, Pew Research Center Found that 61% of Hungarians have favourable views on the EU. A more recent poll (Globsec Trends 2017) found that 61% of Hungarians believe EU membership to be a good thing, while only 11% opposed the country's membership. If a referendum were held on Hungarian EU membership, 79% would vote for staying in it and 14% for leaving the EU. In November 2016, the European Union conjured up a positive image for 37% of Hungarians. While 45% had neutral views, only 18% had either a fairly or a very negative image about the EU¹⁴. Jobbik supporters reject the country's EU membership the most, only 43% of them believe it is a good thing, while 57% of Fidesz voters and 66% of the supporters of MSZP have favourable views on the EU¹⁵.

Experts interviewed for this study believe that Hungarian society is somewhat anti-Russian and somewhat anti-American as well, although anti-US sentiments seem to make society more vulnerable to pro-Kremlin sentiments than people's opinion on Russia. While expert opinion on Russia seems to confirm the results of public opinion polls, in certain aspects experts have

¹¹ *Hungarians approve NATO membership*. (1997) Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/1997/11/17/world/hungarians-approve-nato-membership.html> Last downloaded: 4 November 2016

¹² Pew Research Center (2016) *Support for NATO is widespread among member states*. Available at: <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/07/06/support-for-nato-is-widespread-among-member-nations/> Last downloaded: 4 November 2016

¹³ Political Capital's own calculations on the Globsec Trends 2016 survey data

¹⁴ European Commission Standard Eurobarometer surveys. Available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/COMMFrontOffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Chart/getChart/chartType/lineChart//themeKy/19/groupKy/102/savFile/196>. Last downloaded on 21 March, 2017.

¹⁵ Political Capital Institute's internal calculations, based on TNS Hoffmann's survey.

differentiated views. One expert stated that these negative sentiments are the result of the country's Russian domination in the post-WWII period and wrote that the government's positive communication about Russia has only had a slight effect on Hungarian anti-Russian sentiments. With regards to the United States, one expert attests that party identification is an important factor in people's orientation in this issue, as pro-government voters generally see the US as a country influencing Hungarian domestic politics, while left-wing voters tend to see the USA as the country of democracy and freedom.

Experts indicated that Hungarians are somewhat pro-NATO (mean score: 2.00), with one expert stating that the country's membership is viewed as a "one-way street", meaning that the advantages – namely, national security – are accepted, but the duties conferred upon Hungary by its member status are not that important, although this is somewhat contradicted by Globsec's findings, which indicate that 69% of Hungarians would favour helping an allied nation in case it was attacked.

Regarding the country's EU membership, experts confirm that Hungarian society is strongly in favour of the European Union (mean score: 1.50). An expert wrote that Hungarians are generally in favour of the EU, however, voters with lower socioeconomic statuses are more sceptical of it, as they are more unlikely to benefit from EU membership.

Altogether, Hungarians are generally in favour of the country's integration into the West, although the populations' views on the EU, NATO and the US have deteriorated over the years. Hungarians, due to the Fidesz government's political orientation, have been subjected to strong rhetoric critical of the EU, especially since the beginning of the migration crisis, which could explain the significant drop in public trust of the EU. Nevertheless, this could not change Hungarians' general views on the country's EU membership. Hungarian right-wing parties (Fidesz, Jobbik) were generally critical of the policies of the Obama administration, the prime minister often criticises the US for its role in the Middle East and its criticism directed towards the Hungarian government, which could explain the Hungarian right-wing's scepticism of the USA. On the other hand, Hungary is a regular participant in NATO efforts and the Hungarian government generally depicts the alliance in a positive light and, parallel to this, the population views NATO rather favourably. In terms of Russia, the government's pro-Russian rhetoric is generally in contrast with the views of the population. The government's positive messages about Russia seem to resonate with Fidesz supporters, but not with the voters of other parties. Recently the European Commission gave the green light to the widely-debated expansion of the Paks Nuclear Power Plant, which will be financed by a Russian loan and built with Russian technology. According to a poll conducted in late January 2017¹⁶, the relative majority of respondents considered the deal with Russia beneficial to the country as a whole. One-third of the respondents had completely opposite views on the issue. While the share of those considering the deal to be a good thing did not reach 20% among the supporters of opposition parties, the result was 60% among Fidesz voters. According to a survey by Századvég¹⁷, an institute with close ties to the government, 35% of Hungarians had favourable views on Vladimir Putin in

¹⁶ Publicus: *Paksi atomerőmű bővítéséről* (2017). Available at: http://www.publicus.hu/blog/paksi_atomeromu_boviteserol/ Last downloaded: 21 March, 2017.

¹⁷ Századvég: *A magyarok többsége kiegyensúlyozott viszonyt szeretne Putyin Oroszországaival* (2017). Available at: <http://szazadveg.hu/hu/kutatasok/az-alapitvany-kutatasi-piackutatas-kozvelemeney-kutatas/a-magyarok-tobbsege-kiegyensulyozott-viszonyt-szeretne-putyin-oroszorszagaval> Last downloaded 21 March, 2017.

January 2017. Although the relative majority (44%) had rather negative views on him, this is a far better result than the one German Chancellor Angela Merkel received in the same poll. Only every fourth respondents had favourable views on her and almost two-thirds (64%) saw Chancellor Merkel in a negative light. The assessment of Donald Trump lies in between. Even though only 27% views him positively, the proportion of those having a negative opinion is 38%. One-third of the respondents were undecided, they could not assess President Trump. This will definitely change as soon as the Trump cabinet starts playing a more active role in Europe and in Hungary. According to the Globsec Trends 2017 survey, 44% of Hungarians find Vladimir Putin likeable, while 47% have the opposite opinion on the Russian president. Therefore, Hungarians are quite divided on this issue. The assessment of German Chancellor Angela Merkel was not as balanced. 55 per cent of Hungarians find her dislikeable. This is 17 percentage points higher than the proportion of those who tend to like her. Regarding US President Trump, the majority of Hungarians (56%) see him as dislikeable.

All in all, Hungarian society is more against Russia than against the West, and so far the government's rhetoric had fairly little effect on the population's attitudes towards Russia, however, the fact that there is a large camp of people with no opinion on the country's geopolitical orientation is a large vulnerability that could be exploited in the future.

POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

After the democratic transition, mainstream Hungarian actors agreed on the basic principles of Hungarian foreign policy, among others, the country's Western orientation and its integration in Euro-Atlantic structures such as NATO and the EU. However, Hungary's massive dependence on energy (mainly gas and oil) transports from Russia has made a pragmatic and steady relationship with Russia inevitable, and at the same time posed a risk to the country's vulnerability to Russian political and economic influence. Hungary's small size as well as its geographic and geopolitical position [a) being part of Central and Eastern Europe, which has long been a buffer zone between Western powers and Russia, and b) positioned between the EU and Ukraine, which has always been part of Russia's interests and sphere of influence] have also made the country vulnerable to Russia's influencing efforts. Based on these factors and dependences, successive Hungarian governments have usually aimed at a pragmatic economic and political relationship with Russia.

While between 1990 and the early 2000s Russia was not able to act as a major player neither on the global nor on the regional level due to its economic or political turmoil, Russia has re-emerged on the scene since then. Along with Vladimir Putin's presidency came the country's political stability and economic growth that have made Russia capable to exert its influence in and tighten its grip on its immediate and broaden neighbourhood once again. While Hungary's dependence and vulnerability are not new phenomena, the change of Russia's self-identification and geopolitical repositioning since the mid-2000s has revealed Hungary's vulnerable situation. The two key events, which marked Russia's changing role and new ambitions, and which put also the Hungarian governments under pressure were the Russo-Georgian war in 2008 and Russian aggression in Ukraine in 2014.

As part of the traditionally pragmatic relations with Russia, which focused on economy, Hungarian governments have tried to increase economic cooperation (Hungarian exports to Russia grew steadily prior to the 2008 crisis)¹⁸ with Russia since the early 2000s. However, several signs indicated that the relationship goes beyond pragmatism.

- PM Ferenc Gyurcsány¹⁹ had good personal relations to Putin. In 2007, for instance, PM Gyurcsány said that "Russia is a very developed democracy".
- PM Gyurcsány favoured Russia's South Stream Gas Pipeline project idea over the EU's Nabucco project.
- Preparations for the extension of the Paks Nuclear Power Plant (NPP) began under PM Gyurcsány, and government officials stated that most probably Russia will be commissioned with the work after an international tender procedure.
- PM Gyurcsány and MFA Kinga Göncz remained remarkably silent and refrained from criticising Russia during the Russo-Georgia war in 2008²⁰.

¹⁸ Ámon, Ada; Deák, András (2015): Hungary and Russia in economic terms – love, business, both or neither? In: Kurcharczyk, Meseznikov (2015)

¹⁹ Hungary's socialist prime minister, who headed a coalition government of the socialist MSZP and liberal SZDSZ parties between 2004 and 2009

²⁰ Kurcharczyk, Meseznikov (2015)

- There were allegations of covered business ties between Russian stakeholders close to the Kremlin and Hungarian business circles close to the Hungarian government through the Ukrainian oligarch Dmitry Firtash's gas company Emfesz.

Even though Viktor Orbán used to be a fierce critic of Russia before 2009, his views changed after a personal secret meeting with Vladimir Putin that year. His government, which has been in power since 2010, has been pursuing a policy line, which under the pretext of pragmatism is clearly characterised by elements that have increased Hungary's vulnerability to Russian influence.

- Even though economic cooperation between Hungary and Russia was on the rise before the 2008 crisis, the government loudly announced its Eastern Opening policy, which mainly focuses on increasing economic cooperation with authoritarian regimes (e.g., Azerbaijan, Russia, Turkmenistan etc.), and based the foreign policy on new foundations ("*economic interests ahead of values*")
- The Hungarian government tends to assign public development projects to Russian companies. The most blatant example of this is the extension of the Paks NPP, but there are other examples, too (e.g., renewal of metro cars).
- The Hungarian government is a fierce opponent of the sanctions imposed by the EU on Russia and Russian stakeholders. However, in EU bodies government representatives always vote with the mainstream in favour of prolonging the sanctions.
- There is a clear ideological proximity between the Russian and the Hungarian leadership. The government has applied harsh anti-establishment and "freedom fighter" rhetoric against the EU and the US (until the election of Donald Trump), and criticised the Western socio-political, economic and financial model. PM Orbán many times has praised the Euroasian Union and values that can be considered to be official state values in Putin's Russia (e.g., traditionalist, nativist, Christian, nationalist ideas).
- Despite the emphasis on national sovereignty and the "freedom fight" rhetoric against Hungary's Western partners such as the EU and the US, the government undertakes symbolic policies and measures to please the Kremlin. For instance, before Putin's visit to Budapest in February 2017, a new Memorial for the Soviet Red Army has been erected in Hungary for the first time since the end of the Cold War. Also, Patriarch Kirill is expected to visit Budapest to discuss the matter of the reconstruction of Orthodox churches financed by the Hungarian government.
- Also, the Hungarian government applies power political methods that are well-known from Russia. The Hungarian government follows Russian autocratic patterns in its fight against the free press and civil society organisations, and builds its oligarchic economy the same way.
- PM Orbán has reorganised the state structure and introduced a centralised government structure, in which political interests overwrite professional considerations. This leads to a weaker institutional environment, which has a weaker defence capability against foreign influence (e.g., functioning of the secret services²¹).

²¹ How political will might affect professional considerations is well reflected in Viktor Orbán's statement in Autumn 2016, when he said that "in Hungary, we do not feel like Russia threatens our national security". *Orbán: Oroszország nem fenyegeti a biztonságunkat.* (2016) Available at:

- Based on the Hungarian government's friendly approach towards the Kremlin's policies, some allege that either leading government officials have personal financial interests related to the Kremlin (e.g., through the gas trading company MET) or Russian secret services have compromising information on some of them.

Putin's latest visit to Budapest in February 2017 has made the Hungarian government's Kremlin-friendly policy line clearly visible. During their joint press conference, PM Orbán confirmed Vladimir Putin's stance on the Russia-Ukraine war by rejecting and relativizing Russian aggression in Ukraine, appealed against the sanctions as obstacles to economic prosperity, and expressed his commitment to extending the Paks NPP financed by a loan from Russia, which will further increase Hungary's political and energy dependence on Russia. Hungary's government seem to be in line with the Kremlin's strategy to strengthen "internal opposition" within the European Union and weaken European integration in order to secure and extend its power domestically.²²

Up to the election of Donald Trump, the Orbán government's long-standing opinion regarding the US was that military and economic cooperation is working well, but politically the relationship between the sides was subpar.²³ Since 2010, Viktor Orbán's regime has been criticised on several occasions by the US for the erosion of liberal democratic standards, systemic corruption, and the government's steps making the country more dependent on Russia.²⁴ Instead of acting to addressing the issues, the government usually proclaimed that no country should restrict the national sovereignty of Hungary,²⁵ blamed George Soros as the man behind criticism coming from the US, a claim supported by unsubstantiated statements.²⁶ Viktor Orbán has also regularly talked about the failure of "democracy export" and the coming end of Western dominance in world affairs.²⁷ However, with the new president, PM Orbán has hoped for a restart of relations. Based on their shared anti-immigration stance and rejection of liberal values, the Hungarian government expects the new administration to end criticism over autocratic measures (e.g., over the future crackdown on NGOs).

As far as the NATO is concerned, Hungary values the membership in the organisation and regularly participates in NATO initiatives. After the NATO summit in Warsaw in 2016, PM Orbán announced that NATO would strengthen the protection of its eastern flank without harming its

http://index.hu/belfold/2016/10/20/orban_oroszorszag_nem_fenyegeti_a_biztonsagunkat/ Last downloaded: 4 November 2016

²² Orbán continues to follow Putin's path (2017), Political Capital, http://politicalcapital.hu/news.php?article_read=1&article_id=399

²³ *Orbán az útdíjról: most tiltakozzon mindenki.* (2015). Available at: <http://www.atv.hu/belfold/20150109-utdij-orban-arra-kert-mindenkit-hogy-meg-most-tiltakozzon> Last downloaded: 4 November 2016

²⁴ *Soha ilyen durva kritikát nem kaptunk Amerikától.* (2015). Last downloaded: http://index.hu/kulfold/2015/10/28/soha_ilyen_durva_kritikat_nem_kaptunk_amerikatol/ Last downloaded: 4 November 2016

²⁵ *Orbán az útdíjról...*

²⁶ *Lázár: Soros György áll az amerikai kritikák mögött.* (2016). Available at: http://mandiner.hu/cikk/20160519_lazar_soros_gyorgy_all_az_amerikai_kritikak_mogott Last downloaded: 4 November 2016

²⁷ *Orbán titkos megállapodást sejt.* (2015). Available at: <http://www.origo.hu/itthon/20151202-orban-europat-lerohantak.html> Last downloaded: 4 November 2016

agreement with Russia, and within this framework a military command point will be established in Hungary.

In terms of the EU, the basis of the government's policy is that Hungary's EU membership is "unquestionable",²⁸ however, the European Union has been the focal point of the government's criticism. The European Union has been blamed for the migrant crisis and, consequently, for Brexit.²⁹ Prime Minister Viktor Orbán many times announced that he aims at a union of strong nation states with less centralised power at the European Commission. In his views, certain competences, such as migration and social issues, should be returned to member states³⁰. The European Union is expected to continue to be the main opponent of the government, as evidenced by PM Orbán's speech on October 23, 2016, warning against the sovietisation of Brussels.³¹

With regards to the opposition, one of Hungary's two main opposition parties, the far-right party Jobbik has a clear pro-Russian stance, which adds to the generally already high level of the country's vulnerability. Jobbik is part of the network of far-right and right-wing populist parties that Russia has built up in Europe to spread its propaganda and destabilize the EU. Clear signs of Russian influence within Jobbik contains the following elements:

- Jobbik's MEP Béla Kovács has been accused by Hungarian authorities of spying on EU institutions for Russia.
- The party advocates for policies (mainly related to energy policy) that are in line with Russia's economic and/or geopolitical interests (e.g., subsidizing vehicles fuelled by gas).
- Backing Russia's line of argumentation and moves in the Ukraine conflict (e.g., Jobbik politicians served as observers at illegal elections in Crimea and Donbass, the party launched a petition campaign in 2014 for the neutrality of Hungary in a possible conflict with Russia).
- Jobbik openly favours the ideology of Euroasianism instead of Euro-Atlanticism.
- Communication channels related to Jobbik spread Russian propaganda.
- Alleged financial ties with and funding from Russia through MEP Béla Kovács.

Despite Jobbik's clear pro-Russian stance, the party has tempered its anti-EU, anti-NATO and anti-US rhetoric along with party president Gábor Vona's repositioning and rebranding strategy³². While earlier the party was opposed to Hungary's NATO membership, in 2016 party President Gábor Vona announced "I do not believe it would be a sober thing to leave NATO", although he added

²⁸ Orbán: Oroszország nem...

²⁹ Orbán: azok után, hogy az EU nem képes megállítani a migrációs válságot, nincs mit csodálkozni Nagy-Britannia Kilézésén. (2016) Available at: <http://minap.hu/cikkek/orban-azok-utan-hogy-az-eu-keptelen-megoldani-migracios-valsagot-nincs-mit-csodalkozni-nagy> Last downloaded: 4 November 2016

³⁰ Orbán négy pontban reformálná meg az EU-t. (2016). Available at: <http://24.hu/kozelet/2016/08/26/orban-negy-pontban-reformalna-meg-az-eu-t/> Last downloaded: 4 November 2016

³¹ Hungary's Orbán rejects 'Sovietisation' by Brussels, defends nation state. (2016) Available at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-hungary-orban-idUSKCN12N0PJ> Last downloaded: 4 November 2016

³² Since the end of 2013, Jobbik has been pursuing a softening approach on the surface to reposition the party and move it from the far end into the middle right section. Although the party's rhetoric and visual elements have become softer on the national level indeed, the party's policies, its ideology and its membership has not changed and remained as radical as before.

that this does not mean that Hungary should get into a war with Russia.³³ Vona also said that leaving the EU is not actuality for Jobbik³⁴, however, the party would favour a referendum on ‘Huxit’.³⁵ Although Jobbik previously considered the Ukrainian crisis the direct result of US intervention and supported the Ukrainian separatists – including its senior politicians observing the Crimean “referendum -”,³⁶ the party has recently been quite silent on the topic.

The left-wing opposition has been highly critical of the government’s close cooperation with Russia and the Russian Federation’s intervention in Ukraine. The socialist party MSZP is split on the issue of Russia mainly due to a generational divide. While many party members whose political career started in the pre-1989 era have a positive approach to Russia, a new generation of party officials are more critical of the Kremlin’s actions. This division is reflected in the party’s neutral position as MSZP considers pragmatic economic relations with Russia a benefit for Hungary, although only after Russia fulfils its international obligations. Ex-PM Ferenc Gyurcsány has become critical of Vladimir Putin, and claims that the Putin of today is not the Putin of the past. The green LMP strongly rejects Hungary’s deepening relations with the Russian Federation and strongly supported Ukraine’s EU integration from the very beginning, whereas it also criticised the Ukrainian government’s steps against the ethnic Hungarian minority living in the country.³⁷ The country’s meaningful left-wing parties are, with the possible exception of LMP, fervently pro-EU, pro-US and pro-NATO. They consider Hungary as a country that must be a part of Europe and the West and they harshly criticise every step of the Orbán government that diverges from this pro-European path.

Experts attest that the government is quite pro-Russian, which makes Hungary highly vulnerable to pro-Kremlin influence. In addition, opposition parties are considered by experts to be slightly pro-Russian as a whole. Among the two largest opposition parties, MSZP is considered neutral, while Jobbik is – similarly to the government – pro-Russian. Experts considered four relatively small parties, LMP, DK, Együtt and PM as somewhat or strongly anti-Russian. Experts also confirmed that the Hungarian government is strongly against EU sanctions on Russia and that it has a firm anti-US attitude (*expert interviews were conducted in October 2016, before the US elections*).

All in all, the area of politics proves to be the highest risk factor in Hungary when it comes to vulnerability, as the governing party and one of the two most popular opposition parties, Jobbik are strongly pro-Russian, while only minor parties are firmly anti-Kremlin.

³³ Vona: *a Jobbik számára már nem aktuális az EU-ból való kilépés*. (2016). Available at: <http://24.hu/belfold/2016/06/01/vona-a-jobbik-szamara-mar-nem-aktualis-az-eu-bol-valo-kilepes/> Last downloaded: 4 November 2016

³⁴ *ibid.*

³⁵ *Jobbik-Chef: Mit dem Standpunkt des Papstes nicht einverstanden*. (2016). Available at: <http://derstandard.at/2000042537351/Jobbik-Chef-Mit-dem-Standpunkt-des-Papstes-bin-ich-nicht> Last downloaded: 4 November 2016.

³⁶ Vona Gábor: *Eurázsiai vagyok*. (n.d.). Available at: <http://www.oroszvilag.hu/?t1=sajtoszemle&hid=5170> Last downloaded: 4 November 2016

³⁷ Kucharczyk, Meseznikov (2015)

Question	Expert 1	Expert 2	Expert 3	Expert 4	Mean Score
2.2. Position of opposition parties towards Russia (1: strongly anti-Russia - 5:strongly pro-Russia)					3.49
2.2.1. Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP)	3	3	3	3	3.00
2.2.2. Jobbik	5	5	5	5	5.00
2.2.3. Politics Can Be Different (LMP)	2	3	3	2	2.50
2.2.4. Democratic Coalition (DK)	2	2	1	1	1.50
2.2.5. Together – Party for a New Era (Együtt)	1	1	1	1	1.00
2.2.6. Dialogue for Hungary (PM)	2	1	3	1	1.75
2.2.7. Solidarity for the Republic Party (SZKP)	3	2	3	3	2.75
2.2.8. Hungarian Liberal Party (MLP)	3	1	3	1	2.00

MEDIA

Since the dissolution of the Hungarian branch of *Voice of Russia* in late 2014, Hungary has had no pro-Kremlin media outlet present in the country³⁸, however, a part of mainstream media is voicing pro-Russian opinions and, after the eruption of the Ukrainian crisis, a large variety of fringe outlets sprung up to directly support the Kremlin's geopolitical goals.

Mainstream media outlets under the control of the government generally follow the government's foreign policy line quite tightly, including the Public Broadcaster (PBS). The pro-government heads of these media allow very little deviation from the official line. Since the public channel M1 was turned into an all-day news channel³⁹, it has played a major role in disseminating the government's messages, and played an active role in Fidesz's anti-West campaign, including broadcasts of US, EU and migration-related conspiracy theories⁴⁰. Furthermore, M1 is relentlessly using the rhetoric of pro-Russian propaganda, e.g. in the case of Syria it calls every opposition movement a "terrorist organisation" constantly.⁴¹ Moreover, TV2 has been purchased by Film Commissioner Andrew G. Vajna, which sometimes airs a "millionaires in hiding" segment, in which they use inaccurate information to attack people undesirable for the government.⁴² The large web portal Origo has also been subordinated to government control. Magyar Idők, which declared even before it started that it would be a "pro-government daily",⁴³ regularly shares the Russian viewpoint on the US, Syria and NATO⁴⁴. The all-day news channel M1 did not even inform people on that Russian state media labelled the Hungarian revolutionaries of 1956 as "Nazis"⁴⁵ and M1 failed to mention that the Russian Ambassador to Hungary was summoned by the Hungarian Foreign Ministry⁴⁶. Experts' opinion confirms that the PBS is under government control (mean score: 4.75), and they believe

³⁸ Krekó, P.; Győri, L.; Dunajeva, J.; Janda, J.; Kundra, O.; Meseznikov, G.; Mesik, J.; Szylar, M.; Shekhovtsov, A. (2016). *The Weaponisation of Culture: Kremlin's Traditional Agenda and the Export of Values to Central Europe*. Available at: http://www.politicalcapital.hu/wp-content/uploads/PC_reactionary_values_CEE_20160727.pdf Last downloaded: 4 November 2016

³⁹ *Keserves rajtot vett az M1 hírtévé*. (2015). Available at: <http://www.origo.hu/teve/20150320-m1-nemzeti-hirteve-rajtja-also-het.html> Last downloaded: 4 November 2016

⁴⁰ *Az "amerikai birodalom" nem akarja, hogy tovább gyengüljön a pozíciója*. (2015). Available at: <http://www.hirado.hu/2015/11/02/az-amerikai-birodalom-nem-akarja-hogy-pozicioja-tovabb-gyenguljon-allitja-bogar-laszlo/> Last downloaded: 4 November 2016

⁴¹ *A magyar közmédiá úg terjeszti az orosz háborús propagandát, mintha közvetlenül Moszkvából szerkesztenék*. (2016). Available at <https://444.hu/2016/12/16/a-magyar-kozmedia-ugy-terjeszti-az-orosz-haborus-propagandat-mintha-kozvetlenul-moszkvabol-szerkesztenek> Last downloaded: 22 March 2017.

⁴² *Soros után Spédernek ment neki a TV2*. (2016). Available at: http://hvg.hu/itthon/20160608_tenyek_rejtozkodo_milliardosok_speder_zoltan_fhb_soros_gyorgy Last downloaded: 4 November 2016

⁴³ *Igen, ez egy kormánypartí napilap*. (2015). Available at: <http://www.demokrata.hu/cikk/igen-ez-egy-kormanyparti-napilap> Last downloaded: 4 November 2016

⁴⁴ *Lavrov: Törvényes célponttá válhatnak a Washington által támogatott fegyveresek*. (2016). Available at: <http://magyaridok.hu/kulfold/lavrov-torvenyes-celpontta-valhatnak-washington-altal-tamogatott-fegyveresek-1140247/> Last downloaded: 4 November 2016

⁴⁵ *Lenácizták az orosz médiában az '56-os szabadságharcosokat*. (2016). Available at: <http://magyaridok.hu/belfold/lenaciztak-az-orosz-mediaban-az-56-os-szabadsagharcosokat-1125991/> Last downloaded: 4 November 2016

⁴⁶ *Közölték az orosz nagykövettel, hogy senki sem alázhatja meg az '56-os hősök emlékét*. (2016). Available at: <http://magyaridok.hu/belfold/kozoltek-az-orosz-nagykovettel-hogy-senki-sem-alazhatja-meg-az-56-os-hosok-emleket-1129147/> Last downloaded: 4 November 2016

that the coverage of the PBS is, on average, more biased than not. One expert mentioned that the structure of the PBS is highly centralised, “there is no public social control over the main decision-maker, the Media Service Support and Asset Management Fund and its managing director”. This is confirmed by Democracy Reporting International’s analysis on the PBS. The PBS is bound by the highest standards of balanced reporting, yet it was found that during the campaign for the October 2 quota referendum, the news channel M1 supported the government’s position 95% of the time.⁴⁷

Other pro-government media mentioned above was rated by experts as either mostly or fully inaccurate and biased. Experts state that mainstream media sometimes use RT and Sputnik as news sources, as Magyar Idők did when it wrote about George Soros and Hillary Clinton calling Breitbart’s Jewish founder Andrew Breitbart anti-Semitic.⁴⁸ These media outlets combined have the potential to reach a wide part of the Hungarian audience, subjecting them to highly inaccurate information, significantly increasing the country’s vulnerability.

In terms of the non-government owned media, the largest commercial channel RTL and the most read online portal Index are the two that reach the widest audience. Experts state that media outlets not belonging to pro-government oligarchs provide mostly accurate coverage. An interesting case is the daily Magyar Nemzet, which is owned by former Fidesz-ally and oligarch Lajos Simicska. The paper used to even criticise Fidesz’s Atlanticist stance before the party turned to the East and after the inauguration of the second Orbán-government Magyar Nemzet closely followed the party line. One of their journalists, foreign policy editor Gábor Stier has been a regular guest and reporter at the Valdai Club meeting for pro-Russian intellectuals⁴⁹ and wrote a piece praising Vladimir Putin’s speech at the Valdai meeting in 2015, right after one thanking Russia for “ending the Syrian bloodbath” with its intervention.⁵⁰ After the relationship between Lajos Simicska and Viktor Orbán quickly deteriorated Magyar Nemzet started publishing more pro-Western articles.⁵¹ According to the experts partaking in this project, Magyar Nemzet is now a mostly impartial media outlet.

Experts claim that fringe media outlets are able to influence a part of the population. The most popular fringe media site on Facebook is *Világlátó* with just over 75 thousand fans, while the others do not even reach 25 thousand. One of the most important sites is *Hídfő*, which has 13 thousand Facebook fans and it is allegedly controlled by Russian intelligence services.⁵² The website had previously been operated by the far-right paramilitary group *Hungarian National Front* (MNA) and at the time it caused a diplomatic row between Hungary and Russia by sharing pictures of Hungarian tanks allegedly being transported on a train towards Ukraine. Suspiciously, the Russian Foreign Ministry almost immediately reacted to allegations by a rarely visited online portal. Since then, *Hídfő*’s been assigned a Russian domain.⁵³ Since the eruption of the Ukrainian crisis, *Hídfő*

⁴⁷ *Judging by results*. (2017). Democracy Reporting International. Available at http://democracy-reporting.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/DRI_Report_Hungary_2017_en.pdf Last downloaded: 22 March 2017.

⁴⁸ *Már a zsidókat is antiszemita a Soros-Clinton páros*. (2016). Available at: <http://magyaridok.hu/kulfold/mar-zsidokat-antiszemita-soros-clinton-paros-939607/> Last downloaded: 4 November 2016.

⁴⁹ Kucharczyk, Meseznikov (2015).

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

⁵¹ *ibid.*

⁵² *Orosz diplomaták hadgyakorlatot tartanak a rendőrgyilkos brigádjával*. (2016). Available at: http://index.hu/belfold/2016/10/27/orosz_hirszerezok_gyakorlatot_tartanak_a_rendorgyilkos_harcosaival/ Last downloaded: 4 November 2016

⁵³ *ibid.*

has been solely focused on spreading the Kremlin's viewpoint and supporting Russian geopolitical strategy. Besides these, there are a large number of fake news sites spreading conspiracy theories, including ones on how migration is ruining Europe and the failure and destruction of the EU.⁵⁴ Although fringe media are capable of reaching a sizeable audience, it is more likely that there is a core readership, which is significantly lower in numbers than the amount of people liking the pages.⁵⁵

In terms of media ownership, experts attest that it is highly concentrated, and the trend seen recently is concerning. According to one expert, almost half a dozen large media owners left the country in recent years, while dominant media are falling under the ownership of pro-government oligarchs. Another expert writes about media ownership patterns in detail: Film Commissioner Andrew G. Vajna owns TV2, several other commercial channels and a radio station, the owner of Magyar Idők is also the owner of a radio station, Mediaworks – which owned the recently shut-down, left-leaning daily newspaper Népszabadság together with a plethora of local papers – has been bought by Lőrinc Mészáros⁵⁶, a close friend of Orbán,⁵⁷ while the unofficial advisor to the prime minister, Árpád Habony owns the only free daily *Lokál* and the online portal *888.hu*. Lőrinc Mészáros owns the majority of local newspapers, which are sometimes as popular locally as national media.⁵⁸ The pro-government oligarch has also acquired Echo TV, although this has a relatively small audience.⁵⁹

In terms of transparency of ownership, experts claim that neither pro- nor anti-government outlets fare well in this regards. One of the experts described the situation as being so complicated it often puzzles experts, while there have been cases where not even journalists knew who they actually worked for. There is no legal obligation in Hungary for media enterprises to disclose their ownership structures.

According to a report of the Hungarian Institute for Foreign Affairs and Trade (KKI), Hungary is a part of the Kremlin's anti-EU/NATO propaganda aimed at the domestic audience. However, Russian propaganda aimed at the Western audience uses Hungary to attack Western political, cultural values. In this area, the share of highly biased, anti-Hungarian articles is 15%, which can be considered as an information attack. Moreover, Hungarian-related topics are often used in neighbouring countries to incite hatred and generate ethnic tensions. In this region, more than 20%

⁵⁴ *Gyűlöletből és rettegésből építik az alternatív univerzumot.* (2017).

http://index.hu/tech/2017/01/25/gyuloletbol_es_rettegesbol_epitik_az_alternativ_univerzumot/

⁵⁵ Political Capital material not yet published

⁵⁶ *Nem titkolják tovább, Mészáros Lőrinc az Opimus új tulajdonosa.* (2017). Available at

http://hvg.hu/kkv/20170303_nem_titoljak_tovabb_meszaros_lorince_az_opimus Last downloaded: 17 March 2017.

⁵⁷ *Mészáros Lőrinc-közeli cég kezébe került a Népszabadság kiadója.* (2016). Available at:

<http://24.hu/kozelet/2016/10/25/meszaros-lorinc-kozelebe-kerult-a-nepszabadsag-kiadoja/> Last downloaded: 4 November 2016

⁵⁸ *Csak egyvalaki lesz nagyobb a médiapiacon a Mészáros Lőrinc kezébe került Mediaworks-nél.* (2016). Available at

<http://24.hu/media/2016/10/26/csak-egy-valaki-lesz-nagyobb-a-mediapiacon-a-meszaros-lorinc-kozelebe-kerulo-mediaworksnel/> Last downloaded: 17 March 2017.

⁵⁹ *Mészáros Lőrinc megvette az Echo tévét.* (2016). Available online at <http://24.hu/belfold/2016/12/02/meszaros-lorinc-megvette-az-echo-tevet/> Last downloaded: 17 March 2017.

of articles that feature Hungarians are highly biased. This can be categorised as a dangerous information attack.⁶⁰

Overall, the mean score of the Hungarian media is 3.38. The government’s control of the PBS and a large portion of private media, combined with the pro-Russian and anti-West foreign policy of the government, has a significant role in making Hungarians more vulnerable to pro-Kremlin views.

Best practices

There have been several efforts created to list the “voices of Russia in Hungary”, which try to raise awareness regarding potential pro-Russian influences.⁶¹ The articles not only provide people with a list, but they give examples of how Russian propaganda sites try to manipulate public opinion and point out the connections between the Hungarian version and the original, Russian version of the same piece. The investigative portal *atlatszo.hu* managed to find out that the servers of several pro-Russian sites, such as *szentkoronaradio.hu* are operated in Russia. In an article the web portal *vs.hu* also included information on why fringe portals have been created. VS’s article also states that the purpose of the sites is to make the population doubt the validity of what they see and hear from the mainstream. These articles could be suitable to educate the population regarding these sites, however, more attention should be paid to such activities by top 10 media outlets to ensure that the message of these “lists” reaches a wide enough audience.

3.2.4. Impartiality of top mainstream public media in reporting on EU, US, Russia (1:fully impartial and accurate - 5:fully biased, inaccurate)					
Media outlet	Expert 1	Expert 2	Expert 3	Expert 4	Mean Score
1. RTL Klub	1	1	2	2	1.50
2. TV2	4	5	4	5	4.50
3. ATV	1	3	3	2	2.25
4. Magyar Nemzet	2	2	2	2	2.00
5. Népszava	2	3	3	2	2.50
6. Magyar Idők	5	5	5	5	5.00
7. Origo.hu	4	5	4	5	4.50
8. Index.hu	1	1	2	2	1.50
9. 24.hu	1	1	3	1	1.50
10. HVG	1	1	2	2	1.50

⁶⁰ Tölgyesi, B. (2017). *Magyarország-kép az orosz és ukrán médiában, 2016-ban*. Külügyi és Külgazdasági Intézet. Available at http://kki.gov.hu/download/f/4e/a1000/01_KKI-elemzes_HUN_Tolgyesi_20170105.pdf Last downloaded: 22 March 2017.

⁶¹ *Nemzeti radikális hírportálok: Oroszország magyar hangjai*. (2016). Available at: <https://atlatszo.hu/2014/08/26/nemzeti-radikalis-hirportalok-oroszország-magyar-hangjai/> Last downloaded: 4 November 2016; *Bivalybasznádi álhírvállalkozók és Oroszország hangjai*. (2016). Available at: <http://vs.hu/kozelet/osszes/bivalybasznadi-alhivallalkozok-es-oroszország-magyar-hangjai-0407#!s21> Last downloaded: 4 November 2016

STATE COUNTERMEASURES AND STRUCTURES

Hungary's latest document on its security policy was promulgated in 2012,⁶² which bears no mention of Russia. In November 2016, a working group was formed to re-evaluate the National Security Strategy of Hungary,⁶³ however, it is unlikely that this will include Russia as a threat considering the fact that Prime Minister Viktor Orbán⁶⁴, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó⁶⁵ and Minister for Prime Minister's Office János Lázár all claimed Russia poses no threat to Hungary⁶⁶. The strategy has not yet been updated, which is troubling, as the international environment has changed significantly in past years. Even at the time of a relatively cordial relationship it would have been necessary to address a potential threat from Russia, let alone at a time when the Ukrainian crisis is going on only a couple of hundred kilometres from the Hungarian border.

There are general official press releases stating that Hungary supports Ukraine's territorial integrity, the EU's policy regarding the annexation of Crimea and granting Ukraine visa-free status.⁶⁷ According to experts interviewed for this study, governmental documents mention the Russian Federation in connection with the Ukraine, but it is hard to distinguish if the country is mentioned in a positive or negative light. Respondents also mentioned that the Russian Federation's role is not portrayed in publicly available counter-intelligence documents in Hungary. The riskiest factor, according to respondents, is that almost no government policy is in effect to counteract Kremlin disinformation and influence, which is not expected to happen in the near future due to the government's firm pro-Russian stance. Experts also claimed that there are close to no dedicated state experts working on understanding and assessing the threat of Kremlin disinformation in government ministries, although one of the respondents – a former intelligence officer – stated that there are a few dedicated teams within institutions dealing with security issues. The existence of such dedicated working groups has been confirmed by an interview given by former counter-espionage officer Ferenc Katrein to Index.hu. However, he mentioned that individuals whose area of expertise is Russian influence are often moved to other departments as part of "internal reorganisations" or "optimizations". Katrein also told Index that the domestic political leadership

⁶² Governmental decree 1035/2012. Available at http://2010-2014.kormany.hu/download/f/49/70000/1035_2012_korm_határozat.pdf Last downloaded: 4 November 2016.

⁶³ *Munkacsoport alakul a nemzeti biztonsági stratégia felülvizsgálatára* (2016). Available at <https://444.hu/2016/11/24/munkacsoport-alakul-a-nemzeti-biztonsagi-strategia-felulvizsgalatara> Last downloaded: 17 March 2017.

⁶⁴ *Orbán: Oroszország nem...*

⁶⁵ *Szijjártó: Nem támadna meg Oroszország egy NATO-tagországot.* (2016). Available at http://www.portfolio.hu/gazdasag/szijjarto_nem_tamadna_meg_orszorszag_egy_nato-tagorszagot.245250.html Last downloaded: 17 March 2017.

⁶⁶ *Lázár magasról tesz az orosz információs hadviselés elleni védekezésre.* Available at http://index.hu/belfold/2017/02/08/lazar_magasrol_tesz_az_orsz_informacios_haboru_elleni_vedekezesre/ Last downloaded: 17 March 2017.

⁶⁷ *Bemutatkozott az új ukrán nagykövet.* (2016). Available at: <http://www.kormany.hu/hu/kulgaszdasagi-es-kulugyminiszterium/parlament-allamtitkarsag/hirek/2016-junius-13-an-csutora-zsolt-helyettes-allamtitkar-bemutakozo-latogaton-fogadta-ljubov-nepop-uj-ukran-nagykovetet> Last downloaded: 4 November 2016

often blocks Hungarian agencies from carrying out active measures necessitated by professional considerations.⁶⁸

Investigative journalists found out that the far-right paramilitary organisation *Hungarian National Front* (MNA), which was dissolved by Hungarian authorities before the end of 2016 after the group's leader István Györkös had shot a police officer, had connections to Russian military intelligence (GRU) and that Russian diplomats took part in airsoft drills organised by the MNA, which Hungarian secret services had knowledge of.⁶⁹ The Russian connections of the case are allegedly being investigated by authorities.⁷⁰ However, the Russian thread is officially never exposed in cases involving the activities of Russian secret services that threaten national security.⁷¹ This seems to be the case with MNA and also with Jobbik MEP Béla Kovács, whose case has been used for party political purposes instead of properly investigating and exposing Russian influencing efforts.

The Hungarian Constitution Protection Office filed a case against Béla Kovács right before the 2014 European Parliament election and the European Parliament later suspended his immunity.⁷² However, the fact that Hungarian secret services had been monitoring him since 2009,⁷³ that the investigation started right before the election, and that the investigation was prolonged for another four months in September 2016⁷⁴ suggest that Fidesz used the case as a tool in domestic politics to discredit Jobbik rather than as an opportunity to start taking Russian influence in Hungary more seriously.

The government, similarly to the Kovács Béla case, frames 'hostile foreign influence' according to its needs. The government started a campaign against George Soros and NGOs financed by him⁷⁵, accusing the businessman of trying to influence Hungarian domestic politics without any legitimacy. NGOs who receive funding from George Soros are labelled as "foreign agents" in the government's rhetoric⁷⁶, these organisations are sometimes accused of trying to bring down the government of Hungary.

⁶⁸ *Hungarian secret agent reveals in detail how serious the Russian threat is.* (2017.) Available at http://index.hu/belfold/2017/03/21/hungarian_secret_agent_reveals_how_serious_the_russian_threat_is/ Last downloaded: 22 March 2017.

⁶⁹ *Orosz diplomaták...*

⁷⁰ *Kivizsgálják az orosz szílat a bonyi rendőrgyilkosságnál.* (2016). Available at: http://index.hu/belfold/2016/10/31/kivizsgaljak_az_orosz_szalat_a_bonyi_rendorgyilkossagnal/ Last downloaded: 4 November 2016

⁷¹ *Orbán continues to follow Putin's path.* (2017). Available at http://politicalcapital.hu/news.php?article_read=1&article_id=399 Last downloaded: 22 March 2017.

⁷² *Tényleg, mi van Kovács Béla kémügyével?* (2015). Available at: http://index.hu/belfold/2015/11/24/tenyleg_mi_is_van_kovacs_belaval_jobbik_oroszorszag_kemkedes/ Last downloaded: 4 November 2016

⁷³ *A nagy Oroszország kovácsolta frigy* (2016). Available at: http://index.hu/belfold/2014/09/23/a_nagy_oroszorszag_kovacsolta_frigy/ Last downloaded: 4 November 2016

⁷⁴ *Nem csak kémkedés miatt nyomoznak Kovács Béla ellen.* (2016). Available at: <http://www.hirado.hu/2016/09/20/nem-csak-kemkedes-miatt-nyomoznak-kovacs-bela-ellen/> Last downloaded: 4 November 2016

⁷⁵ *Ki a faszagyerek? – Orbán Viktor.* (2016). Available at <https://888.hu/article-orban-2017-a-lazadas-eve-lesz/> Last downloaded: 17 March 2017.

⁷⁶ *Németh Szilárd: „Itt sokkal több lóvé van a háttérben”* (2017). Available at http://hvg.hu/itthon/20170314_nemeth_szilard_interju_szdsz_fidesz_soros Last downloaded: 17 March 2017.

Moreover, the country's communist past has not been dealt with properly, the list of secret agents working for the Hungarian Communist Workers' Party has never been made public. Therefore, there is a lack of information on connections between Hungarian and Russian decision-makers. The fact that the names of former secret agents from the pre-1989 era are unknown also gives ground to potential blackmail through which Hungarian decision-makers could be controlled. The opposition, both Jobbik and LMP, made attempts to have a law that would lead to the names of secret agents being revealed approved in the National Assembly, but all their attempts have been blocked by the governing parties.⁷⁷

Overall, the lack of state countermeasures proves to be another highly risky factor (mean score: 4.19) in the vulnerability of Hungary to Kremlin influences and this is unlikely to change in the near future. Due to the lack of any practices in this area to counter Russian influence, it is impossible to describe any "best practice".

⁷⁷ Az LMP tizenharmadszor is benújtotta az ügynöktörvényt. Available at <http://24.hu/belfold/2016/10/25/az-lmp-tizenharmadszor-is-benyujtotta-az-ugynoktorvenyt/> Last downloaded: 17 March 2017.

CIVIL SOCIETY

NGOs committed to the values of liberal democracy in Hungary have been subjected to constant attacks and campaigns discrediting them by the government. The organisations that are attacked are mostly advocacy or watchdog organisations dealing with human rights, the rule of law, checks and balances, and transparency, meaning that they often voice their reservations about the government's policies and reveal the abuse of human rights and power⁷⁸. The government's approach towards these NGOs clearly follows the Russian path, aimed at silencing and intimidating organisations that criticise the government. The attacks started in 2013 when organisations related to the NGO Programme of the EEA/Norway Grants were accused of being politically biased and paid political activists⁷⁹. Besides presenting NGOs as political actors and part of the leftist domestic opposition or "foreign agents" of an international alliance of leftist-liberal forces against the Hungarian government and nation states in general, PM Orbán's government has launched several attacks including legal and administrative measures, criminal investigations and communication campaigns against civil society organisations since 2013. In 2014, for instance, offices of some NGOs were raided by the riot police and several investigations into their legal and financial practices started. The police raid was later deemed illegal by a court and the investigations found no evidence of illegal activities by the NGOs. Such actions against NGOs have become part of the system. Lately, the office of Energiaklub, a staunch opponent of the extension of the Paks NPP was raided by the Tax Authority recently⁸⁰. NGOs seem to be under surveillance either by the Hungarian secret services or other (probably private) secret service providers⁸¹. In relation to the migration situation in 2015, NGOs that are dealing with the topic of migration came into the crosshairs of the government. As Hungarian-born US-philanthropist George Soros has become the main symbolic enemy of the government, Hungarian NGOs are being blackmailed by the government with their alleged ties to and funding from Mr. Soros. According to the government, these organisations are the agents of Mr. Soros. Deputy chair of Fidesz and head of the Parliament's national security committee Szilárd Németh announced in the beginning of 2017 that NGOs receiving foreign funding (mainly from Mr. Soros' Open society Foundations) should be "swept" out of the country. The parliament is expected to pass a new legislation in March or April to limit foreign funding or to require special registration or reports from NGOs that receive foreign funding. Such a notion clearly copies the Russian example. Even though none of the NGOs are specifically dedicated to

⁷⁸ Unpublished Political Capital study

⁷⁹ For a summary of attacks against NGOs in Hungary see: Timeline of governmental attacks against Hungarian NGO sphere (2017), http://www.helsinki.hu/wp-content/uploads/Timeline_of_gov_attacks_against_HU_NGOs_22022017.pdf

⁸⁰ *Házkutatást tartott az Energiaklubnál a NAV.* (2016). Available at: <http://444.hu/2016/10/13/hazkutatast-tartott-az-energiaklubnal-a-nav> Last downloaded: 4 November 2016

⁸¹ Deputy chair of Fidesz and head of the Parliament's national security committee Szilárd Németh allegedly asked Hungarian secret services to perform background checks on NGOs "connected to the Soros-network", as he believes they breached Hungarian and European legislation during the migrant crisis by encouraging refugees to break the law. *Németh Szilárd a titkosszolgálattal világgítaná át a Soros-hálózatot.* (2016). Available at: <http://vs.hu/kozelet/osszes/nemeth-szilard-a-titkosszolgualattal-vilagitattna-at-a-soros-halozatot-0927#!s22> Last downloaded: 4 November 2016

addressing the issue of Russian influence, their views contradict those of the Kremlin and the Orbán government in most issues.

Since the inauguration of the second Orbán-government in 2010, they have constructed a network of pseudo-civil organisations (GONGOs). Especially important within this group are advocacy-type organisations, whose sole objective is to counterbalance government-critical voices, defend the steps taken by the government through seemingly professional and independent comments, and react to statements critical of the government. Interestingly, the reasoning of these GONGOs in certain matters always match the argumentation used by the government, and most of these organisations are financed by the government indirectly⁸². Such organisations include among others the *Center for Fundamental Rights* and the *Civil Alliance Forum* (CÖF), which organised the so-called peace marches (*Békemenet*) to support government policies⁸³. There was a peace march for Russian friendship, where one of the organisers claimed the USA sent an enforcer-governor to Hungary, and the Russian friendship will be needed to protect the freedom of Hungary.⁸⁴ Another march lashed out against the EU, the US, where signs claimed that Hungary is occupied by the US as it was by the Soviets in 1956.⁸⁵ The organisation also regularly proposes legislation to restrict human rights NGOs.⁸⁶

Besides these organisations, there are small organisations with only a very limited outreach and support base, which are directly involved in spreading Russian views. These organisations have two functions. Their activities can be spread on social media as if they represent a significant opinion, and pro-Kremlin media can refer to them as credible local actors. One of these organisations, *Honfoglalás 2000* supports the government and its pro-Russian foreign policy and organised a plethora of protests supporting Russian-Hungarian friendship. Together with the *Nationalist Social Democrats*, the *Honfoglalás 2000* founded the *Friends of Vladimir Putin Circle in 2015*.⁸⁷ The task of the organisation is, according the press statement following its establishment, is to “inform the population on the incredibly successful work of the Russian president”. A slightly more visible organisation is the *Tolstoy Society*, which is headed by Sándor Lezsák, a Fidesz MP.⁸⁸ The organisation promotes political, economic, societal, cultural and sports-related cooperation between the two sides, and they have organised trips to Moscow for secondary school students.⁸⁹

There is a lively scene of paramilitary organisations promoting the Russian point of view. The main two are the *Army of Outlaws* and the *Sixty-Four Counties Youth Movement*, both of which are tied

⁸² Így pénzeli a Fidesz egy álcivil szervezetet, ami aztán „független civilként” védi a kormányt [This is how Fidesz finances pseudo-civil organisations, which then protect the government as „independent”]. *atlatszo.hu*. 2015.05.07. <http://oktatas.atlatszo.hu/2015/05/07/alcivilbebukottak/>

⁸³ Unpublished Political Capital Study

⁸⁴ *Készül a békemenet az orosz barátságért.* (2014). Available at: <http://www.origo.hu/itthon/20140123-keszul-a-bekemenet-az-orosz-baratsagert.html> Last downloaded: 4 November 2016

⁸⁵ *Békemenet Pesten: Nem leszünk Gyarmat!* (2012). Available at: <http://www.eszakonline.hu/itthon/36-parlament/5758-kormanyparti-tuentek-nem-leszuenk-gyarmat> Last downloaded: 4 November 2016

⁸⁶ Unpublished Political Capital Study

⁸⁷ *Megalakult a Vlagyimir Putyin Baráti Kör.* (2015). <http://444.hu/2015/10/30/megalakult-a-vlagyimir-putyin-barati-kor> Last downloaded: 4 November 2016

⁸⁸ <http://www.tolsztojtarsasag.hu/>

⁸⁹ *Moszkvában jártunk.* (2013). Available at: <http://www.tolsztojtarsasag.hu/en/magunkrol/moszkvaban-jartunk.html> Last downloaded: 4 November 2016

to the pro-Russian Jobbik. HVIM thanked Aleksandr Zakharchenko, the leader of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic, for allowing Hungarian POWs to return home,⁹⁰ while Betyársereg believes that Russia is the alternative to the dying West⁹¹ and admires Russian nationalists "for their readiness to fight".⁹² What makes the activities of these organisations concerning is that they are regularly endorsed by a rather strong far-right political players and neither side is trying to hide the connections between each other. János Volner, leader of the Jobbik parliamentary group, attended one of Betyársereg's events⁹³ and declared that Betyársereg could play a role in defending Hungary.⁹⁴ Jobbik's politicians also attend events of HVIM.⁹⁵

The *Hungarian National Front* (MNA) was a paramilitary organisation with direct connections to the Russian military intelligence service (GRU), whose officers even participated in airsoft drills organised by the group. After its leader had shot a police officer in October 2016, the group was eliminated by the Hungarian authorities. However, MNA was a key evidence for the Kremlin-backed radicalisation among far-right groups in Hungary⁹⁶.

According to experts interviewed, neither NGOs adhering to Western values nor government-organised/pseudo-NGOs advocating the Russian viewpoint have a sizeable impact on society, while academic work both addressing and disseminating Russian views were deemed almost completely negligible. One expert commented that it is practically only Political Capital's studies on Russian influence⁹⁷ and a growing number of pieces by investigative journalists⁹⁸ that deal with the topic in order to reveal Russian influencing efforts. According to the answers of one of the respondents, some members at certain university departments are active in promoting Russian views, but they do so rather in the media as "experts" and not by their proper research work. Experts believed that extremist and paramilitary organisations also have a negligible impact on society, however, "more mainstream media spreading their views or covertly endorsing them is rather influential."

Overall, civil society is unable to exert significant influence on society, neither those organisations addressing nor those promoting Russian propaganda are highly visible. Experts' answers suggest that the negligible impact of the academia and civil society organisations who address Russian

⁹⁰ *Thank you Zaharczenko!* (2015). Available at: <http://www.hvim.hu/hir/thank-you-zaharczenko-koszonjuk-zaharczenko> Last downloaded: 4 November 2016

⁹¹ *Antidogma: Európa haldoklik, Oroszország feltámad.* (2016). Available at: <http://betyarsereg.hu/antidogma-europa-haldoklik-oroszország-feltamad/> Last downloaded: 4 November 2016

⁹² *Az orosz hazafiak hadra foghatósága egyszerűen lenyűgöző* (2016), Available at: <http://betyarsereg.hu/az-orosz-hazafiak-hadra-foghatosaga-egyszeruen-lenyugozo-video/> Last downloaded: 4 November 2016

⁹³ *A Betyársereg éves seregszemlén vett részt Volner János.* (2016). Available at: <http://www.hidfo.ru/2016/03/a-betyarsereg-eves-seregszemlejen-vett-reszt-volner-janos/> Last downloaded: 4 November 2016

⁹⁴ *A Betyársereg a legütőképesebb hazafias önszerveződés Magyarországon.* (2015). Available at: <http://betyarsereg.hu/a-betyarsereg-a-legutokepesebb-hazafias-onszervezodes-magyarorszagon-interju-volner-janossal/> Last downloaded: 4 November 2016

⁹⁵ "Az ellenállás lángja sosem alszik ki" (2016). Available at: http://alfahir.hu/az_ellenallas_langja_sosem_alszik_ki_igy_zajlott_a_hvim_trianon_ellenes_felvonulasa Last downloaded: 4 November 2016.

⁹⁶ *Far-right murder of Hungarian police officer: pro-Russian radicalization in the CEE* (2016), Political Capital, http://politicalcapital.hu/library.php?article_read=1&article_id=320

⁹⁷ Juhász, A.; Győri, L.; Krekó, P.; Dezső, A. (2015). "I am Eurasian" *The Kremlin connections of the Hungarian far-right*. Available at: http://www.politicalcapital.hu/wp-content/uploads/PC_SDI_Boll_study_IamEurasian.pdf Last downloaded: 4 November 2016.

⁹⁸ *A nagy Oroszország...*

propaganda makes society slightly more vulnerable than the absence of the other group's work. One important factor in influencing society could be the presence of Jobbik around pro-Russian paramilitary groups and the party's effort to legitimise these organisations, which could play a large part in affecting the views of the youth.

Best Practices

Political Capital Institute⁹⁹ regularly publishes posts on Russian influence in Hungary and the V4 nations. In cooperation with Political Capital Institute and the European Values think-tank Globsec publishes a bi-weekly information monitor¹⁰⁰ and these are then translated to Hungarian and shared on Political Capital's blog.¹⁰¹ These articles provide a regular update on the topics of Russian propaganda and, additionally, are short and easily accessible, therefore they can be read quickly. The posts also try to shortly summarise why the statements read in the report are untrue, which could help people understand how Russian propaganda sites distort news. It is, however, would be advisable if such reports also involved cooperation with the media, which would allow for the articles to reach a wider audience.

⁹⁹ http://www.politicalcapital.hu/hireink.php?article_read=1&article_id=314

¹⁰⁰ *Information war monitor for Central Europe: October 2016 Part 1*. (2016). Available at: <http://www.cepolicy.org/publications/information-war-monitor-central-europe-october-2016-part-1> Last downloaded: 4 November 2016.

¹⁰¹ *Célkeresztben a NATO*. (2016). Available at: <https://pcblogger.atlatszo.hu/2016/10/13/celkeresztben-a-nato/> Last downloaded: 4 November 2016

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Energy – and, to a smaller extent, economic - dependence on Russia has forced governments to keep relatively close ties with Russia, which made the political landscape in Hungary more vulnerable to Russian influence. To counter that, efforts should be made to diversify Hungarian energy policy and decrease dependence on the Russian Federation.
- It is essential that media enterprises in Hungary be legally required to disclose their ownership structures, which would effectively raise trust in the media in Hungary and allow citizens to know who is behind the publication where they gather their information from.
- A re-evaluation of the Hungarian National Security Strategy is needed as the one currently in effect is out of date and was written in a period where the geopolitical situation was rather different. The Hungarian government should introduce measures to effectively counter Russian disinformation campaigns.
- Civil control of the work of secret services should be increased and partisan party political influence on secret services shall be rolled back in order not to limit their professional capacity and scope of actions. In order to increase transparency, the secret services should publish annual reports to inform the public about the major threats and trends.
- International cooperation between media outlets and actors of the civil society is essential, as Russian disinformation is spread in all EU member states and it requires a concerted effort to analyse. Language barriers hinder the efficacy of thorough research in projects dealing with several countries, which also necessitates some form of cooperation.
- The media and civil society should also cooperate to disseminate counter-propaganda to a wider audience. In Hungary, where the governing party and one of the two main opposition parties as well as the government-backed media are silent about Russian disinformation efforts, or sometimes take part in it, it would be essentially important that efforts countering this influence reach a wider audience. Easy-to-digest tools, which can easily go viral on social media, are required to counter disinformation and pro-Kremlin propaganda.

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