

# RUSSIAN DISINFORMATION THREAT: COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY OF CZECH AND SLOVAK APPROACHES<sup>1</sup>

Marek RECHTIK and Miroslav MAREŠ<sup>2</sup>

---

*This comparative case analysis focuses on the approaches of the Czech and Slovak governments to Russian disinformation activities, with particular attention to the securitization of the threat. The paper argues that the extent of energy relations with Russia plays an important role in the securitization of the threat posed by the said state. It employs a rational model of policy-making to better understand the rationale for the decisions of the actors leading to the different approaches taken by the governments of the examined states. The analysis shows that while the Czech approach seems to be driven mostly by security interests, in Slovakia, the economic goals are of primary importance, with the primary factor being the importance of energy relations with Russia. The Czech approach is considered as an appropriate one in this paper, as it allows for more objective threat assessment and consequently better preparedness and resilience, whereas a rather pragmatic approach of Slovakia leads to increasing vulnerability of disinformation activities.*

**Key words:** disinformation; Russian Federation; securitization; energy relations; rational model.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In 2014, after the armed intervention of the Russian forces, a referendum and the subsequent declaration of independence, the Russian Federation officially annexed Crimea (Grant 2015). This unprecedented aggression from Russia marked a significant turning point in the post-Cold war European security order (Averre 2016). A fundamental change came also with the new form of the Russian hybrid warfare during the intervention which employed cyber, kinetic and information operations dimension (Giles 2016). Since Russia's illegal annexation

---

<sup>1</sup> This article was written at Masaryk University with the support of a Specific University Research Grant provided by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic.

<sup>2</sup> **Marek RECHTIK** is a student of the follow-up Master's degree programme in Security and Strategic Studies at the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University in Brno (Czech Republic). Contact: [marrechtik@gmail.com](mailto:marrechtik@gmail.com). **Miroslav MAREŠ** is professor at the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Studies Masaryk University. Contact: [mmares@fss.muni.cz](mailto:mmares@fss.muni.cz).

of Crimea, there has been a significant increase in disinformation aimed at Western as well as other European states and Russian hybrid warfare activities have been described as “one of the main threats to the security of Europe as well as NATO since the end of the Cold War” (Oğuz 2016, 171).

At the Wales summit, NATO condemned Russia’s aggression and decided to respond to the threat of hybrid activities leading in development of the Readiness Action Plan and a strategy for combating hybrid threats (NATO 2019). European Union’s response was no different from NATO’s, as the European Parliament accused Russia of waging an undeclared hybrid war against Ukraine (including information warfare) and called for a strategy to counter the Russian propaganda campaign directed towards the EU and its eastern neighbours (European Parliament 2015). Both NATO and EU almost immediately began to securitize the Russian disinformation campaigns. At national level, however, member states’ responses were more diverse. The article will therefore try to answer the following research question: *Why have two both NATO and EU member states adopted different approaches to the Russian federation?*

To better understand the motives behind these differences, this paper will examine the issue through the lens of a rational policy-making model. This model is “based on the idea that political behaviour reflects the choices made by individuals working to maximize their benefits and minimize their costs“ which implies that the government should choose policies that maximize societal gains and minimize costs (Hague, Breslin and Harrop 2016, 84). Instead of focusing on the actions made by particular actors, the rational model analyses the rationale behind those actions (ibid.).

As the dependent variable (i.e. different outcome) for this analysis was chosen the securitization of the Russian disinformation threat. Further clarification of the understanding of securitization in this context is needed here. According to the Copenhagen school, matters become security issues when a securitization actor (government, bureaucratic apparatus, etc.) identifies them as a threat by means of a speech act and requires them to protect the referent object by adopting extraordinary measures (Buzan, Wæver and De Wilde 1998). The securitization is an intersubjective process that is directly linked to security threat assessments for which different countries have different thresholds (Eichler 2002) and the speech act is an essential part of this process. “A discourse that takes the form of presenting something as an existential threat to a referent object does not by itself create securitization—this is a securitizing move” (ibid., 26) To successfully complete the securitization process, the securitization move must be accepted by the relevant audience, which means that effective securitization is audience-focused (ibid.).

In this paper, the variable will refer to the securitization move itself (i.e. to a speech act that aims to recognize the Russian disinformation campaign as a threat) because the author aims to examine the decisions of the policymakers rather than the reactions of relevant audiences. Our variable will be differentiated on a simple dichotomous scheme meaning that the securitization move is present or not. As an indicator for this variable, we choose explicit statements of the Russian disinformation threat in the key strategic documents of the examined countries (for the securitization move to be present, the documents must name both the threat of disinformation campaigns as well as the actor posing a potential threat).

The independent variable will be the energy relations with the state, which poses a potential threat. Given the scope of this work, the key and only indicator of this variable will be the import share of the energy supplies (namely solid fossil fuels, oil and petroleum products, natural gas and nuclear fuel) from the given state.

The following hypothesis emerges from the selected variables: *The greater the energy relations with another state, the less willing the government will be to securitize a potential threat from the said state.*

This paper uses a comparative case analysis, as it will aim to compare the specific security policy in two selected states. Since the analysis focuses on different approaches to the Russian disinformation threat, the author will use the Most Similar Different Outcome design. The logic of the chosen design is to select as similar cases as possible to be able to “control” most of the unobserved variables (Berg-Schlusser and de Meur 2009).

The Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic were chosen as the most similar cases due to their differing outcomes in terms of approach to the Russian disinformation threat, while sharing a number of similarities. Following the logic of the research question, both states are members of NATO and the EU. In addition, both states also participate in Visegrad Group (and other Central European initiatives). As for one of the limits of chosen rational model which is sometimes described as „inadequately sensitive to the historical, political and cultural context“ (Levi 1997, 21), the selected cases partially alleviate this limitation because both countries share large part of common history since they formed one state until the end of 1992.

Regarding the time frame of the analysis, the paper will focus on the five-year period from February 2014 (marking the beginning of the events leading to annexation Crimea) to February 2020. The analysis will therefore include official strategic documents issued since 2014, most of which are published on the official webpages of the Ministries of Defence of both countries. The author will mainly use Eurostat data for the analysis of energy relations.

## 2 RATIONAL CHOICE THEORY

As this work will focus on the interests and rationale which stand behind the actors' decisions to choose different approaches to the same threat, rational choice theory will help to guide our analysis. For this reason, further explanation of the theory and its fundamental assumptions is needed. Rational theory is derived from neoclassic economic theory, which views particular outcomes as the result of aggregated decisions of many rational individuals who seek to maximize their egoistic interests (Levi 1997). However, a rational approach should not be viewed merely as a pursuit of monetary assets that set aside social and other values. Rationalism allows for calculation of all political, social and economic values, not only those that can be measured by money (Dye 2013).

Rational choice theory may come in many varieties; however, the key elements of all rational explanations remain the same. They consist of preferences, beliefs and constraints. Simply put, actors choose between alternatives and act consistently in relations of preference or indifference taking into account constraints and anticipated reactions and subsequently act in accordance with their beliefs (De Mesquita 2010). Our objective is to identify the actors' goals and

identify how they can achieve their goals in a given situation. In doing so, we aim to explain only the fundamentals, not a complete explanation of human motives (Hague, Breslin and Harrop 2016).

For this reason, rational choice theory employs a number of simplifying assumptions. First, rational choice assumes that individual behaviour is motivated by utility maximization. It is the basic premise that individual as well as institutional actors strive to maximize their goal achievement (Tsebelis 1990). Hence, rational policy is one that achieves „maximum social gain“ (Dye 2013, 18). In other words, governments should opt for policies which will result in gains to the general public that exceed costs by the greatest amount and in the same manner abstain from policies when the costs exceed the gains (ibid.).

The second assumption is that of self-interest of the actors. It says that actors make choices which they believe will lead to the most feasible outcome for them as defined by their personal values or preferences (De Mesquita 2010). However, this assumption can be somewhat misleading. As Levi (2009) points out, the rational choice does not require the assumption that individuals are self-interested, and interests of others can be taken into account. Hague, Breslin and Harrop (2016) argue that people also pursue altruistic projects because they sometimes take satisfaction from seeing other people achieving their goals. Accordingly, many decision makers may for example pursue national interests (De Mesquita 2010).

Other assumptions of the rational choice theory include „complete agreement on goals, knowledge of alternative policies, and the ability to calculate and select the policies with the greatest benefits and least costs“ (Dye 2013, 20). The assumption of rationality limits how actors choose their actions according to their preferences and beliefs, but it does not limit the identity of the actors. Therefore, the studied actors can be individual citizens, elites, leaders as well as states, IGOs, NGOs and other entities (De Mesquita 2010).

### **3 APPROACHES TO THE DISINFORMATION THREAT: CASE OVERVIEW**

#### **3.1 Czech Republic**

Shortly after the annexation of Crimea, the Czech Foreign Ministry issued a statement condemning Russia's actions and refused to recognize the independence of Crimea (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic 2014). After that, the Czech Republic joined the EU sanctions and since then has maintained a critical stance towards Russia, which is also reflected in the strategic documents. The Czech Security Strategy (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic 2015a), despite its publication prior to the beginning of Russian intervention, highlights the threat of hybrid warfare. It is implicitly aimed at Russia, as it states that some countries seek to alter the current international order and build exclusive spheres of influence by destabilizing neighbouring countries, and are ready to use hybrid warfare methods (employing unconventional military means such as propaganda, disinformation or cyber-attacks) to achieve their power goals.

A few months later after the annexation of Crimea, the Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Czech Republic (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic 2015b) was published and it stated that Russia has been fundamentally destabilizing the European security architecture. In spite of highlighting Russia as an important political and economic partner for the Czech Republic, the Concept declares that Czech foreign policy will depend on the Russian Federation's respect for international law and the territorial integrity and sovereignty of its neighbours.

In 2016, the Czech government approved an important document called the National Security Audit (Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic 2016), which aimed to find out how the Czech Republic is prepared to face the current serious security threats and assess the state's resilience to the presented threats. In this document, hybrid threats and foreign power influence have been identified as two of the top ten most serious threats to the state. For the first time in one of the Czech official strategic documents, the Russian Federation is mentioned here as an actor who employs disinformation campaigns as a means of information warfare, through which it tries to influence the state in various areas.

In accordance with the Audit, the Czech Republic established Centre Against Terrorism and Hybrid Threats as a specialised analytical and communication unit responsible for monitoring, evaluating and countering disinformation campaigns related to internal security. The centre's activities include the dissemination of information and spreading awareness about the given issues among the general and professional public (Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic 2019).

In the Defence Strategy of Czech Republic of 2017, Russia is presented as an actor responsible for deteriorating security situation in Europe, which is openly realizing its power ambitions and does not hesitate to violate the norms of international law. In addition, the document points out that Russia uses a number of hybrid campaign tools against EU and NATO member states, including disinformation campaigns and cyber-attacks (Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic 2017). The last two examined documents are the Long Term Perspective for Defence 2035 and the Concept of the Czech Armed Forces 2030 (Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic 2019a, 2019b). Both documents build on the Defence Strategy and designate Russia as an assertive actor guided by its power ambitions while increasingly employing hybrid means (including disinformation campaigns) to weaken cohesion of NATO and EU members.

We can see that the political acknowledgement of the Russian disinformation threat is at a high level in the Czech Republic and the securitization move is clearly present. In its key strategic documents, we can observe the explicit proclamation of the threat posed by Russian hybrid activities, including the disinformation campaigns. The credibility of government documents and measures is further enhanced by annual reports of the Security Information Service which point out to Russian influence activities on the state territory (Security Information Service 2019). The establishment of the Centre Against Terrorism and Hybrid Threats further increases resilience to disinformation campaigns.

### 3.2 Slovak Republic

The initial reaction of the Slovak Republic to the events in Ukraine was much the same as the Czech one. Slovakia condemned the gross violation of international law by the Russian Federation (Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic 2014) and subsequently joined the EU sanctions (despite subsequent criticism from then Prime Minister Robert Fico) (Vilček 2014). However, Slovak strategic documents show a different trend. The first of the Slovak strategic documents we will focus on here is the White Paper on Defence of the Slovak Republic published in 2016. This document reflects the changing security environment, which is characterized by increasing importance of non-conventional means of warfare such as hybrid threats. It also highlights the change of the revision of the European security architecture which is the „...result of the system of international law ... being questioned, as well as of the developments taking place in bilateral relations of the Russian Federation with Ukraine on the one hand, and with NATO and the EU on the other“ (Ministry of Defence of the Slovak Republic 2016, 33).

The year 2017 marks the creation of three key strategic documents, namely the Security Strategy of the Slovak Republic, the Defence Strategy of the Slovak Republic and the Military Strategy of Slovak Republic (Ministry of Defence of the Slovak Republic 2017a; Ministry of Defence of the Slovak Republic 2017b; Ministry of Defence of the Slovak Republic 2017c). However, the inclusion of the following documents can be viewed as quite problematic as neither of them is currently considered in force.<sup>3</sup> The Security Strategy is somewhat more critical than the White Paper as it describes the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation as an extremely worrying case of violation of the fundamental principles and standards of international law. Nevertheless, it still emphasises the importance of dialogue with Russia. With regard to hybrid threats, the strategy acknowledges that the armed conflict in Europe need not take the form of direct military confrontation between states, but it can take the form of hybrid warfare. The Defence Strategy conversely does not mention Russia or its activities, but it accentuates increase of hybrid activities and it assumes that the armed forces should be able to use their specific capabilities against hybrid threats. The Military Strategy is limited only to mentioning of the possibility to countering information-psychological operations or hybrid warfare.

The adoption of the Concept for Combating Hybrid Threats in 2018 (Government Office of the Slovak Republic 2018) brought a major breakthrough in the Slovak approach. The purpose of the Concept is to establish a mechanism for the exchange of information and cooperation between relevant authorities to be able to evaluate and counter hybrid threats. It states that Slovak Republic, as a part of the European security environment, faces the same threats as other members of EU and NATO, and therefore cannot ignore this type of threat. It also highlights that an ongoing disinformation campaign spreading various narratives is taking place on Slovak territory.<sup>4</sup> The concept also mentions that authorities of foreign powers are often involved in propaganda and influence activities.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Despite being accepted by the Government in 2017, the document still has not been submitted to National Council for approval yet.

<sup>4</sup> For a detailed analysis of various narratives spread by pro-Kremlin media in Slovakia, see Ižak (2019).

<sup>5</sup> The Concept authorized the Situational centre of Slovak Republic as a National Focal Point for Hybrid Threats and main communication channel towards EU Hybrid Fusion Cell. It also designated National Security Analytic Centre of SIS as a National Cooperation Centre for Hybrid Threats with the objective of detecting and evaluating hybrid threats. However, so far there is no

Despite Slovakia's progress in recent years, there are still several problematic points regarding the securitization of Russian disinformation campaigns. In none of the examined documents are Russian disinformation activities explicitly proclaimed as a potential threat. The 2017 Security Strategy, being the only document critical to Russia here, still remains officially unapproved. Hybrid threats are mentioned in all of the examined documents, not to mention the separate document addressing this issue. However, in the Concept, we can observe the avoidance of naming the potential threat actors. Instead, the Concept refers to changes in the security environment that require action to be taken. Slovakia therefore remains silent to the Russian disinformation threat, in spite of intelligence services reporting on Russian hybrid activities against the Slovak population (Slovak Information Service 2019).

Given that the successful completion of securitization process entails acceptance of the threat by the audience, another drawback can be observed in terms of presentation of the disinformation threat to the general public. Although Peter Pellegrini (Prime Minister at the time) stated that he considered the non-adoption of the new Security Strategy to be simply a technical problem (as all the respective authorities follow its provisions), he misses the importance of the officiality of this fundamental strategic document and its presented threats to the public.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the Concept should not be considered as a document aiming for a public recognition. As an amusing example of relatively poor accessibility (and possibly low impact on the general public) of the document, we can mention interpellation of one of the parliament members asking whether any document for combating hybrid threats has been already released a year and a half after the publication of the Concept (National Council of the Slovak Republic 2019).

We can see that Slovakia not only remains reluctant to label Russia as a potential threat, it also fails to present the disinformation threat in general to the public, which is not only a prerequisite for a successful securitization process but also for "...increasing the level of security awareness of the public and public officials about the risks associated with the manifestations of hybrid threats" to cite one of the main goals of the mentioned Concept (Government Office of the Slovak Republic 2018, 7). All these factors subsequently lead to a state where Slovak Republic lags behind in strategic communications capabilities with many other potentially exploitable weaknesses in resilience against disinformation campaigns (Štepanovič 2019).

## 4 ENERGY RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA

### 4.1 Czech Republic

Economic relations between the Czech Republic and Russia are nowadays relatively modest, as the share of Russian import and export has declined since the start of Crimean crisis and the subsequent imposition of EU sanctions (see Figure 1).

---

authority responsible for monitoring and evaluating disinformation campaigns, as in the case of the Czech Republic.

<sup>6</sup> As stated in the Security Strategy of the Slovak Republic 2005 (currently in force), „[t]he effectiveness of the security policy of the Slovak Republic is by conditioned by ... the degree of identification of citizens with security goals and the ability of the government to gain the support of the general public for these goals” (Ministry of Defence of the Slovak Republic 2005, 8).

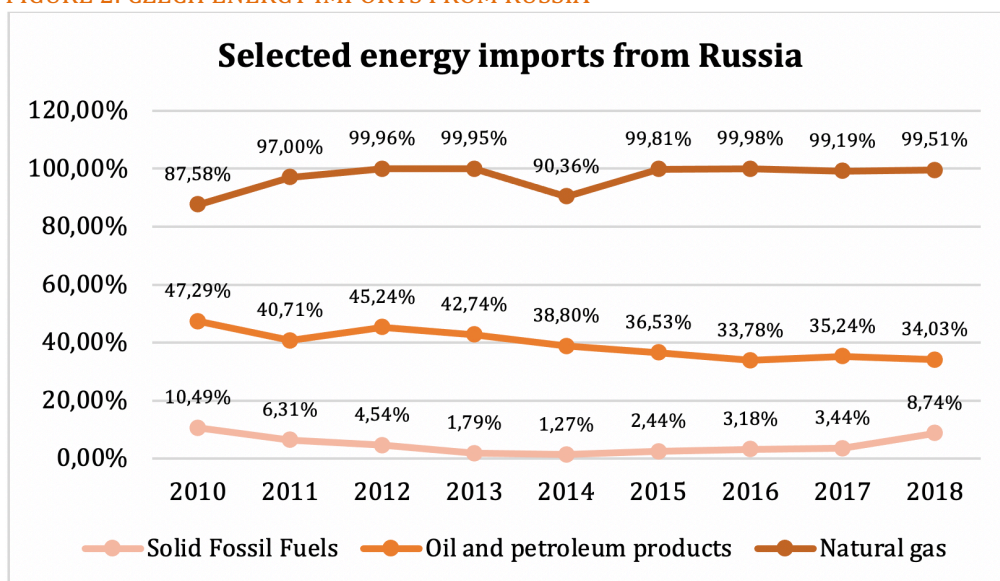
FIGURE 1: CZECH MERCHANDISE TRADE WITH RUSSIA



Source: World Trade Organization (2014; 2018) and ČSÚ (2019).

The total energy dependency of the Czech Republic has fluctuated between 30 and 37% in recent years (Eurostat 2020a), i.e. below the EU average (55%) (Lavička and Kačer 2019). This state is due to the Czech Republic’s long-term efforts to diversify the import portfolio and transit routes of oil and gas beginning in 1996 (Jirušek, Kuchyňková and Vlček 2020). The Czech Republic benefits from its substantial coal resources, which cover most of the total primary energy supply (see Annex A). Russia accounted for a maximum of 8% of total imports (see Figure 2). However, the situation in oil and petroleum products is completely different because approximately 98% of oil demand is met by imports (IEA 2016). Nevertheless, due to successful diversification, Russia’s share of total imports counts for roughly 35% in the last few years. The Czech Republic’s dependence on Russia is most evident in the natural gas supplies, as Russia accounts for more than 99% of total imports over the last three years (despite the ability to secure alternative supply in case of crisis) (Ministry of Industry and Trade of the Czech Republic 2015). The situation is similar in the nuclear sector, where the Czech Republic is currently 100% dependent on Russian supplies of fuel assemblies (European Commission 2019).

FIGURE 2: CZECH ENERGY IMPORTS FROM RUSSIA



Source: Eurostat (2020b, 2020c, 2020d).



Russia's influence in the Czech energy sector was also discussed with regard to planned building of a new nuclear units. After the annexation in 2014, the Russian Rosatom was excluded from the tender, however, the company is being considered as one of the possible contenders again (Investiční web 2020). The plans to engage Rosatom have been met with many security-related arguments (Havlíček et al. 2019).

Russia's aggressive stance towards Ukraine and other Western states, together with the ongoing sanction regime, have made it difficult to achieve any deeper economic or political cooperation (Kratochvíl and Svoboda 2018). An exception in this regard were the efforts of President Zeman to create a Czech-Russian Discussion Forum. This platform however failed to meet its expectations (Havlíček et al. 2019). The Czech Republic has decided to take an unyielding approach towards Russia, pointing out its violations of international law and threats in the foreign policy. Perhaps for this reason, Russia stopped viewing the Czech Republic as a partner with a potential for further development of the energy relations (Tichý and Dubský 2020). Altogether, the energy sector in the Czech Republic is characterized by relatively low level of politicization. There are no fears of negative Russian influence over its gas and oil supplies due to the existence of alternative supply routes. Nevertheless, the potential increase in Russia's presence in the energy sector is still viewed with caution (Jirušek, Kuchyňková and Vlček 2020).

#### 4.2 Slovak Republic

Slovakia's economic relations with Russia follow the same trend as Czech-Russian relations after the annexation of Crimea due to Slovakia's participation in EU sanctions. Russia's privileged position as a monopoly supplier of raw materials and at the same time as the main customer of Slovak production decreased after 2014 (see Figure 3), but the level of dependence on energy supplies remains high as the cooperation in the field of energy and fuel complex is the basis of Slovak-Russian economic relations (Kašťáková 2017). Despite Slovakia's efforts to diversify oil and natural gas supply after the gas crisis in 2009, its total energy dependence approximates 62% (Eurostat 2020a).

FIGURE 3: SLOVAK MERCHANDISE TRADE WITH RUSSIA

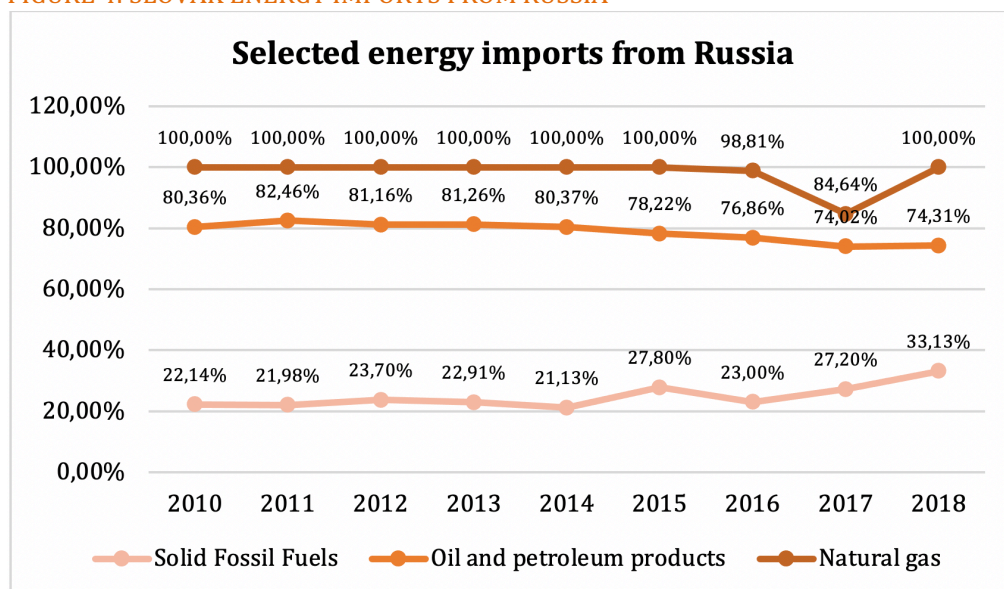


Source: World Trade Organization (2014, 2018).

Due to the fact that Slovak coal production has halved in the last two decades, it remains highly dependent on imports (OECD 2019). Russia is a main importer of solid fossil fuels (IEA 2018) and also a majority supplier of oil and petroleum products and natural gas (see Figure 4). Despite the successful diversification of both commodities, the potential disruption of Russian supplies remains a major economic risk (Bučka and Žentek 2019). Slovakia has therefore been among the EU countries most vulnerable to Russian supply cuts (Takáč 2018). In 2014, the government took over the dominant gas supplier Slovenský plynárenský priemysel which could provide further leverage to the Russian side (ibid.).

The vulnerability to Russian supply cuts is further increased by Slovakia's position as a major transit country. The Slovak government is interested in maintaining the country's transit which is viewed as an important part of Slovakia's energy security (Diallo et al. 2018). Gas transit generates substantial revenues to the state budget and the interest of the Slovak government is to keep this revenue at a maximum (Takáč 2018). Despite the construction of Nord Stream I in 2011 the Slovak position as the main transit route to the Russian gas remained. However, Gazprom's new Nord Stream II project could possibly make the Ukrainian and Slovak transit routes redundant and the government fiercely opposes this project. Consequently, the completion of this transit route would allow Russia to „play the transit countries against each other” (Takáč 2018, 225). Similarly to the Czech Republic, Slovakia is also 100% dependent on Russian supplies of fuel assemblies (European Commission 2019). In Slovak case, this dependency is further aggravated by the fact that the share of nuclear energy in total electricity production is more than 50% (IAEA 2019).

FIGURE 4: SLOVAK ENERGY IMPORTS FROM RUSSIA



Source: Eurostat (2020b, 2020c, 2020d).

Slovak-Russian relations are therefore characterized by a rather appeasing approach, by which Slovak politicians try to ensure favourable terms of supply and maintain transit revenues in the area of gas and oil (Takáč 2018). Although Slovakia joined EU sanctions, the then Prime Minister Fico persistently criticised their meaning (Novotný 2015; HNonline 2016). This was accompanied by the foreign policy that continuously emphasised the mutual dialog and the importance of economic relations with particular attention to energy (Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic 2020). Russia has been eager to maintain these relations and has regularly emphasised that positive

cooperation with Slovakia will continue with a potential for its deepening (regardless of any “short-term disagreements”) (Tichý and Dubský 2020, 6). All this should be viewed alongside the fact that Russia inclines to use its energy sector as a political tool (as with Russian retaliation to Slovakia for enabling reverse gas flow to Ukraine in 2014) (Mesík 2015; Takáč 2018), which puts Slovakia in a subordinate position implying vulnerability to Russian influence and potential indifference to the Russian disinformation threats.

### 4.3 Summary

If we look at the Czech Republic’s approach, we can see that the decision-makers have decided to put the security interests clearly first and began the securitization of Russian disinformation campaigns. All proclamations and steps were taken regardless of Russia’s potential response, as the ultimate goal was to achieve maximum resilience to the Russian hybrid activities. This was made possible not only by the Russia’s subordinate role in the Czech Republic’s overall trade, but also by successful diversification leading in significant reduction of energy dependence on Russia (despite still relying on imports of natural gas and nuclear fuel assemblies). Compared to security interests, economic gains were of secondary importance to the decision-makers when assessing the threats posed by Russia. This is also illustrated by the fact that potential increase of the Russian capital in the energy sector has been viewed with cautious approach rather than with anticipation of potential profit.

While the Czech Republic has decided to take a firm stance against Russian hybrid activities and disinformation campaigns in particular, Slovak Republic has taken a somewhat more lenient approach. It can be argued that Slovak policy towards Russia is ambivalent to a certain degree as it aims to maintain cooperation with Russia while also imposing sanctions and accepting countermeasures to its hybrid threats (in accordance with EU and NATO policies). This pragmatic approach is characterized by accentuating importance of energy relations with Russia while underemphasising threats which Russia poses to Slovakia’s national security. The economic motives for this behaviour are clearly visible as they are often highlighted in official documents.<sup>7</sup> The potential costs of adopting more critical approach to Russian hybrid activities were arguably seen as too high by the decision-makers given the level of energy dependence to Russia which is further aggravated by its position as a major transit country.

In conclusion, the Czech approach is seen as an appropriate one in this work, as it allows for more objective threat assessment and consequently for better preparedness and resilience to disinformation threats. While the Slovak approach can be advantageous especially from an economic point of view, it might have negative implications for the national security. Hence, the author’s recommendation for Slovakia’s policy is threefold. Firstly, Slovakia should take a more critical approach to Russia and should not prioritize economic gains over security interests in order to be able to objectively assess and effectively counter Russia’s hybrid activities. Secondly, decision-makers should make greater efforts to raise the awareness about Russian hybrid and disinformation activities to achieve greater resilience among all parts of society. Consequently, the government should direct its statements and intentions related to disinformation campaigns more towards the general public.

---

<sup>7</sup> The primacy of the economic rationale in mutual relations is also visible on the example of Slovakia’s decision to enable gas reverse flow to Ukraine after Russian cut-off despite the potential threat of retaliation by Russia (Deutsche Welle 2014).

## 5 CONCLUSION

The aim of this comparative case study was to find out why two EU and NATO member states have adopted different approaches to the disinformation threat. The rational model of policy-making was chosen as the most appropriate since it allowed us to better understand the rationale behind the decisions of the actors leading in visibly different outcomes. This model, however, allows only a limited interpretation of political reality, and therefore alternative explanations that would be reached on the basis of a different theoretical anchorage cannot be ruled out. For example, the chosen model did not allow for consideration of an ideological dimension, which undoubtedly represents an important aspect in the relations between the two countries examined and Russia. Nevertheless, the employment of rational model provided us with understanding of how the extent of energy relations with another state can affect the securitization of the threat from the given state.

This was demonstrated on the cases of the Czech and Slovak Republic. While these countries share a number of similarities, their approaches to the Russian threat of hybrid and disinformation activities differ significantly. Looking at the motives of the actors standing behind the differences, the Czech approach seems to be driven by security interests, while in Slovakia, the economic goals are of primary importance. As this work argues, this is due to the extent of energy relations with Russia, as the Slovak Republic is largely dependent on energy imports from Russia and gains substantial revenue from its position as a major transit route for Russian gas and oil. The current Slovak approach may have several negative security implications however (such as the vulnerability to Russian influence and disinformation threats), and therefore its modification needs to be considered. Change for the better may come with a new government elected in 2020 which committed itself to actively combat disinformation and hybrid threats (Government Office of the Slovak Republic 2020a). Most recently, Igor Matovič's Cabinet proposed an ambitious plan to set up a Coordinated mechanism of the Slovak Republic's resilience to information operations which could fundamentally help Slovakia in the fight against Russian disinformation and hybrid threats (Government Office of the Slovak Republic 2020b).

## REFERENCES

- Averre, Derek. 2016. "The Ukraine Conflict: Russia's Challenge to European Security Governance." *Europe-Asia Studies* 68 (4): 699–725.
- Berg-Schlosser, Dirk and Gisèle de Meur. 2009. Comparative research design: case and variable selection. In *Configurational comparative methods: Qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) and related techniques*, eds. Rihoux, Benoît and Charles C. Ragin, 19–32. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Bučka, Pavel and Miroslav Žentek. 2019. "Predstavuje Rusko bezpečnostnú hrozbu pre Slovenskú republiku?" *Bezpečnostné fórum 2019*: 16–25.
- Buzan, Barry, Ole Wæver and Jaap De Wilde. 1998. *Security: A new framework for analysis*. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- ČSÚ. 2019. "Zahraniční obchod ČR - roční údaje - 2018." Available at <https://www.czso.cz/csu/czso/zahranicni-obchod-cr-rocni-udaje-2018>.
- De Mesquita, Bruce Bueno. 2010. Foreign Policy Analysis and Rational Choice Models. In *Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of International Studies*. Available at <https://oxfordre.com/internationalstudies/internationalstudies/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.001.0001/acrefore-9780190846626-e-395>.

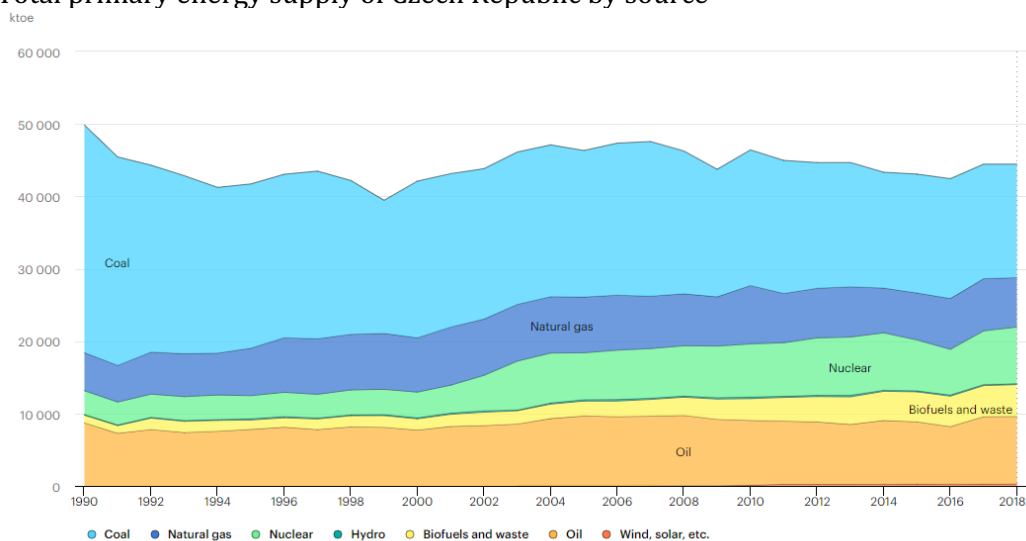
- Deutsche Welle. 2014. "Slovakia opens reverse-flow pipeline to carry gas to Ukraine." 2 September 2014. Available at <https://www.dw.com/en/slovakia-opens-reverse-flow-pipeline-to-carry-gas-to-ukraine/a-17895333>.
- Diallo, Alfa, Bettina Dézsi, Adéla Denková, Wojciech Jakóbič, Anna Jordanova, Enikő Kácsor, Tomáš Madleňák, Matúš Misik, Kamil Moskwik, Veronika Oravcova, Marcin Roszkowski, László Szabó, Borbála Takácsné Tóth and Ágnes Töröcsik. 2018. "Beyond gas' – energy security issues in the V4 after 2020." Available at <http://www.amo.cz/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/V4-Beyond-Gas-Beyond-2020-Final-Synthesis-Report.pdf>.
- Dye, Thomas R. 2013. *Understanding Public Policy. 14<sup>th</sup> edition*. Tallahassee: Pearson.
- Eichler, Jan. 2002. Sekuritizace. In *Česká bezpečnostní terminologie: Výklad základních pojmů*, ed. Zeman, Petr, 165–168. Brno: Mezinárodní politologický ústav.
- European Commission. 2019. *EURATOM Supply Agency. Annual Report 2018*. Luxembourg: Imprimerie Centrale. Available at <https://ec.europa.eu/euratom/ar/last.pdf>.
- European Parliament. 2015. "European Parliament resolution of 15 January 2015 on the situation in Ukraine." Strasbourg: European Parliament. Available at [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2015-0011\\_EN.html?redirect](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2015-0011_EN.html?redirect).
- Eurostat. 2020a. "Energy imports dependency." Available at [https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=nrg\\_ind\\_id&lang=en](https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=nrg_ind_id&lang=en).
- Eurostat. 2020b. "Imports of solid fossil fuels by partner country." Available at [https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=nrg\\_ti\\_sff&lang=en](https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=nrg_ti_sff&lang=en).
- Eurostat. 2020c. "Imports of natural gas by partner country." Available at [https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=nrg\\_ti\\_gas&lang=en](https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=nrg_ti_gas&lang=en).
- Eurostat. 2020d. "Imports of oil and petroleum products by partner country." Available at [https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=nrg\\_ti\\_oil&lang=en](https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=nrg_ti_oil&lang=en).
- Giles, Keir. 2016. *Handbook of Russian information warfare*. Rome: NATO Defence College.
- Government Office of the Slovak Republic. 2018. *Koncepcia pre boj Slovenskej republiky proti hybridným hrozbám*. Available at <https://www.slov-lex.sk/legislativne-procesy/-/SK/LP/2018/133>.
- Government Office of the Slovak Republic. 2020a. *Programové vyhlásenie vlády Slovenskej republiky na obdobie rokov 2020-2024*. Available at <https://www.mpsr.sk/programove-vyhlasenie-vlady-slovenskej-republiky-na-obdobie-rokov-2020-2024/800-17-800-15434/>.
- Government Office of the Slovak Republic. 2020b. *Koordinovaný mechanizmus odolnosti Slovenskej republiky voči informačným operáciám*. Available at <https://www.slov-lex.sk/legislativne-procesy/SK/LP/2020/507>.
- Grant, Thomas D. 2015. "Annexation of Crimea." *American Journal of International Law* 109 (1): 68–95.
- Hague, Rod, Shaun Breslin and Martin Harrop. 2016. *Political science: A comparative introduction. 8th ed*. London: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Havlíček, Pavel, Anna Jordánová, Michal Lebduška and Iva Svobodová. 2019. Eastern Europe and Western Balkans. In *Agenda for Czech Foreign Policy*, eds. Borčany, Vít and Pavlína Janebová, 37-45. Prague: Association for International Affairs.
- HOnline. 2016. "Fico: Sankcie voči Rusku sú nezmysel." 23 November 2016. Available at <https://slovensko.honline.sk/864260-fico-sankcie-voci-rusku-su-nezmysel>.
- IAEA. 2019. "Country Nuclear Power Profiles: Slovakia." Available at <https://cnpp.iaea.org/countryprofiles/Slovakia/Slovakia.htm>.
- IEA. 2016. "Energy Policies of IEA Countries: 2016 Review Czech Republic." Available at <https://www.iea.org/reports/energy-policies-of-iea-countries-czech-republic-2016-review>.
- IEA. 2018. "Energy Policies of IEA Countries: 2016 Review Slovak Republic." Available at [https://www.connaissancesenergies.org/sites/default/files/pdf-actualites/energy\\_policies\\_of\\_iea\\_countries\\_slovak\\_republic\\_2018\\_review.pdf](https://www.connaissancesenergies.org/sites/default/files/pdf-actualites/energy_policies_of_iea_countries_slovak_republic_2018_review.pdf).
- IEA. 2019. "Czech Republic." Available at <https://www.iea.org/countries/czech-republic>.
- Investiční web. 2020. "V Praze se uskutečnily schůzky s možnými účastníky tendru na jaderný blok." 1 February 2020. Available at <https://www.investicniweb.cz/news-uskutecnily-se-schuzky-s-moznymi-ucastniki-tendru-na-jaderny-blok/>.
- Ižak, Štefan. 2019. "(Ab) using the Topic of Migration by Pro-Kremlin Propaganda: Case Study of Slovakia." *Journal of Comparative Politics* 12 (1): 53–70.

- Jirušek, Martin, Petra Kuchyňková and Tomáš Vlček. 2020. Business as Usual or Geopolitical Games? Russian Activities in Energy Sector of the Czech Republic. In *Czech Security Dilemma*, eds. Holzer, Jan and Miroslav Mareš, 117–149. London: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Kašťáková, Elena. 2017. "Intenzita zahraničného obchodu medzi Slovenskom a Ruskom v súčasnom období." *Studia commercialia Bratislavensia* 10 (37): 44–53.
- Kratochvíl, Petr and Karel Svoboda. 2018. Russia in Czech Foreign Policy. Increased Contacts amid Increased Tensions. In *Czech Foreign Policy in 2017: Analysis*, ed. Kizeková, Alica, 176–182. Prague: Institute for International Relations.
- Lavička, Václav and Jan Kačer. 2019. "EU závisí v dodávkách paliv na Rusku. Česko je na tom se závislostí relativně dobře." *Hospodářské noviny*. Available at <https://infografiky.ihned.cz/eu-energeticka-zavislost/r~33a92d52fa6811e982ef0cc47ab5f122/>.
- Levi, Margaret. 1997. A Model, a Method, and a Map: Rational Choice in Comparative and Historical Analysis. In *Comparative politics: rationality, culture, and structure*, eds. Lichbach, Mark Irving and Alan Zuckerman, 19–41. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Levi, Margaret. 2009. Reconsiderations of Rational Choice in Comparative and Historical Analysis. In *Comparative politics: rationality, culture, and structure, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition*, eds. Lichbach, Mark Irving and Alan Zuckerman, 117–133. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mesík, Juraj. 2015. Economics and energy in Slovak-Russian relations in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. In *Diverging Voices, Converging Policies: The Visegrad States' Reactions to the Russia-Ukraine Conflict*, eds. Kucharczyk, Jacek and Grigorij Mesežnikov, 175–193. Warsaw: Heinrich-Böll Stiftung.
- Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic. 2017. "The Defence Strategy of the Czech Republic." Prague. Available at <http://www.army.cz/assets/en/ministry-of-defence/strategy-and-doctrine/defencestrategy2017.pdf>.
- Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic. 2019a. "Dlouhodobý výhled pro obranu 2035." Prague. Available at [http://www.mocr.army.cz/images/id\\_40001\\_50000/46088/11\\_dlouhodobovyvhled\\_proobranu2035.pdf](http://www.mocr.army.cz/images/id_40001_50000/46088/11_dlouhodobovyvhled_proobranu2035.pdf).
- Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic. 2019b. "Koncepce výstavby Armády České republiky 2030." Prague. Available at [http://www.mocr.army.cz/images/id\\_40001\\_50000/46088/koncepce\\_2030.pdf](http://www.mocr.army.cz/images/id_40001_50000/46088/koncepce_2030.pdf).
- Ministry of Defence of the Slovak Republic. 2005. "Bezpečnostná stratégia Slovenskej republiky." Available at <https://www.mod.gov.sk/data/files/833.pdf>.
- Ministry of Defence of the Slovak Republic. 2016. "Bielá kniha o obrane Slovenskej republiky." Available at [https://www.mod.gov.sk/data/BKO2016\\_LQ.pdf](https://www.mod.gov.sk/data/BKO2016_LQ.pdf).
- Ministry of Defence of the Slovak Republic. 2017a. "Bezpečnostná stratégia Slovenskej republiky. (Návrh)." Available at <https://knowww.eu/nodes/5be083801d79b861c647605f>.
- Ministry of Defence of the Slovak Republic. 2017b. "Obranná stratégia Slovenskej republiky. (Návrh)." Available at <https://knowww.eu/nodes/5be083801d79b83635476070>.
- Ministry of Defence of the Slovak Republic. 2017c. "Vojenská stratégia Slovenskej republiky. (Návrh)." Available at <https://knowww.eu/nodes/5be083801d79b8a8bd476061>.
- Ministry of Industry and Trade of the Czech Republic. 2015. "Státní energetická koncepce." Prague. Available at <https://www.mpo.cz/dokument158059.html>.
- Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic. 2016. "Audit Národní Bezpečnosti." Prague. Available at <https://www.vlada.cz/assets/media-centrum/aktualne/Audit-narodni-bezpecnosti-20161201.pdf>.
- Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic. 2019. "Centre Against Terrorism and Hybrid Threats." Available at <https://www.mvcr.cz/cthh/clanek/centre-against-terrorism-and-hybrid-threats.aspx>.
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic. 2014. "Prohlášení MZV k rozhodnutí Ruské federace o připojení Krymu." Available at [https://web.archive.org/web/20140322005321/https://www.mzv.cz/jnp/cz/udalosti\\_a\\_media/prohlaseni\\_a\\_stanoviska/x2014\\_03\\_19\\_prohlaseni\\_mzv\\_k\\_rozhodnuti\\_ruske.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20140322005321/https://www.mzv.cz/jnp/cz/udalosti_a_media/prohlaseni_a_stanoviska/x2014_03_19_prohlaseni_mzv_k_rozhodnuti_ruske.html)

- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic. 2015a. "Bezpečnostní strategie České republiky 2015." Prague. Available at <https://www.vlada.cz/assets/ppov/brs/dokumenty/bezpecnostni-strategie-2015.pdf>.
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic. 2015b. "Konceptce zahraniční politiky ČR." Prague. Available at [https://www.mzv.cz/jnp/cz/zahranicni\\_vztahy/analyzy\\_a\\_koncepce/koncepce\\_zahranicni\\_politiky\\_cr.html](https://www.mzv.cz/jnp/cz/zahranicni_vztahy/analyzy_a_koncepce/koncepce_zahranicni_politiky_cr.html).
- Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic. 2014. "Vyhlásenie MZVaEZ SR k aktuálnemu vývoju na Ukrajine." Available at [https://www.mzv.sk/aktuality/detail/-/asset\\_publisher/Iw1ppvnScIPx/content/vyhlasenie-mzvaez-sr-k-aktualnemu-vyvoju-na-ukrajine?p\\_auth=9d41xKan&\\_101\\_INSTANCE\\_Iw1ppvnScIPx\\_redirect=%2Faktuality%2Fvyhlasenia\\_a\\_stanoviska%3Fstrana%3D21](https://www.mzv.sk/aktuality/detail/-/asset_publisher/Iw1ppvnScIPx/content/vyhlasenie-mzvaez-sr-k-aktualnemu-vyvoju-na-ukrajine?p_auth=9d41xKan&_101_INSTANCE_Iw1ppvnScIPx_redirect=%2Faktuality%2Fvyhlasenia_a_stanoviska%3Fstrana%3D21).
- Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic. 2020. "Dokumenty k zahraničnej politike." Available at <https://www.mzv.sk/zahranicna-politika/dokumenty-k-zahranicnej-politike>.
- National Council of the Slovak Republic. 2019. "Interpelácia poslankyne Národnej rady SR (S. Petrik)." Available at <https://www.nrsr.sk/web/Dynamic/DocumentPreview.aspx?DocID=462585>.
- NATO. 2019. "NATO's response to hybrid threats." 8 August 2019. Available at [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_156338.htm?selectedLocale=en](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_156338.htm?selectedLocale=en).
- Novotný, Pavel. 2015. "Fico vyvolal v Moskve veľký záujem, kritizoval sankcie voči Rusku." *HNonline*. 6 June 2015. Available at <https://hnonline.sk/svet/518813-fico-vyvolal-v-moskve-velky-zaujem-kritizoval-sankcie-voci-rusku>.
- OECD. 2019. "Slovak Republic. Fossil fuel support country note." Available at <http://stats.oecd.org/wbos/fileview2.aspx?IDFile=282d6d1a-7a03-4bb4-b8a4-a643dab8a260>.
- Oğuz, Şafak. 2016. "The new NATO: Prepared for Russian hybrid warfare?" *Insight Turkey* 18 (4): 165–180.
- Security Information Service. 2019. "Výroční zpráva Bezpečnostní informační služba za rok 2018." Available at <https://www.bis.cz/public/site/bis.cz/content/vyrocnizpravy/2018-vz-cz.pdf.pdf>.
- Slovak Information Service. 2019. "Správa o činnosti SIS za rok 2018." Available at <https://www.sis.gov.sk/pre-vas/sprava-o-cinnosti-2018.html>.
- Štepanovič, Dominik. 2019. "Hybridné hrozby: Slabiny Slovenskej republiky ako ciele hybridných aktivít." *Analytický útvar Ministerstva obrany SR*. Available at [https://www.mosr.sk/data/files/3887\\_2019-c-05-hybridne-hrozby.pdf](https://www.mosr.sk/data/files/3887_2019-c-05-hybridne-hrozby.pdf).
- Takáč, Kristián. 2018. "Slovakia: Energy dependence vulnerabilities." In *The Russian Economic Grip on Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Shentov, Ognian, 221–231. London: Routledge.
- Tichý, Lukáš and Zbyněk Dubský. 2020. "Russian energy discourse on the V4 countries." *Energy Policy* 137: article 111128.
- Tsebelis, George. 1990. *Nested games: Rational choice in comparative politics*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Vilček, Ivan. 2014. "Sankce na Rusko nezabírají a poškozují střední Evropu, tvrdí Fico." *Novinky.cz*. 4 September 2014. Available at <https://www.novinky.cz/ekonomika/clanek/sankce-na-rusko-nezabiraji-a-poskozuji-stredni-evropu-tvrdi-fico-240460>.
- World Trade Organization. 2014. "Trade Profiles 2014." Genève: World Trade Organization.
- World Trade Organization. 2018. "Trade Profiles 2018." Genève: World Trade Organization.

## ANNEX

## Total primary energy supply of Czech Republic by source



Source: IEA (2019).



## RUSKA DEZINFORMACIJSKA NEVARNOST: PRIMERJALNA ŠTUDIJA ČEŠKIH IN SLOVAŠKIH PRISTOPOV

*Primerjalna analiza se osredotoča na pristope češke in slovaške vlade do ruskih dezinformacijskih dejavnosti, s posebnim poudarkom na grožnji listinjenja. Avtorja prispevka trdita, da ima obseg energetskih odnosov z Rusijo pomembno vlogo pri grožnjah listinjenja, ki jo predstavlja navedena država. Prispevek uporablja racionalen model oblikovanja politik za boljše razumevanje utemeljitev odločitev akterjev, ki vodijo do različnih pristopov vlad obravnavanih držav. Analiza kaže, da češki pristop večinoma temelji na varnostnih interesih, medtem ko so na Slovaškem primarnega pomena ekonomski cilji, pri čemer je glavni dejavnik pomen energetskih odnosov z Rusijo. Češki pristop se v tem prispevku šteje za ustreznega, saj omogoča bolj objektivno oceno nevarnosti in posledično boljše pripravljenost in odpornost, medtem ko precej pragmatičen pristop Slovaške vodi do večje ranljivosti dezinformacijskih dejavnosti.*

**Ključne besede:** dezinformacija; Ruska federacija; listinjenje; energetski odnosi; racionalni model.