Emotions of fear and anger as a discursive tool of radical right leaders in Central Eastern Europe

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The paper examines how the radical right parties' leaders work with emotions while addressing their voters and sympathizers on Twitter/X social media. We focus on the "supply side" on the level of leaders' discourses. The goal is to demonstrate how they work with emotions, especially those of fear and anger. The context represents Russian aggression against Ukraine, because, typically, circumstances of a crisis bolster the ability of radical right leaders to use emotional rhetoric devices. Czechia, Hungary, and Slovakia represent three particularly relevant and distinctive cases among the CEE countries according to the relevance, relative strength, and stability of radical right parties. We examined social media, particularly Twitter, since it is one of the most prominent tools of political communication today, especially for populists. We collected the data of all Tweets between February 24, 2022 and February 24, 2023. We combined a systematic quantitative content analysis with a more in-depth qualitative analysis of the key characteristics of the discursive construction of the two most salient emotions: anger and fear. We did not confirm the assumption that they would utilise the war in Ukraine since most tweets addressed issues related to domestic politics. The research, however, confirmed that despite differences, anger and fear play a substantial role in the emotional repertoire and represent necessary rhetorical devices. Our findings concur with the literature on radical right populism and its employment of emotional discourse. We found that even a crisis in international politics has been reframed primarily as a domestic issue and integrated into classical discursive practices.

KEYWORDS

Central Eastern Europe, radical right parties, Twitter communication, emotion of fear, emotion of anger

1 Introduction

The political impact and relevance of radical right parties (RRP) in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) are rising (Minkenberg, 2017), making the question of how their leaders work with emotions prominent in comparative party politics. Surely, emotional discourse belongs to repertoire of radical left and even centrist politicians, too. The following literature survey, however, indicates that there are specificities typical for far-right use of emotions, both in terms of intensity, and variety of emotions.

In this paper, we will analyse the "supply side" on the personal level. Based on original data Research Topic and analysis, we will examine the discourses of selected Central Eastern European (CEE) radical right leaders to demonstrate how they work with emotions, especially

those of fear and anger, against the background of the specific situation of the war against Ukraine. Such a political and societal context is particularly intriguing, given the populist positions adopted vis-à-vis the war by radical right leaders in the region and the issues that might arouse public emotions quickly, such as feelings of danger over migration caused by the conflict. Despite the context and the time period under study (February 2022 – February 2023), we do not focus only on tweets addressing the war against Ukraine. As we explain, the literature suggests that such circumstances bolster the ability of radical right leaders in using emotional rhetoric devices, especially to operate with fear and anger. We demonstrate that this assumption holds, with some relevant caveats.

Why pay any particular attention to cases in CEE? All of the European radical right parties have many features in common, such as nationalism, welfare chauvinism (Mudde, 2007), and especially mobilisation against minorities (Buštíková, 2018). Political discourses of Marine Le Pen, Matteo Salvini, Giorgia Meloni, or top politicians of Alternative for Germany (AfD) are employing the emotional language, typically addressing negative emotions vis-à-vis the migrants, and mixing populism with wide use of negative emotions (Özer and Fatmanur, 2021; Bonansinga, 2022; Martella and Bracciale, 2022). Still, CEE party systems reveal certain specificities, based on a historical context remarkable for the lack of liberalism and the specific role of nationalism compared with Western European mainstream (Minkenberg, 2002, 2017; Pirro, 2014, 2015; Pytlas, 2016). Many, and not only far right, CEE politicians are treating nation in ethnic and historical terms, placing nation, state, and even language as normatively isomorphous phenomenon (Kamusella, 2009: p. 56–61). Therefore, we can expect that exclusivist populist language, using negative emotions against any alleged external threats, will be a dominant withing the emotional toolbox of local far right politicians.

Czechia, Hungary, and Slovakia represent three particularly relevant and distinctive cases among the CEE countries. In the Czech Republic, the radical right has been represented in party politics with short breaks since the very early period of the democratic transition with no direct challenger from the mainstream. The migration crisis has increased the importance of the radical right, including mainstreaming radical right topics and (at least some) narratives (Wondreys, 2021). In Hungary, the radical right has to fight for voters with the ruling national-conservative populist party Fidesz (Goldstein, 2021). In Slovakia, radical right parties are more vulnerable than in Czechia (Rehák et al., 2021). They have faced multiple populist challengers, typically coming from the left side of the party spectrum. Therefore, although altogether all our cases belong to similar group of cases, we compare them to look for the subtler differences and potential diverging patterns within this group.

For all of the radical right leaders, the mastering of emotional discursive practices can complete and underline the content of the radical right discursive messages. Therefore, our paper will examine the role of the emotions of fear and anger in the discursive practices of three currently relevant CEE radical right leaders, Tomio Okamura (Freedom and Direct Democracy), Milan Uhrík (The Republic Movement), and László Toroczkai (Our Homeland Movement).

The article examines the emotions in tweets of selected CEE radical right leaders after Russia attacked Ukraine to answer the following question: How do contemporary CEE radical right leaders leverage emotions in their discourse, and in particular, how do they discursively construct the emotions of anger and fear? Covering the period between late February 2022 and late February 2023, the paper investigates and compares the Czech, Hungarian, and Slovak cases.

The paper is organised as follows. First, we address the role of emotions in politics in general and discuss the CEE radical right parties as specific producers of emotions of fear and anger. The following part introduces our data (tweets by the radical right leaders) and the method of analysis (content analysis). This is followed by presentation of the empirical results, and finally a discussion and conclusion.

2 Materials and methods

2.1 Central eastern RRPs as transmitters of emotions: theoretical considerations

Increasing attention has been paid to the research of emotions in politics (Lynggaard, 2019: p. 1201–1202). It is important not only what politicians say and to whom they address their message; the emotional style matters, too (Crabtree et al., 2020). Emotions and structural conditions play crucial roles in mobilising radical right voters (Kriesi, 2014; Salmela and von Scheve, 2017) and radical right online communication in general (Gerbaudo et al., 2023; Tuomola and Wahl-Jorgensen, 2023). The focus on negative emotions in this article stems from the fact that negative emotions are particularly important in the discourse of radical right politicians (Widmann, 2021), even forcing mainstream politicians to respond with positive emotions (Valentim and Widmann, 2021). More specifically, fear relates to discourse on powerlessness and hatred of outgroups. Anger is directed towards the political and cultural elites, which fail to protect "our people" (Caiani and Di Cocco, 2023: p. 12).

Salmela and von Scheve (2017) identified a psychological mechanism explaining how RRPs' rhetoric helps their followers transform shame and fear into anger accompanied by hatred and resentment towards the groups deemed responsible, like minorities or liberal elites. The role of emotional appeals increases during different crises (Widmann, 2022). In our case, the war in Ukraine may be a source of fear and Ukrainian migrants may be seen as an outgroup, arousing anger among CEE radical right voters and, therefore, becoming objects of negative emotional discourses by regional radical right leaders. The expected prevalence of negative emotions stems from the discursive tactic of the radical right of touching upon their voters' feelings of lack of control (Heinisch and Jansesberger, 2022). We can see that the literature offers good arguments and reasons to deal primarily with negative emotions such as anger and fear.

Furthermore, Leser and Spissinger (2020) argue that RRPs are very sophisticated in the use of affective politics based on the arousal of emotions. Therefore, we might expect that the basic strategy of arousing fear and anger will be complemented by the use of other positive emotions whenever the radical right politician addresses voters, in order to offer transgression of the emotional norms "imposed" by the liberal democratic political culture. For example, expressions of empathy are reserved for the "victims" of incoming migrants, not the migrants.

Widmann (2022) stressed the importance of context, showing that during the covid pandemic crisis, mainstream parties increased their use of fear; meanwhile, populist right-wing parties used more positive emotions to play down the risks stemming from disease and to

differentiate themselves from the negative governmental messages of fear. We assume that the Ukrainian war represents another type of crisis, where pro-Ukrainian mainstream parties will typically transmit positive emotions of hope and pride in assistance to Ukraine, or pathos of moral imperative to help and boost military spending. Radical right politicians will stress fear of war and anger against Ukrainian refugees.

2.2 Brief introduction of the analysed parties

As mentioned, we analyse three leaders of CEE far-right parties. Freedom and Direct Democracy is the oldest, being founded by Tomio Okamura in 2015 as a follow up of his first far-right party Dawn of Direct Democracy. Our Homeland Movement was founded by László Toroczkai in 2018. The Republic Movement is the youngest, being founded by the splinter from another far-right party Milan Uhrík in 2021. All of these parties are strongly dependent on the leader, all of them have the far-right profile from the scratch with no attempts to adopt any moderate position. The following table brings the basic survey of their current electoral performance.

All three parties are smaller, The Republic Movement even did not manage to cross the 5 % electoral threshold in Slovakia. All three parties have remained in opposition with the coalition potential limiting to zero. None of them ever had an experience with coalition governing. Therefore, they remain populist, far/right, protest oriented parties with a clear anti/establishment profile. In the period under our scrutiny, each party operated in different phase of the national electoral cycle. The last Czech parliamentary elections took part almost 4 months before the aggression started. The last Slovak parliamentary election took part more than half a year after the period we examine. Only Our Homeland Movement provided an electoral campaign at the beginning of it.

2.3 Data and method

Why examine discourses? Golder (2016) summarises that the explanation of the success of radical right parties has to do both with the demand side of dissatisfied and protest-oriented voters seeking "proper" representation and the supply side offered by the RRPs and their leaders. Werkmann and Gherghina (2018) analysed the profound impact of supply-side determinants of RRPs' electoral success, such as consistency of ideology, propaganda, and leadership continuity, to confirm that there is not only a demand side that drives the success or failure of these parties. As examples from Western Europe show, the personality of a leader is very important for right-wing voters, and the effect of the leader is more crucial for radical right populists than for any other voters (Kriesi, 2014; Michel et al., 2020). Well-developed rhetorical skills and devices are thus essential to any charismatic leadership.

We decided to examine social media, particularly Twitter, since it is one of the most prominent tools of political communication today, especially for populists (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2020; Theocharis et al., 2020; Lonso-Muñoz and Casero-Ripollés, 2023; Zahradnickova and Šerek, 2023). The emphasis on Twitter in this study is substantiated by its extensive usage and its significant surge in popularity since its launch in 2006 (Adi et al., 2014; Hansson and Page, 2022). This social media communication platform is used strategically by political elites to "attract voters, interact with constituencies and advance issue-based campaigns" (Adi et al., 2014: p. 1). Each Twitter handle of the RRP party leaders has accumulated quite a large number of followers, specifically Okamura (@tomio_cz) has 54,500 followers, Toroczkai (@ToroczkaiLaszlo) has 36,800 followers, and Uhrik (@MilanUhrik) has 2,460 followers. By publishing short posts online ("tweets"), users can share various forms of content, including text, images, links and/or videos. They can also add "hashtags" (words preceded by the # symbol) to "cross-reference messages on certain topics, classify the content, as well as construe interpersonal relationships and evaluations" (Hansson and Page, 2022: p. 6). Therefore, we specifically focused on the textual content published on Twitter while acknowledging the potential for future research to explore the content shared through links, images, and videos.

We collected the data in the following manner: We compiled a corpus of all Tweets by three radical right leaders (Okamura, Toroczkai, and Uhrík) during the year following the Russian invasion of Ukraine (i.e., between February 24, 2022 and February 24, 2023). The focus was exclusively on their individual Twitter accounts rather than the institutional accounts of their respective parties since we are interested in the production of emotions by individual radical right leaders. Indeed, as our research demonstrates, the leader's personality is one of the critical reasons for RRP voters to support such parties (Michel et al., 2020).

To analyse and interpret how the three politicians exploited emotions in their communication, we combined a systematic quantitative content analysis with a more in-depth qualitative analysis of the key characteristics of the discursive construction of the two most salient emotions: anger and fear. This mixed-methods design allows not only for capturing the breadth of emotional discourse but also for delving into the subtleties and nuances, making it a particularly apt approach for understanding the intricate dynamics of emotion exploitation in politics.

Implementing content analysis (Neuendorf, 2017) allows for assessing the scope of the given emotion in the politicians' rhetoric and its association with specific topics. After creating the corpus and cleaning it into a dataset, we conducted data analysis in the following steps. Each Tweet was registered as a single-meaning unit. Employing a deductive and iterative coding process, each Tweet was coded according to the emotions classification system developed by Parrott (2001).

As detailed and operationalised in Appendix 1, Parrott (2001) proposed a hierarchical model of emotions, which classifies emotions into primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. While the primary emotions are the most basic and general, secondary and tertiary emotions become increasingly specific and nuanced. Each successive tier within the model refines the specificity of the preceding level, systematically transforming broadly defined emotional categories into more differentiated and tangible expressions, thereby allowing for a nuanced understanding of how abstract emotions evolve into concrete emotional states. Here, we work only with the primary emotions (i.e., happiness, surprise, fear, disgust, anger and sadness). Yet, secondary and tertiary emotions helped us operationalise their detection in the tweeted discourses, as depicted in Table 1. In our pursuit of nuanced analysis, it was crucial to acknowledge the complexity of emotions that can be expressed in a single Tweet. It became apparent that a Tweet,

despite its brevity, could contain several emotions. Thus, we decided to assign two emotions to each Tweet, a decision grounded in our objective to capture the multifaceted nature of the emotions conveyed. In cases where only a single emotion was clearly discernible, we systematically assigned that same emotion twice to maintain consistency and rigour in our coding process. What is more, our approach accounted for both explicit and implicit emotional content within the analysed Tweets. Explicit content was characterized by direct expressions through specific words or phrases unequivocally manifesting emotions, such as "angry" or "afraid." In contrast, implicit content was discerned through a nuanced interpretation of context and subtler linguistic cues, including metaphor usage and the intensity of language, which subtly suggested underlying emotional tones.

Additionally, as seen and operationalised in Appendix 2, we aimed to ascertain the general thematic orientation of the emotion-charged tweets in the sense of whether they pertained more to domestic or non-domestic topics, and were related to Ukraine or not. We were also interested in the specific topics that particular emotions were associated with. Each Tweet was thus coded into one of nine topics, as seen in Table 2. The topics are products of open coding, which means that we established them after the first reading of the entire corpus. The topics are mutually exclusive, which means that each Tweet was assigned to only one of them. Somewhat surprisingly, we found that criticism of Russia hardly appeared in the tweets, and when it did on rare occasions, it was included in the "Other" category.

In order to delve deeper into the analysis and gain further insights into the patterns of fear and anger exploitation, we made a qualitative analysis of the discursive construction of these emotions, identifying similarities and differences across the three cases. In the following sections, we present the empirical results and discuss to what extent a single Central Eastern European pattern of the use of negative emotions exists, or whether national specificities prevail.

TABLE 1 Electoral results of the selected parties in the last parliamentary elections.

Party	Year of the last parliamentary elections	Percentage of the vote
Freedom and Direct Democracy (*Svoboda a přímá demokracie*)	October 2021	9.6
The Republic Movement (*Republika*)	September 2023	4.8
Our Homeland Movement (*Mi hazánk mozgalom*)	April 2022	5.9

Source: www.parties-and-elections.eu.

TABLE 2 Proportion of emotions in the tweets of individual politicians.

			Okamura	Uhrík	Toroczkai
All tweets			924	239	597
Tweets without emotions			424	14	222
			45.89%	5.86%	37.19%
Tweets with emotions*			500	225	375
			54.11%	94.14%	62.81%
Tweets with a specific primary emotion	Love	*count*	35	10	28
		% (of all tweets)	3.79%	4.18%	4.69%
		% (of tweets with emotions)	7.00%	4.44%	7.47%
	Joy	*count*	77	65	95
		% (all tweets)	8.33%	27.20%	15.91%
		% (of tweets with emotions)	15.40%	28.89%	25.33%
	Surprise	*count*	0	0	0
		% (of all tweets)	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
		% (of tweets with emotions)	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
	Sadness	*count*	19	37	45
		% (of all tweets)	2.06%	15.48%	7.54%
		% (of tweets with emotions)	3.80%	16.44%	12.00%
	Anger	*count*	389	176	235
		% (of all tweets)	42.10%	73.64%	39.36%
		% (of tweets with emotions)	77.80%	78.22%	62.67%
	Fear	*count*	94	55	90
		% (of all tweets)	10.17%	23.01%	15.08%
		% (of tweets with emotions)	18.80%	24.44%	24.00%

*One tweet could include more than one emotion (a maximum of two emotions was coded).

3 Results

3.1 Overview of empirical results

Let us first present the results of the quantitative content analysis, highlighting the general trends in the utilisation of emotional content by the three politicians. Table 2 illustrates that while there are similarities in the emotional content tweeted by the three politicians, there are also distinct differences in the frequency and distribution of the emotions. Tweets containing emotional content comprised more than half of the total tweets for all three politicians, demonstrating the salience of emotional communication in their online presence. Uhrík emerges as the one with the highest penchant for emotive language, with a remarkable 94.14% of his tweets containing emotional content. Toroczkai and Okamura, while less emotive than Uhrík, still presented considerable emotional content in their tweets, with percentages standing at 62.81 and 54.11%, respectively.

When examining the emotions expressed, anger and fear are the two most prominent. Anger emerges as the dominant emotion across all three politicians. Uhrík's engagement with anger is particularly staggering, as it forms 73.64% of all tweets and 78.22% of emotionally-charged tweets. Okamura also leans heavily into this emotion, with anger being present in 42.10% of all his tweets and an impressive 77.80% of his emotionally-laden tweets. Toroczkai, while also utilising anger, does so to a lesser extent, with the emotion found in 39.36% of all tweets and 62.67% of those with emotions.

Fear is the second most prevalent emotion, though it is expressed in varying degrees. Uhrík leads here as well, with fear present in 23.01% of all tweets and 24.44% of emotionally-charged tweets. Toroczkai's exploitation of fear is also notable, represented in 15.08% of all tweets and 24.00% of tweets with emotions. Conversely, Okamura exhibits fear in a more restrained manner, evident in 10.17% of all tweets and 18.80% of those with emotions. Other emotions such as love, joy and sadness are also present but in relatively lower magnitudes. Interestingly, none of the politicians used the emotion of surprise in their tweets.

Table 3 highlights the predominant concern with domestic issues in emotionally-charged tweets for the three politicians. Okamura had the highest concentration of domestic content (93.40% of all emotion-laden tweets), followed by Toroczkai (73.87%) and Uhrík (64.89%). This pattern clearly demonstrates a substantial focus on domestic

issues. A noteworthy similarity among the three is the near-equal lack of attention to Ukraine, with the figures relatively close, all hovering around 10%.

Tables 4, 5 present a detailed breakdown of anger and fear exploitation, suggesting how these two emotions were harnessed to resonate with specific topics. Reflecting the general tendencies previously described, Table 4 shows a common use of anger directed towards domestic issues. This is apparent with Okamura's anger-laden tweets, of which 94.86% concentrated on domestic matters, followed by Toroczkai's 70.21% and Uhrík's 59.66%. The use of anger in relation to Ukraine was limited, with the percentages being rather low and similar: Uhrík at 16.48%, Toroczkai at 12.77% and Okamura at 10.28%. A significant pattern was also found in the extensive utilisation of anger for criticising the domestic government. However, this varied significantly among the politicians: Okamura directed 65.04% of his anger-filled tweets at this target, compared to Uhrík's 34.09% and Toroczkai's 21.28%. Criticism of the EU was another area where anger was employed, with Uhrík leading at 17.61%, trailed by Okamura at 3.60% and Toroczkai at 2.55%.

Similar to the trend with the anger emotion, the data in Table 4 highlight that the utilisation of fear was concentrated on domestic matters. Okamura is again at the forefront, directing 91.49% of his fear-infused tweets towards domestic issues, with Toroczkai at 71.11% and Uhrík at 54.55%. Just as with anger, and emotions more broadly, the exploitation of fear concerning Ukraine-related topics was notably limited, with percentages ranging from 8.89 to 14.55%. Migration and refugees were the only topics for which all three politicians consistently leveraged fear more than anger. Conversely, for criticism of the domestic government, the EU, and energy issues, fear was put to use less often than anger. For all three politicians, the other topics did not consistently follow the trend showing a clear preference for either emotion – instead, the preferences for anger or fear varied among the politicians, depending on the topic. Both emotions were also harnessed only minimally for topics such as positive peace appeals and emphasising national interests across the board.

Let us focus on the most frequently mentioned topics before we embark on analysis of emotions in detail. Surprisingly, given the role of crises as fodder for radical rights rhetoric, the war in Ukraine was not the most intensively exploited topic, with the figures relatively close, all hovering around 10 per cent of emotionally charged tweets. Among emotionally charged tweets, most expressed anger or fear and the predominant concern remained domestic issues. Only Uhrík paid more attention to the EU, which can be explained by the far stronger pro-EU consensus among the mainstream parties in Slovakia than in the other two countries. All three leaders addressed the war in Ukraine as a means of fear-mongering, accusing the EU, Ukrainian leaders, or the domestic government of wanting to draw CEE into the war. Here again, war was interpreted almost purely in the context of negative domestic consequences. Foreign policy generally does not work as a full-fledged issue for radical right leaders but rather as a proxy for accusations and critiques of those in power and as a space for crafting dichotomies between "our people" and the world outside. The above conclusions are consistent with existing literature. Widmann (2021) sees anger as a tool to fight political opponents. These are, logically, primarily rival politicians at the national level and government parties, hence the "Brussels elites" (in the radicals' view, allied with domestic "liberal" politicians).

TABLE 3 General thematic foci of emotionally-charged tweets by individual politicians.

	Okamura	Uhrík	Toroczkai
Tweets with emotions	500	225	375
Domestic	467	146	277
	93.40%	64.89%	73.87%
Non-domestic	33	79	98
	6.60%	35.11%	26.13%
Ukraine-related	46	31	32
	9.20%	13.78%	8.53%
Unrelated to Ukraine	454	194	343
	90.80%	86.22%	91.47%

%, of all tweets with emotions.

TABLE 4 Anger emotion: general and specific thematic foci.

ANGER		Okamura	Uhrík	Toroczkai
		Total tweets including the anger emotion	Total tweets including the anger emotion	Total tweets including the anger emotion
		389	176	235
General focus	Domestic	369	105	165
		94.86%	59.66%	70.21%
	Non-domestic	20	71	70
		5.14%	40.34%	29.79%
	Ukraine-related	40	29	30
		10.28%	16.48%	12.77%
	Unrelated to Ukraine	349	147	205
		89.72%	83.52%	87.23%
Specific focus	Critique of warmongering	6	30	15
		1.54%	17.05%	6.38%
	Energy	55	17	6
		14.14%	9.66%	2.55%
	Migration and refugees	33	9	21
		8.48%	5.11%	8.94%
	Emphasising national interests	5	5	10
		1.29%	2.84%	4.26%
	Positive peace appeals	0	5	0
		0.00%	2.84%	0.00%
	Criticism of the EU	14	31	6
		3.60%	17.61%	2.55%
	Criticism of the domestic government	253	60	50
		65.04%	34.09%	21.28%
	Criticism of Ukraine	4	1	11
		1.03%	0.57%	4.68%
	Other	19	18	116
		4.88%	10.23%	49.36%

TABLE 5 Fear emotion: general and specific thematic foci.

FEAR		Okamura	Uhrík	Toroczkai
		Total tweets including the fear emotion	Total tweets including the fear emotion	Total tweets including the fear emotion
		94	55	90
General focus	Domestic	86	30	64
		91.49%	54.55%	71.11%
	Non-domestic	8	25	26
		8.51%	45.45%	28.89%
	Ukraine-related	9	8	8
		9.57%	14.55%	8.89%
	Unrelated to Ukraine	85	47	82
		90.43%	85.45%	91.11%
Specific focus	Critique of warmongering	5	17	6
		5.32%	30.91%	6.67%
	Energy	14	3	2
		14.89%	5.45%	2.22%
	Migration and refugees	9	6	13
		9.57%	10.91%	14.44%
	Emphasising national interests	1	1	1
		1.06%	1.82%	1.11%
	Positive peace appeals	1	0	0
		1.06%	0.00%	0.00%
	Criticism of the EU	3	8	2
		3.19%	14.55%	2.22%
	Criticism of the domestic government	54	19	12
		57.45%	34.55%	13.33%
	Criticism of Ukraine	0	0	4
		0.00%	0.00%	4.44%
	Other	7	1	50
		7.45%	1.82%	55.56%

How do we explain the lack of interest in the war as such? The discourse of radical right leaders must remain simple, and over-engagement in Ukrainian issues might lead to issue overload. It is still true that there are other "traditional" issues that radical parties typically focus on. For the radical right leaders, it has been a challenge to align the war directly with their nationalistic agenda of preservation of national identity and sovereignty. Even more difficult would be to reframe Russia, a traditional ally in the eyes of European radical right politicians (Carlotti, 2023).

3.2 Patterns of discursive construction of anger

A close examination of anger-laden tweets reveals recurrent patterns that illuminate specific communicative practices

exploited to evoke and amplify the emotion of anger. In what follows, we highlight four prominent characteristics: (1) use of intensely negative language, saturated with hyperbolic adjectives, (2) construction of the "us versus them" dichotomy, (3) various calls to action, and (4) evocation of a sense of betrayal of the people.

A salient characteristic across all three cases is the marked use of highly negative language, replete with loaded expressions and phrases imbued with severe negative connotations. For instance, in the illustrative example of "The Fiala government wants to steal from pensioners" by Okamura, the emotionally-charged verb "to steal" is used to imply criminality and wrongdoing. Typical here is the extensive use of exaggerating adjectives, with the leaders often beginning their statements with terms such as "crazy," "shameful" or "outrageous" that amplify the negative aspects of the issues being discussed and further fuel the emotion of anger. Dehumanising

expressions that provoke disgust are also present – evident, for instance, in Toroczkai labelling certain elites as "pig-headed lords" in order to emphasise his profound contempt.

Another linguistic device employed by all three leaders is the polarising "us versus them" dichotomy. This classic tool seeks to delineate between "Us" (the party and the people it represents) and "Them" (typically the domestic government but also, for example, the EU). Even though all three leaders are known for their Eurosceptic rhetoric, not all of them project this into their tweets. In contrast to the expected attacks on the EU, Okamura does so only marginally, defining himself more in opposition to the domestic government, whose actions he constantly contrasts with those of his own party ("Only SPD is against the state of emergency"; "The government coalition rejected the SPD's proposal to help disabled citizens"). In doing so, he systematically reinforces the sense of identity and belonging within the "We" group, since when an individual feels part of a group, s/he is more likely to develop strong emotional reactions, including anger, to perceived threats against the collective "We." Similarly, Toroczkai only sparingly references the EU, being significantly more vocal in his opposition to domestic government policies. Uhrík thus emerges distinctively as the only one who, in addition to criticising the government, also systematically stirs up anger against the EU as a foreign power ("This is not the EU we have entered! We joined the economic community [at least that's what they told us]. We have never given anyone permission to tell us how families should look like, how many immigrants we should accept, where to buy gas etc."). Interestingly, Uhrík is also the only one who self-positions himself as a defender of conservatism against the West and Western liberals who threaten the peace. He discursively constructs the liberals as a counterpoint to "decent people" and accuses them of aggression and warmongering ("The aggression of many "liberals" has really grown to the point of insanity and has nothing to do with the desire for peace. (.) Let us tell them ENOUGH!").

A common mobilising tool accompanying the invocation of anger is calls to action. These typically manifest as entreaties for governmental reforms, targeted either broadly at the government or specifically at the prime minister, or as calls for citizens to express dissatisfaction with the government's policies. To underscore the immediacy of these appeals, they are frequently punctuated with exclamation points and accompanied by negative emotions. Okamura exhibits the most restrained approach, eschewing calls for direct street action. Instead, he gravitates towards advocating for changes in the government's policies ("The government is not addressing fuel prices. We call on the government to make them cheaper") or making direct requests for governmental resignations. Diverging from this, Uhrík and Toroczkai take a more assertive stance, extending their appeals directly to their voter base, urging them to engage in demonstrations. To illustrate, Uhrík has called for protests outside the parliament against US military bases in Slovakia ("Today we go! All together – opposition, activists, citizens. All united against a corrupt and treasonous government") and advocated for a referendum on early elections ("We're going to a referendum! For an end to the rule of fools, for early elections. We call on the partners of the real opposition to unite and act together, let the signatures be collected as soon as possible"). In a similar vein, Toroczkai has beckoned citizens to attend a debate on the planned construction of a battery factory ("We are holding a public forum on this in Debrecen. We are waiting for

everyone!"), and in response to government austerity actions, he has even mobilised nationwide protests ("From tomorrow, we will be demonstrating across the country against austerity! (.) Locations and dates of the demonstrations (.)").

Lastly, to convey anger in their tweets, all three leaders typically accuse the domestic government of betrayal, specifically fraud or high treason. This is most evident in the case of Uhrík, who consistently levels charges of high treason against the Slovak government ("The handing over of MiGs to Zelensky is the last straw of the government's treasonous behaviour" and "Fascinating that Prime Minister Heger is not bothered by high treason"). Toroczkai echoes this sentiment, consistently directing his attacks at the Hungarian government and the Left alike, using both references to high treason and betrayal ("The whole leftist side serves pigs, we already know the amount of money. This is net treason!"). Compared to these two, Okamura's tweets are phrased more subtly, but he too insinuates governmental betrayal ("Fiala's government is gradually introducing a dictatorship").

3.3 Patterns of discursive construction of fear

While anger dominates the tweets, fear is less frequent. Its discursive construction also showcases discernible patterns across all three cases. Let us again highlight four prominent characteristics: (1) alarmist language, (2) evocation of threats, (3) portrayal of the domestic government as an enemy and danger to the "common people," and (4) references to authoritative sources and evidence.

In order to reinforce the emotion of fear, all three leaders exploit alarmist language, implying a sense of urgency. Typically employed are expressions evoking a sense of uncertainty and omnipresent (Uhrík: "We do not know how many of them [migrants] are former terrorists, jihadists or criminals") or future dangers (Okamura: "The price of electricity is threatening to."). The leaders' discourse does not shy away from invoking potent lexemes associated with dire outcomes such as death, killing, silencing a person, attack, and the like.

While anger is often directed at immediate actions or decisions made by the government, fear typically relates to potential future threats or uncertainties. Prominent among the evoked threats are those of conflict and violence, threats to economic security and threats to freedom and democratic norms. A salient topic discerned across all three leaders is fear-mongering about war. Contextualised within the ongoing war in Ukraine, Toroczkai warns against its spread ("If we do not want a third world war, Hungary must prevent #Ukraine from joining #NATO, since #Zelensky has just submitted his application for accelerated admission. We will try to prevent this"). Similarly, Okamura evokes fear that the government's policy towards Ukraine will draw the Czech Republic into the war ("We do not want war! We do not want the government of Petr Fiala (ODS) to drag us into war!"). For Uhrík, the war is even imminent ("Great #war on the way? Listen to this! There's talk of conquest in Brussels. Like a Hitler copycat").

A potent trigger for the emotion of fear is the adversarial portrayal of the government as an enemy that is very dangerous and destructive to the existing (traditional) social order and values. The discourse of

individual leaders evokes fear by accusing the government of anti-constitutional or anti-systemic actions, with Okamura *de facto* warning of regime change in the Czech Republic ("Fiala's government is gradually introducing a dictatorship") and Uhrík criticising the government for treason in a way that evokes an acute threat to the Slovak economy ("Isn't it enough that they betrayed Slovakia? They must also defraud it? The US stooge Naď is buying technology for billions: non-transparently, in a hurry"). By contrast, Toroczkai gravitates towards painting the government and individual ministers as incompetent and inconsistent and, therefore, a threat to the country and its citizens. While he tends to eschew direct allegations that the government demonstrates anti-regime or treasonous tendencies, his discourse is frequently imbued with insinuations, doubting the government's commitment to its proclaimed objectives or the broader interests of Hungary.

To bolster the perceived legitimacy of their fear-driven tweets, all three leaders deploy external references but do so uniquely. Okamura often employs the topos of authority, quoting or referencing authoritative figures or sources (economists, surveys, official data) to lend credibility to his claims ("Many people already think they cannot speak their minds without endangering themselves and their families, and that is the worst thing that could happen to us)," says ombudsman Stanislav Křeček (.)." Conversely, Toroczkai and Uhrik highlight content from opposing voices as counterpoints to spotlight their aversions. While Toroczkai tends to refer to the tweets of the personalities and media articles he opposes, Uhrík's modus operandi leans heavily on visual reinforcement, with a substantial portion of his fear-laden tweets accompanied by video content. These recordings (with accompanying captions) usually showcase speeches from prominent figures, notably MEPs or members of the European Commission, in order to evoke a sense of betrayal coming from the outside. A common thread weaving through these varied tools is an endeavour to present the audience with tangible evidence of the looming perils that society confronts.

Another recurring feature is the focus on target groups in the fear-mongering strategies. Yet, the specifics of these target groups and the issues that the leaders underscore reveal their distinct approaches. Okamura stands out by highlighting various negative impacts on vulnerable groups such as the elderly, families with children, and low-income individuals, eliciting a fear response rooted in empathy and concern for others ("Half a million seniors already live on the poverty line. Their standard of living is declining significantly, threatened, among other things, by rising energy prices"). In a contrasting approach, Toroczkai and Uhrík do not favour any particular social group. Instead, their tweets cast a wider net, aimed "at the whole population." This variation stems largely from the distinct thematic direction taken by each leader. While Okamura leverages fear by criticising the domestic government's economic policies, Uhrík elevates wider issues like warmongering and the EU ("There is a crisis coming, but the EU is preoccupied with the number of genders. It persists in its biased agro-politics and applauds sanctions. No one is addressing the repercussions on prices or if people will have enough to eat"). Such broad concerns drive Uhrík to adopt a generalised stance without the need to pigeonhole specific segments of the population. Toroczkai's stance, on the other hand, stands out for its eclectic range. This diversified attention to multiple subjects makes focusing on specific target groups less necessary, allowing him a more generalist appeal.

4 Discussion

4.1 Discussing the results

The role of the war in Ukraine has remained limited. Indirectly, the conflict supplies the radical right leaders with ammunition concerning Ukrainian migrants, allowing them to accuse the domestic political elites of failing to protect "our people" (Caiani and Di Cocco, 2023; Lonso-Muñoz and Casero-Ripollés, 2023). The finding that migration and refugees is the only theme in which all three politicians consistently leverage fear more than anger correlates well with expectations in the literature.

Our research showed that emotions matter in radical right discursive strategies, as captured in the tweets of Tomio Okamura, Milan Uhrík, and László Toroczkai, starting with the outbreak of Russian aggression against Ukraine. Our study confirmed that negative emotions play an essential role in the discourse of RRPs in CEE (Salmela and von Scheve, 2017; Widmann, 2021, 2022; Heinisch and Jansesberger, 2022). However, the findings do not depict a universally transferable pattern. While the majority of tweets in all three cases are emotional, the range is from more than 90 per cent by Uhrík to some 54 per cent by Okamura. Positive emotions played some role, too, and our research confirmed the ability of radical right leaders to employ a complex emotional spectrum in their tweets (Leser and Spissinger, 2020), albeit with the notable exception of surprise. Among positive emotions, joy stands out in terms of quantity. However, these are overwhelmingly *ad hoc* tweets, without any thematic coherence or patterns. These tweets typically combine joy and love, except a few tweets by Uhrík, who links joy and anger. However, even for him, tweets encompassing joy are practically ungraspable thematically.

Anger and fear are often related. As we know from the literature (Filsinger et al., 2023), anger "pays off" more than fear in mobilising voters. Our research, however, shows that combining both might be an essential tool for radical right politicians to convey their message. They both help to channel radical right voters' emotions into hatred against the groups deemed responsible for their self-perception as losers (Salmela and von Scheve, 2017). In our cases, RRP leaders in CEE use anger to reinforce the "us versus them" dichotomy, call the followers to action, and provoke the feeling of being betrayed by the elite. Fear works more like a passive background emotion paving the way for anger, which seems more suitable for political mobilisation. The alarmist language of fear aptly matches the negative language of anger.

The difference is based on the generally diverse levels of radicality in each leader's discourse and on the specific position of their parties. Uhrík and to some extent Toroczkai have to be more visible because competing parties like Smer, the Slovak National Party and Fidesz use parts of the radical right repertoire. They are positioned at one of the major poles of the Slovak and Hungarian party systems. Okamura does not face such serious competition, so he can base his strategy on a somewhat moderate approach. Among these three leaders, only Okamura is trying to garner at least some coalition potential vis-à-vis Andrej Babiš's technocratic populist movement, ANO. It is also true that the Czech Republic has a less strong tradition of nationalist and extremist expression at the parliamentary level than Slovakia and Hungary, and excessive radicalism could be damaging to Okamura. Moreover, Twitter is far from the only communication channel, so further research, analysing Facebook or YouTube presentations for example, might provide additional insights.

As we can see, the interplay between anger and fear, as manifested in the tweets of the three radical Central European leaders, is a

complex and dynamic process in which the two emotions complement each other.

Our analysis demonstrated that even though fear might seem secondary, it is strategically woven into the dominant fabric of anger. It acts as a perfect catalyst for anger and heightens the stakes. We showed that the tweets frequently introduce an element of fear by highlighting various potential threats, thereby creating a backdrop against which anger becomes a natural and justified reaction. The sense of fear is then leveraged to elicit a strong emotion of anger directed at the supposed culprits – be it the domestic government, the EU or any other entity. In other words, threat (real or perceived) creates a sense of vulnerability and uncertainty (fear), which is then channelled into a sense of betrayal and demand for action (anger). Interestingly, however, the converse is also true: anger sometimes exacerbates fear, intensifying threat perceptions. This interplay then creates a self-reinforcing loop, where anger causes fear and fear causes anger.

Our findings thus sit well with the literature showing that fear and anger very often co-occur, mutually intensifying each other and feeding off each other in a cyclical process (Salmela and von Scheve, 2017; Wodak, 2020; Gerbaudo et al., 2023; Tuomola and Wahl-Jorgensen, 2023): the fear heightens receptivity to messages of anger, and as this anger grows and spreads, it amplifies the initial fear, creating an escalating cycle of intensifying emotions. Leaders can mobilise their followers more effectively by alternating or combining these emotions in their discourse (Salmela and von Scheve, 2017).

5 Conclusion

In our paper, we analysed emotions in the tweets of three CEE radical right leaders and focused on the use of fear and anger in their discourse. We did not confirm the assumption that they would utilise the war in Ukraine since most tweets addressed issues related to domestic politics. The research, however, confirmed that despite differences, anger and fear play a substantial role in the emotional repertoire and represent necessary rhetorical devices. Our findings concur with the literature on radical right populism and its employment of emotional discourse. In the use of emotions, there is no such as specific CEE pattern, since the CEE politicians follow the same ways of using the (negative) emotions as their Western European counterparts, and taking migrants and mainstream policies as their main target.

We found that even a crisis in international politics has been reframed primarily as a domestic issue and integrated into classical discursive practices ("us versus them," rejection of the domestic government, targeting minorities, including refugees etc.). Anger and fear play mutually supportive and reinforcing roles, creating an argumentation loop that calls radical right followers into action and points to the alleged culprits of their troubles. Our main contribution to the literature on the use of emotion by the radical right lies in detecting domestic framing as the main way of dealing with foreign policy crises in radical right discourses, and dissecting the circular interplay between anger and fear.

Let us conclude by acknowledging the limitations of our analysis and outlining potential directions for future research. First, the geographical focus of our study might constrain the generalisability of our findings because of the specific features of the CEE radical right (Pirro, 2015; Pytlas, 2016; Minkenberg, 2017). Second, the article's focus is limited to one specific crisis and covers a restricted time frame of 1 year. The third limitation pertains to the utilisation of tweets as the sole data source for our analysis, as radical right politicians might also use other social media platforms for articulating their emotional discourses.

All these caveats, however, provide avenues for further investigation. Further research might orient towards collaborative projects, including countries and cases from CEE, western, and southern European countries, engage in analysing data collected from a larger variety of social media platforms, and cover a broader time period to capture the impact of diverse crises on the emotional discourses of the radical right.

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Ethics statement

Ethical approval was not required for the study involving human data in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. Written informed consent was not required, for either participation in the study or for the publication of potentially/indirectly identifying information, in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The social media data was accessed and analysed in accordance with the platform's terms of use and all relevant institutional/ national regulations.

Author contributions

VíH: Funding acquisition, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. MM: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. VrH: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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Supplementary material

The Supplementary material for this article can be found online at: https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpos.2024.1385338/full#supplementary-material

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