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THE TISZA EGTC AS A RESILIENCE TOOL FOR CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION

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Abstract:

This study examines how the Tisza European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (Tisza EGTC) at the EU-Ukraine border has evolved from a legal-technical cooperation instrument into a resilience node in a multi-crisis context. Anchoring the analysis in resilience debates in regional and cross-border governance, it first situates the Upper Tisza basin as a laboratory where cohesion, neighbourhood and enlargement policy logics overlap. It then reconstructs the genesis, governance and financial model of the Tisza EGTC, highlighting the importance of Hungarian core funding and balanced multi-level structures. The empirical core offers a project-level analysis of five thematic clusters – environmental risk management, waste and circular economy, border efficiency, institutional capacity-building and multilingual accessibility – showing how projects such as REVITAL I, ZeroWaste, Secure Borders, LEAD-UP, PLANNING4U and Language APL generate anticipatory capacities, institutional learning and cross-border problem-solving routines. The article argues that resilience in border regions is less about individual projects than about institutional architectures that combine hard and soft interventions over time. It concludes with reflections on the transferability of the Tisza model to Slovak-Ukrainian cooperation, outlining legal, financial and political preconditions, and pointing to the need for comparative research on EGTCs at external EU borders.

Keywords:

Cross-border resilience, EU-Ukraine border, Tisza EGTC.

Introduction

The EU-Ukraine border has moved from being a distant external frontier of the Union to a highly politicised and securitised contact zone, shaped first by the annexation of Crimea and then by Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022 (Freudlsperger – Schimmelfennig, 2023, pp. 843-871). This eastern borderland concentrates multiple vulnerabilities: military risk and security dilemmas, large-scale refugee and labour migration, environmentally fragile river basins such as the Tisza, and structurally weaker, peripheral regional economies. Border-regional research shows that such areas experience repeated "mobility shocks" and crises but also develop specific repertoires of adaptation and "border-regional resilience" rooted in cross-border institutions and trust (Prokkola, 2019, pp. 1587-1606; Hippe – Bertram – Chilla, 2024, pp. 186-207).

In parallel, "resilience" has become a central organising principle of EU policy, particularly after the financial crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. It is now embedded in the Recovery and Resilience Facility

and in the 2021-2027 Cohesion Policy framework, where it means "the ability to face economic, social and environmental shocks or persistent structural changes in a fair, sustainable and inclusive way" (Regulation (EU) 2021/241, 2021, art. 2(5)). This agenda stresses multilevel, place-based governance and cross-border functional regions as key arenas for resilience-building. The European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), created by Regulation 1082/2006 and revised in 2013, offers a stable legal personality for territorial cooperation across borders. Initially conceived as an operational vehicle for EU-funded programmes, EGTCs have increasingly been interpreted as multilevel governance platforms and even "supraregional" institutions that can coordinate strategic development across borders, including with third countries (Spinaci – Vara-Arribas, 2009, pp. 5-13; Evrard, 2016, pp. 513-537; Sararu, 2014, pp. 150-162). The Tisza EGTC, involving Hungarian counties and the Transcarpathian regional council, is the first grouping to include a third-country member from Ukraine and therefore a pioneering institutional laboratory at the EU's eastern border (Balogh, 2021, p. 51; European Parliament, 2023).

Against this background, the article addresses a core puzzle: under what conditions can an institutional instrument such as an EGTC evolve from a relatively technical implementation vehicle for projects into a node of territorial resilience at a highly exposed external EU border? Building on the experience of the Tisza EGTC, the study asks three interrelated research questions:

(1) How can an EGTC at the EU-Ukraine border develop functions that strengthen the capacity of local and regional actors to anticipate, absorb and transform in the face of war-, migration- and environment-related shocks, rather than only managing individual cross-border projects?

(2) Through which phases, mechanisms and partnerships have the Tisza EGTC moved from a mainly legal-institutional framework to an operational actor in fields such as environmental risk management, waste treatment and social support along the Tisza basin? (3) Which institutional design features, governance practices and cooperation routines from this model are potentially transferable to the Slovak-Ukrainian border, with its partly similar but also distinct geopolitical and socio-economic configuration?

The study offers three types of contribution. Empirically, it provides a detailed case study of the first EGTC involving a third-country member at the EU's eastern border, thus adding to the still limited literature on EGTCs beyond internal EU borders (Sararu, 2014, pp. 150-162; Evrard, 2016, pp. 513-537; Spinaci – Vara-Arribas, 2009, pp. 5-13). Conceptually, it seeks to operationalise "resilience" for cross-border cooperation practice by linking the border-regional resilience debate (Prokkola, 2019, pp. 1587-1606; Hippe – Bertram – Chilla, 2024, pp. 186-207) with the emerging policy understanding of territorial resilience in EU cohesion and neighbourhood frameworks. In policy terms, the article draws out lessons for the design of institutional cooperation at the Slovak-Ukrainian border, where EGTCs and similar groupings could play a stronger role as resilience-oriented governance nodes in the context of Ukraine's EU accession trajectory and the long-term reconstruction of its western borderlands (Freudlsperger – Schimmelfennig, 2023, pp. 843-871).

Theoretical framework and research design

Resilience in cross-border and regional governance

In the broader regional studies literature, "resilience" has evolved from a mainly ecological concept – the capacity of a system to absorb disturbance and reorganise while undergoing change – into a contested umbrella notion applied to cities and regions (Christopherson – Michie – Tyler, 2010, p. 3; Davoudi, 2012, p. 299). While early work distinguished between engineering and ecological resilience, more recent contributions stress evolutionary and place-based understandings that emphasise path dependency, institutional configurations and power relations (Davoudi, 2012, pp. 300-302). In this perspective, regional and borderland resilience concerns how territories cope with and adapt to serial shocks – economic crises, environmental hazards, geopolitical ruptures – while maintaining or renewing de-

velopment trajectories (Christopherson – Michie – Tyler, 2010, pp. 4-6).

This shift is visible in EU cohesion and territorial cooperation policy, where resilience has become a key objective alongside economic, social and territorial cohesion. The Recovery and Resilience Facility, based on Article 175 TFEU – the same legal basis as cohesion policy – explicitly links recovery investments with long-term territorial resilience and convergence (European Parliament, 2024, p. 2; European Commission, 2024). At the same time, recent work on territorial resilience argues that resilience should be understood as a multi-dimensional, territorially embedded attribute, depending on local capacities, governance arrangements and cross-border functional linkages rather than on isolated sectoral measures. In border regions, resilience debates intersect with the long-standing concern for territorial cohesion and Europeanisation: they highlight how institutional thickness, cross-border trust and multi-level arrangements shape the ability of border areas to manage crises and exploit integration opportunities (Christopherson – Michie – Tyler, 2010, p. 7; Medeiros, 2024, p. 4).

Border-specific research has begun to develop the notion of border-regional resilience, stressing that peripheral internal and external borderlands are exposed to compounded environmental, socio-economic and geopolitical pressures, but also generate specific adaptive repertoires through cross-border institutions and everyday cooperation (Prokkola, 2019, pp. 1588-1589). Empirical analyses show that convergence and resilience patterns in EU border regions are strongly conditioned by cross-border accessibility, institutional cooperation and integration into wider networks (Hippe – Bertram – Chilla, 2024, pp. 187-189). For EU external borders – including the EU-Ukraine frontier – this literature suggests that resilience depends not only on EU funding flows, but on the capacity of cross-border governance frameworks to stabilise expectations, coordinate investments and manage cross-border risks.

EGTCs as legal-institutional instruments

Within this governance landscape, the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) is a relatively new legal instrument created by Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006 and amended in 2013. EGTCs are EU law entities with legal personality, enabling regional and local authorities from at least two Member States to plan and implement joint actions and manage EU-funded programmes across borders (Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006, 2006, p. 19; Spinaci – Vara-Arribas, 2009, pp. 5-6). The regulation grants EGTCs the capacity to act on behalf of their members, to adopt a convention and statutes defining their competences and organs, and to hold and manage a budget (Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006, 2006, p. 20). In practice, EGTCs are used for a wide spectrum of tasks: project implementation, provision of cross-border services, strategic planning, or even managing entire territorial cooperation programmes (Caesar, 2017, p. 248; Evrard, 2016, pp. 514-515).

At external borders, EGTCs face additional legal and financial constraints. Participation of partners from third countries depends on their national legislation and on the design of European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) and Interreg NEXT programmes (European Parliament, 2015, pp. 22-24; Regulation (EU) 2021/1059, 2021, art. 3). Nevertheless, the instrument has gradually been opened to the inclusion of non-EU members and to the management of external cross-border cooperation strands. Analysts therefore interpret the EGTC as a flexible tool that can "harden" previously soft, network-based forms of cross-border cooperation, by providing a durable legal shell and decision-making structure (Caesar, 2017, pp. 247-249). Empirical studies highlight their potential to operate as multi-level governance platforms and "supraregional" coordinators of cross-border development strategies (Evrard, 2016, pp. 518-520; Sararu, 2014, pp. 150-151).

The Tisza EGTC, bringing together Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County and the City of Kisvárda on the Hungarian side with Zakarpattia Oblast on the Ukrainian side, fits into this broader family as the first EGTC with a Ukrainian member, established at an external EU border (CESCI, 2021, p. 3; Tisza EGTC, 2021). Its location along the Upper Tisza basin and the EU-Ukraine border places it at the intersection of environmental risks, socio-economic peripherality and geopolitical instability. As such, it offers a particularly relevant case for examining how an EGTC can move

beyond technical project management towards functioning as a resilience node for a wider cross-border region.

Research design and sources

Methodologically, the article adopts a single-case qualitative design centred on the Tisza EGTC. Case-study approaches are widely used in regional and border studies to explore complex governance arrangements and to trace causal mechanisms in depth rather than breadth (Christopherson – Michie – Tyler, 2010, p. 4; Prokkola, 2019, p. 1591). The choice of Tisza EGTC is theoretically driven (pioneering case) and justified by its status as the first EGTC including a Ukrainian region and by its extensive portfolio of resilience-relevant projects.

The empirical analysis draws on several types of material. First, founding and legal documents of the EGTC – the convention, statutes and registration acts – are used to reconstruct its institutional design, governance structure and formal competences. Second, strategic documents, in particular the "Cohesion Analysis and Integrated Development Strategy" of the Tisza EGTC, provide information on the socio-economic and environmental context and on the grouping's strategic priorities (CESCI, 2021, pp. 3-6). Third, project applications and publicly available summaries of key projects – including REVITAL I, ZeroWaste and ZeroWaste 2.0, Secure Borders, LEAD-UP, PLANNING4U and Language APL – are analysed to identify objectives, partners, budgets, outputs and territorial targeting. These documents are complemented by materials produced by CESCI and other expert organisations involved in EGTC support, as well as secondary literature on EGTCs and cross-border governance (Spinaci – Vara-Arribas, 2009; Caesar, 2017; Evrard, 2016; Sararu, 2014).

The analysis proceeds in two steps. First, it reconstructs the institutional trajectory of the Tisza EGTC, from its establishment to its current governance and funding model. Second, it examines the project portfolio through the lens of resilience, grouping activities into environmental/risk management, infrastructural and service provision, institutional capacity-building, and socio-cultural or economic enablement. On this basis, the article assesses the extent to which the Tisza EGTC can be interpreted as a resilience node and identifies elements that may be transferable to the Slovak-Ukrainian border context.

EGTCs at the EU-Ukraine border

The EU-Ukraine border in the Upper Tisza basin brings together four countries – Hungary, Slovakia, Romania and Ukraine – in a compact cross-border region structured around the river and its tributaries. Hydrologically, the basin has long been treated as a functional unit in international water-management frameworks: all five Tisza countries (including Serbia) cooperate under the Updated Integrated Tisza River Basin Management Plan, which highlights shared flood risk, upstream-downstream pollution linkages and the need for joint prevention and monitoring measures (ICPDR, 2019, pp. 1-4; 14-18). In territorial terms, this configuration combines a tightly interdependent river system with a politically fragmented border landscape marked by the EU's Schengen external frontier and Ukraine's candidate-country status, creating a dense overlay of regulatory, infrastructural and environmental interdependencies.

The main cross-border challenges in this segment are documented in both EU programme materials and regional analyses. Flood and landslide risks in the mountainous Ukrainian part of the basin, combined with low-lying, densely settled floodplains on the Hungarian side, generate recurrent vulnerability to extreme hydrological events (ICPDR, 2019, pp. 2-4). Legacy pollution and geohazards around the Solotvyno salt mine represent a particularly acute threat to water quality in the Tisza, with potential implications for four states; recent geospatial and geotechnical research confirms significant deformation, subsidence and the risk of saline infiltration into the river system (Pukanská et al., 2023, p. 2). These concerns are explicitly reflected in regional strategic documents, which identify Solotvyno and other mining-related hazards as key cross-border environmental risks requiring joint monitoring and intervention (Tisza EGTC, 2017, pp. 2-4).

Socio-economically, the Upper Tisza region is characterised by peripherality within national space-economies, dependence on agriculture and low value-added services, asymmetric industrial capacities, and marked income and

wage gaps between the Hungarian and Ukrainian sides (Tisza EGTC, 2017, pp. 6-10). Weak secondary and local road networks, bottlenecks at road and rail border-crossing points, and limited public transport options further reinforce the sense of "distance" across what is, geographically, a short span (Tisza EGTC, 2017, pp. 4-6). Such structural constraints are typical of cross-border regions at the EU's external frontier, where functional interdependence is high but infrastructural and institutional connectivity remains partial and uneven (Prytula et al., 2019, pp. 6-8).

Cross-border interaction is further shaped by pronounced linguistic and ethnic diversity. Zakarpattia oblast hosts substantial Hungarian, Romanian, Slovak and Roma minorities alongside the Ukrainian majority, while the Hungarian border districts themselves are characterised by Roma communities and pockets of Ruthenian and Ukrainian population (Tisza EGTC, 2017, pp. 11-12). This diversity reflects long-standing cultural interdependencies, yet it also produces language barriers in access to public services, information and labour markets. Recent multilingualism initiatives – including the "Language Accessibility in Public Life (Language APL)" project under Interreg NEXT HU-SK-RO-UA – explicitly frame bilingual front desks, multilingual forms and online portals as tools to mitigate such barriers and improve everyday cross-border accessibility for citizens and small and medium-sized enterprises (Language APL, n.d., pp. 2-3).

From a policy perspective, the EU-Ukraine border segment has increasingly functioned as a "laboratory" where different EU policy logics intersect. ENPI/ENI CBC and, more recently, Interreg NEXT HU-SK-RO-UA programmes have been designed to address common environmental problems, improve border-crossing facilities and strengthen people-to-people contacts in a context of "efficient and secure borders" (European Commission, 2015; Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine ENI CBC Programme, 2017). At the same time, cohesion-policy concepts such as territorial cohesion, functional regions and multi-level governance have progressively been applied to this external frontier, including through support for Euroregions and other cross-border structures that seek to transform border peripheries into functional cross-border regions (Czimre, 2001,

p. 176; Prytula et al., 2019, pp. 7-10). Ukraine's evolving association and now candidate status adds an enlargement logic, whereby cross-border projects and institutions are expected to support approximation to EU norms and practices in fields ranging from environmental management to border security and administrative capacity-building (Prytula et al., 2019, pp. 14-16).

Within this setting, the creation of the Tisza EGTC in 2015 marked a qualitative step in institutional innovation. The amended EGTC Regulation 1302/2013 opened participation to authorities from third countries sharing a border with an EU member state (European Union, 2013), making it legally possible to establish a grouping that combines EU and non-EU territories under a single legal personality. Building on this framework, Zakarpattia Regional Council, Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County and the City of Kisvárda created the Tisza EGTC, the first EGTC to include a Ukrainian regional authority as a full member; scholarly and policy analyses highlight this as a precedent for Ukraine's deeper integration into EU territorial-cooperation structures (Prytula et al., 2019, p. 174). In effect, an instrument originally conceived for internal cohesion policy – endowed with EU legal personality, stable governance structures and the capacity to manage EU funds – was transplanted into the context of an external Schengen border. The Tisza EGTC has thus become an experimental node where cohesion, neighbourhood and enlargement policy logics intersect, and where "resilience" is increasingly operationalised not only through sectoral infrastructure projects, but through the capacity of local institutions to plan, coordinate and absorb shocks in a complex, multi-level cross-border environment (Zillmer, 2014, pp. 4-5; Tisza EGTC, 2017, pp. 18-20).

The Tisza EGTC: formation, governance and funding model

Genesis

The Tisza EGTC was formally registered on 26 October 2015 on the Hungarian-Ukrainian border. Its founding members are Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County and the City of Kisvárda on the Hungarian side, and the Zakarpattia Regional Council on the Ukrainian

side (European Parliament, 2023, p. 30; Tisza EGTC, 2015, p. 1). The grouping covers 18,704.4 km² with a population of around 1.8 million inhabitants and is headquartered in Kisvárda (European Parliament, 2023, p. 30).

Tisza EGTC emerged at the intersection of cohesion policy and neighbourhood policy logics. On the one hand, it builds on the long-standing Hungarian-Ukrainian euroregional and project-based cooperation around the Upper Tisza; on the other, it was explicitly conceived as a tool to "strengthen territorial cohesion and to promote Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration" (CESCI, 2017). In the wider EGTC landscape, it occupies a pioneering position: it was the first EGTC to involve a third-country member (the Transcarpathian Regional Council), a point emphasised both in Hungarian regional policy literature and in evaluations of Hungarian cross-border cooperation (Szabó, 2016, p. 59).

The Central European Service for Cross-Border Initiatives (CESCI) played a central brokerage role in this process. CESCI had been involved in the preparation and registration of several EGTCs around Hungary and developed a specialised "EGTC atelier" to support grouping managers (Svensson – Ocskay, 2015). In the case of Tisza EGTC, CESCI's own account underlines that it "actively participated in the establishment" of the grouping, from conceptual design through to legal-institutional preparation and the drafting of founding documents (CESCI, 2015; Svensson – Ocskay, 2015). This role continued in the preparation of the 353-page cohesion analysis and integrated development strategy (CESCI, 2016) and its later trilingual extract (CESCI, 2017).

From a resilience perspective, the genesis of Tisza EGTC is already significant. Rather than emerging merely as a technical vehicle for EU-funded projects, it was explicitly framed as a territorial platform meant to stabilise cooperation in a precarious geopolitical and legal environment. Its legal personality, multi-level partnership and direct anchoring in both EU and Ukrainian legal orders would later allow it to function as an intermediary "resilience node" capable of absorbing shocks and mobilising resources on both sides of the border.

Governance structure

Tisza EGTC's internal governance follows the standard EGTC template defined in Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006 and its amendments, but with some important contextual specificities. According to its Statute, the main bodies are (1) General Assembly, composed of the representatives of all members, as the supreme decision-making body; (2) Director (or managing director), responsible for day-to-day management and external representation; and (3) Control or supervisory body, ensuring financial control and compliance with national and EU rules (Tisza EGTC, 2015).

Given the small number of founding members, representation in the General Assembly is relatively balanced: both Hungarian and Ukrainian partners delegate elected representatives, ensuring parity in strategic decisions and budgetary choices (European Parliament, 2023, p. 30; Tisza EGTC, 2015). The Hungarian legal framework requires ex-ante national approval of the convention and statutes, while the Ukrainian side had to gradually adapt its legislation to allow a regional council to participate in an EU-law entity, a process described in detail by Benczi and Ocskay (2021, p. 64). This dual legal anchoring is itself a resilience feature: it stabilises cross-border cooperation regardless of short-term political changes on either side and creates a degree of protection against unilateral withdrawal.

Mechanisms of accountability and oversight are multi-layered. Internally, the General Assembly votes on annual work programmes, budgets and strategic documents; externally, national authorities monitor compliance with both Hungarian and EU regulations on EGTCs, while Ukrainian ministries have gradually developed procedures to follow the grouping's activities (European Parliament, 2023, pp. 29-31). CESCI's long-term accompaniment of the grouping – e.g. through the EGTC-monitor platform and expert support – adds a further "soft" layer of governance, enabling peer learning with other Hungarian EGTCs and diffusing innovative practices in project management and strategic planning (Svensson – Ocskay, 2015).

In terms of resilience, this governance architecture does two things. First, it embeds Ukrainian actors in a dense web of EU-style

multi-level governance, contributing to the Europeanisation of administrative routines (Benczi – Ocskay, 2021, p. 64). Second, the combination of formal statutes and informal expert networks allows the EGTC to adjust relatively quickly to external shocks – including the 2014 and 2022 escalations of Russian aggression – without losing its institutional continuity.

Financial and support model

Like most EGTCs, Tisza EGTC combines project-based funding with core institutional support. On the project side, it has been particularly active in ENI CBC / Interreg cross-border programmes and related EU instruments, implementing several large projects in environmental risk management and waste infrastructure, with a combined budget of around EUR 7.5 million (CoR, 2020).

What distinguishes Tisza EGTC within the EU EGTC family is its access to stable national core funding. Since 2011 the Hungarian government has provided financial and professional support to EGTCs with Hungarian members, amounting to approximately EUR 500-600,000 annually for the system as a whole (Benczi – Ocskay, 2021, p. 62). This subsidy is used to cover staff costs, office infrastructure and co-financing obligations for EU projects. As a grouping with its seat in Hungary, Tisza EGTC is among the beneficiaries of this scheme, and its own website explicitly acknowledges the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (CESCI, 2015).

In most other Member States, EGTCs depend almost entirely on intermittent project funding and voluntary member contributions, which makes it difficult to retain staff or invest in long-term strategy development (CoR, 2020; Svensson – Ocskay, 2015). This makes the Hungarian model – and Tisza EGTC within it – relatively rare in the EU context. The availability of predictable institutional funding underpins (1) the maintenance of a small but stable professional team in Kisvárda; (2) continuous project generation and partnership management, rather than ad-hoc bids; (3) the ability to co-finance capital-intensive projects, such as waste management facilities or flood-protection infrastructure (Benczi – Ocskay, 2021, pp. 62-64).

From a resilience angle, this financial architecture functions as a backbone: it allows the EGTC to keep its organisational memory, maintain relationships with Ukrainian partners even in crisis periods, and quickly reorient its activities (for example, towards humanitarian assistance after 2022) without having to rebuild capacity from scratch (CESCI, 2024).

Strategic orientation and project portfolio

The strategic orientation of Tisza EGTC is laid out in detail in its cohesion analysis and integrated development strategy (CESCI, 2016). The documents and subsequent project portfolio reveal four main thematic pillars, closely linked to the specific vulnerabilities of the Upper Tisza basin and the wider EU-Ukraine borderland:

1) *Environmental and risk management* – The Tisza and its tributaries are highly prone to floods, flash-floods and pollution, including from upstream mining activities. Tisza EGTC has positioned itself as a coordinator of cross-border environmental risk management, participating in projects that combine infrastructural investments with planning tools and public awareness. A flagship initiative in this field is the project aimed at the recultivation of the collapsed salt mines in Solotvyno and the reduction of saline pollution in the Tisza, carried out under an Interreg / ENI CBC scheme (CoR, 2020).

2) *Waste management and circular economy* – A second strategic pillar addresses the chronic deficits of municipal solid waste management in Zakarpattia. Tisza EGTC has been instrumental in preparing and implementing the first cross-border waste management projects, including the construction of a solid waste selection centre and the elaboration of the Waste Management Strategy of the Transcarpathian Region until 2030 (Tisza EGTC, 2019; Ocskay, 2021). These initiatives, supported by Hungarian and EU funds, have both infrastructural and governance components: they create physical facilities while also introducing EU-compliant planning and regulatory practices on the Ukrainian side.

3) *Border efficiency, security and connectivity* – A third focus concerns the functioning of the border itself: crossing procedures, small-scale infrastructure and the security-mobility nexus.

While border control remains a state competence, the EGTC has used projects such as Secure Borders, REVITAL I and PLANNING4U to support traffic management, small road improvements and joint planning of cross-border mobility solutions. These interventions aim at reducing the "friction of distance" created by the external Schengen border while aligning with EU priorities on security and critical infrastructure protection (European Parliament, 2023, pp. 30-31; CoR, 2020).

4) *Institutional capacity, planning, language accessibility and SME support* – Finally, Tisza EGTC invests in "soft aspects" – institutional capacity and social capital. Planning exercises, leadership academies and training schemes for local officials have been combined with projects on language accessibility (e.g. interpretation services, bilingual information) and SME support (e.g. advisory services, networking) (CESCI, 2017; Council of Europe, 2018). Projects such as LEAD-UP and Language APL illustrate this softer side of the portfolio, targeting both public administrations and private actors.

Taken together, these four pillars show that Tisza EGTC has moved well beyond a narrow project-implementation role. Its strategic portfolio combines hard (infrastructure, facilities) and soft (planning, training, network-building) interventions across multiple policy fields. This multi-dimensionality is crucial for resilience: flood protection investments are backed by cross-border planning routines; waste management facilities are embedded in long-term regional strategies; and border-related projects are accompanied by capacity-building and trust-building among local stakeholders. The EGTC thus acts as an intermediary structure that can translate abstract cohesion, neighbourhood and enlargement objectives into concrete, territorially anchored responses to shocks and chronic vulnerabilities at the EU-Ukraine border.

The Tisza EGTC as a resilience node: project-level analysis

This section examines how the Tisza EGTC's project portfolio operationalises resilience in the EU-Ukraine borderlands. Rather than treating projects as isolated interventions, the grouping uses them to build anticipatory capacities, redundancy and cross-border problem-solving routines – key dimensions in recent work on resilience in border regions (Böhm, 2024; Scott, 2022). The analysis focuses on five thematic clusters: environmental risk management; waste and circular economy; border efficiency; capacity-building and planning; and language accessibility and economic enablement.

Environmental protection and risk management: REVITAL I

The REVITAL I project, implemented under the Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine ENI CBC 2014-2020 programme, addresses the long-standing environmental and safety risks posed by the Solotvyno salt mines to the Upper Tisza basin. Programme documentation highlights the project's aim to develop a joint, cross-border environmental monitoring and early-warning system for subsidence, sinkholes and groundwater contamination affecting both Ukrainian and downstream Hungarian territory.

With a budget of around €1.2 million, REVITAL I combines geotechnical and hydrological monitoring, shared databases and joint risk assessment procedures between Ukrainian and Hungarian institutions. These instruments translate previously fragmented national expert knowledge into a cooperative regime, including shared indicators of risk, agreed thresholds for intervention and coordinated responses in the event of sudden collapses or pollution incidents.

From a resilience perspective, this project reduces uncertainty and strengthens anticipatory capacity in a highly vulnerable area. Instead of relying solely on post-disaster support, the partners use common monitoring and modelling tools to identify emerging threats, which is consistent with arguments that cross-border projects can make cooperation itself more resilient to shocks if they institutionalise shared information and standard operating procedures (Böhm, 2024, pp. 7-9.).

REVITAL I also anchors the Tisza EGTC's role vis-à-vis Ukrainian authorities: by acting as lead beneficiary and interface with the ENI programme structures, the grouping gains experience in managing technically complex, risk-oriented projects, which later feeds into

other environmental and infrastructure initiatives. In this sense, environmental monitoring becomes a backbone function of the EGTC's resilience portfolio, not merely a one-off intervention.

Waste management and circular economy: ZeroWaste and follow-up actions

The ZeroWaste project ("Zero Waste: Theory for Everybody, Practice for Everyone in the Cross-Border Region", HUSK-ROUA/1701/LIP/006) is a flagship ENI CBC strategic project coordinated by Tisza EGTC. It seeks to tackle severe waste-management deficits in Zakarpattia, which have direct cross-border implications through uncontrolled dumping and river-borne pollution in the Tisza basin.

Programme materials emphasise several core components: construction of a municipal landfill and related facilities at Yanoshi (Berehove district); establishment of a regional waste-management system including selective collection and recycling; and intensive awareness-raising and behaviour-change activities in partner municipalities. The project is explicitly framed as a "complex intervention" aimed at reducing risks to water and soil quality and enabling environmentally sustainable development on both sides of the border.

News items report that 27 selective collection points are being set up in Zakarpattia, alongside the new landfill infrastructure, with strong involvement of regional and local authorities and Hungarian central actors. This infrastructure, combined with new institutional arrangements (such as regional associations for waste services), allows for a gradual transition from ad hoc dumping to a regulated and financially viable system.

Although the follow-up "ZeroWaste 2.0" initiative under Interreg NEXT is still in its early stages, it is conceived as a second-generation intervention that expands recultivation activities, equipment provision and awareness measures in the same functional area. Here, the Tisza EGTC builds on the legal, engineering and organisational groundwork of the original ENI project to deepen the circular-economy dimension and adapt to new regulatory standards under the 2021-2027 period.

In resilience terms, the ZeroWaste cluster mitigates chronic environmental stress while also generating co-benefits for health and local economies. It increases redundancy in service provision (multiple collection points and actors), reduces the likelihood of disaster-type pollution events and embeds waste management into cross-border governance routines. This reflects broader ENI/NEXT narratives that frame environmental cooperation as a way to create more cohesive and resilient border regions through long-term partnerships around shared resources (Logvinov et al., 2025).

Border efficiency and security standards: Secure Borders

Under the Interreg VI-A NEXT Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine 2021-2027 programme, the project "Secure and Effective Borders in the Carpathian Region" (Secure Borders, HUSKROUA/23/S/3.2/018) targets institutional and procedural aspects of border management between Hungary and Ukraine. With a budget of approximately €333,000 for 2025-2026, the project is led by the International Association of Regional Development Institutions (IARDI), with Tisza EGTC as a key partner.

Programme descriptions emphasise the modernisation of border-crossing infrastructure, alignment of procedures with EU standards, and improved coordination between customs and border-guard services. The project specifically aims to reduce control times, streamline documentation and enhance information exchange, thereby contributing to the Interreg NEXT objective of "a safer and more secure Europe" and secure, efficient borders.

While the immediate outputs concern training modules, harmonised standard operating procedures and small-scale equipment upgrades, the resilience dimension lies in institutional learning and predictability. A border regime that is more transparent and aligned with EU practice is better able to cope with sudden changes, such as traffic surges, new security requirements or shifts in customs regimes linked to Ukraine's EU accession path. This corresponds to empirical findings that institutionalised cross-border routines can cushion the disruptive effects of crises on mobility and cooperation (Böhm, 2024, pp. 10-12).

For the Tisza EGTC, participation in Secure Borders strengthens its role as an intermediary between local/regional stakeholders and national border-management authorities. It extends the EGTC's portfolio from socio-economic and environmental projects to the highly sensitive field of border security, thereby broadening the range of functions through which it contributes to regional resilience.

Capacity, planning and people: LEAD-UP and PLANNING4U

Resilience in cross-border regions depends not only on physical infrastructure but also on human and institutional capacities to design and implement projects (Gabrić, 2016; Demedyuk, 2016). The LEAD-UP and PLANNING4U projects explicitly address this dimension by investing in municipal officials, planners and cross-border networks.

LEAD-UP: Building Capacity for Sustainable Futures & Cross-Border Partnerships (HUSKROUA/23/S/3.1/016) is a small-scale project under Interreg NEXT, with a total budget of €321,804 in 2025-2026. It targets 21 local communities in Ukraine, Slovakia and Hungary, providing training, mentoring and partnership-building support for cross-border infrastructure projects. According to programme descriptions, LEAD-UP aims to fill a gap in strategic planning and feasibility-study capacities at municipal level, moving beyond "soft" cooperation towards technically robust infrastructure initiatives.

From a resilience viewpoint, LEAD-UP diversifies the pool of actors capable of initiating and managing complex cross-border projects. By equipping local officials with practical project-management skills, it reduces dependence on a few expert centres and enhances the system's ability to generate adaptive responses to funding opportunities and emerging needs.

PLANNING4U (HUSKROUA/23/RS/3.1/037) complements this human-capital focus by producing joint spatial and development plans. Project news emphasise that between 2025 and 2026, the consortium – including the Research Institute for National Strategy, Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County, Tisza EGTC and partners from Satu Mare and Transcarpathia – will prepare 14 microregional development plans in Zakarpattia and

tailored strategies for three border municipalities in Satu Mare County. The project also assesses the socio-economic impacts of the war in Ukraine on the border region and addresses institutional challenges arising from administrative reform and pandemic legacies.

By creating shared evidence bases, impact studies and territorial visions, PLANNING4U strengthens the "strategic" side of resilience. It improves the capacity of border municipalities to anticipate demographic, economic and infrastructural trends, to coordinate investment decisions across the border and to position themselves within wider EU policy debates on Ukraine's reconstruction and future accession (European Parliament, 2023, pp. 43-51). Together, LEAD-UP and PLANNING4U illustrate how the Tisza EGTC functions as a resilience node not only by implementing projects but also by curating learning processes, methodologies and planning frameworks that outlive specific funding periods.

Language accessibility and economic enablement: Language APL

Finally, the Language APL project ("Cross-Border Language Accessibility in Public Life", HUSKROUA/23/S/3.1/011) addresses a less tangible but crucial dimension of resilience: communicative capacity and social cohesion in a multilingual, war-affected borderland.

According to the project brochure and Interreg NEXT project description, Language APL responds both to historical minority-language issues along the Hungarian-Ukrainian-Romanian border and to the recent influx of Ukrainian citizens into neighbouring EU regions. With a total budget of €299,352 in 2025, the project identifies best-practice multilingual locations in each partner country, provides information to minorities about their linguistic rights, supports translation of signage and materials for selected public and private actors, and culminates in a cross-border conference in Berehove presenting lessons and models.

The Antal Hodinka Linguistic Research Centre plays a central role, building on earlier empirical work showing high demand among Transcarpathian Hungarians for minority-language use in administration and services. This explicit link between research and practice aligns with broader arguments that language

rights and effective multilingual communication are preconditions for inclusive governance and conflict prevention in border regions (European Parliament, 2023, pp. 50-52).

In resilience terms, Language APL lowers informational and transaction costs for both residents and SMEs by making public services and business environments more accessible in multiple languages. This enhances the capacity of individuals and firms to navigate regulatory systems, access support schemes and engage in cross-border trade, especially under conditions of uncertainty and frequent legal change. Moreover, by visibly recognising linguistic diversity in the public space, the project contributes to trust-building and social capital, which recent literature identifies as key to the resilience of cross-border cooperation in times of crisis (Scott, 2022; Böhm, 2024).

Transferability to Slovak-Ukrainian cross-border cooperation

Similarities and differences between Tisza and SK-UA border segments

The Slovak-Ukrainian border shares several structural features with the Tisza EGTC area, but also differs in hydrology, settlement structure and institutional setting. On the Slovak side, the Prešov and Košice self-governing regions, and on the Ukrainian side Zakarpattia oblast, form the core of the borderland in both cases (Lačný – Michalková, 2025; Brenzovych, Lačný, & Tsalan, 2023). Hydrologically, however, the focus shifts from the Tisza main stem to tributaries such as the Uzh/Uh and Latorica. Studies on flood scenarios along the Uh at Lekárovce in eastern Slovakia underline high flood exposure in low-lying settlements and the need for improved structural and non-structural protection measures. At the same time, the Latorica floodplain is recognised as an ecologically valuable but hydrologically stressed landscape, where climate change and declining water levels threaten wetlands and biodiversity, prompting new transboundary restoration initiatives (Latorica, 2023; Reconnecting the Latorica river floodplain, 2023).

Socio-economically, both the Tisza and the Slovak-Ukrainian border segments are peripheral within their national territories, with below-average GDP per capita, weaker labour markets and significant out-migration. Comparative analyses show that Prešov and Košice regions, together with Zakarpattia, belong to the least performing regional economies in Slovakia and Ukraine, with structural dependence on low-value manufacturing, agriculture and cross-border commuting (Lačný & Kováčová, 2022; Lačný – Michalková, 2025). Settlement patterns are dominated by small and medium-sized towns and dispersed villages along river valleys, which makes them similar to the Tisza basin; but the Slovak-Ukrainian segment has fewer larger urban centres directly at the border, which limits market size and institutional density (Zaitseva-Chipak, 2025, pp. 199-201).

Institutionally, Slovak-Ukrainian cooperation rests on a dense treaty framework – including a 1993 treaty on good-neighbourliness, a 2000 intergovernmental agreement on cross-border cooperation and Ukraine's 2004 Law "On Cross-Border Cooperation" – and on Euroregional structures such as the Carpathian Euroregion (Melehanych & Shelemba, 2023; Duleba et al., 2019). Unlike the Hungarian-Ukrainian border, there is still no EGTC directly bridging Slovak and Ukrainian territorial authorities, despite Slovakia's high overall participation in EGTCs (15 groupings, mostly with Hungary) (Demedyuk, 2016, pp. 120-121). This creates both a gap and an opportunity: the legal and political conditions for EGTC-type cooperation exist, but an institutional vehicle similar to the Tisza EGTC has not yet been created on the Slovak-Ukrainian border.

Transferable practices and models

Given these similarities, several elements of the Tisza EGTC's practice are highly transferable to the Slovak-Ukrainian context, especially within the framework of the Interreg NEXT Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine programme (CESCI, 2020; Interreg NEXT HUSK-ROUA, 2025). First, joint risk monitoring and early-warning systems for river basins – modelled on the REVITAL I approach to Solotvyno – could be adapted to the Uzh/Uh and Latorica catchments, where flood and low-water risks are already the focus of bilateral projects (Reconnecting the Latorica river floodplain, 2023). Second, the ZeroWaste model of cross-border waste-stream management and river-litter con-

trol offers a template for addressing illegal dumping and plastic pollution along Slovak-Ukrainian rivers, combining regional strategies, infrastructure and awareness-raising.

Third, harmonisation of border procedures and joint training for customs and police, as in the Secure Borders project, corresponds directly to identified needs on the Slovak-Ukrainian border, where complex Schengen rules and uneven administrative capacities remain key obstacles to mobility and trade (Lačný – Michalková, 2025). Fourth, the capacity-building model of LEAD-UP and the cross-border planning practices of PLANNING4U could be extended to Slovak partners in Prešov and Košice regions: mixed training cohorts, joint feasibility studies and shared spatial plans would strengthen local abilities to absorb EU funds and to integrate Ukrainian reform priorities into cross-border strategies (Duleba et al., 2019; European Parliament, 2023). Finally, the Language APL approach – bilingual municipal services, multilingual information tools for SMEs and explicit support for minority-language use – is directly relevant to a borderland characterised by Slovak, Ukrainian, Rusyn and Hungarian communities and by increasing post-2022 Ukrainian mobility (Zaitseva-Chipak, 2025, pp. 210-214; Lačný – Michalková, 2025).

Preconditions, limitations and risks

However, transferring the Tisza EGTC model to the Slovak-Ukrainian border is not automatic. On the legal and administrative side, Ukraine's participation in EGTCs already has a precedent through the Tisza EGTC, but any Slovak-Ukrainian grouping would still require careful alignment of Slovak EGTC legislation, Ukrainian law on cross-border cooperation and explicit central-government approvals on both sides (Demedyuk, 2016; Melehanych & Shelemba, 2023). There is also a need for clear division of competences between self-governing regions and state administrations, which earlier research has identified as a bottleneck for effective Slovak-Ukrainian cross-border action (Duleba et al., 2019).

Financial sustainability forms a second constraint. The Hungarian model of systematic core funding for EGTCs – which underpins the Tisza EGTC's resilience role – has no direct an-

alogue in Slovakia, where EGTC participation is more reliant on project funds and member contributions (Demedyuk, 2016, pp. 120-121; CESCI, 2020). Any SK-UA EGTC would therefore need either a new national support scheme or alternative multi-annual funding (for example, ring-fenced technical assistance under Interreg NEXT) to avoid becoming a purely "project-driven" structure.

Finally, political and security risks must be considered. While Slovakia has generally supported Ukraine's EU integration and cross-border cooperation, domestic political shifts and the ongoing war introduce uncertainty about long-term priorities and public attitudes (Lačný – Michalková, 2025). Some aspects of the Tisza experience – notably the strong role of Hungarian national policy and diaspora politics – are context-specific and cannot simply be replicated in the Slovak setting. What can travel are the functional logics: basin-based risk management, integrated waste systems, capacity-building pipelines and multilingual service provision. Their institutional packaging – whether in the form of an EGTC, strengthened Euroregions or looser project-based coalitions – will have to be tailored to the evolving legal, financial and political conditions on the Slovak-Ukrainian border.

Conclusions and implications

This article asked how an institutional instrument such as an EGTC can evolve from a relatively technical implementation vehicle into a resilience node at an exposed external EU border; how, in practice, the Tisza EGTC has made this transition; and which elements of its model might be transferable to the Slovak-Ukrainian border. The analysis has shown that Tisza EGTC's trajectory is marked by a gradual but clear shift from "container for projects" to "cross-border institution" that organises monitoring, planning and service provision across multiple policy fields. Through projects such as REVITAL I, ZeroWaste, Secure Borders, LEAD-UP, PLANNING4U and Language APL, the grouping increasingly provides anticipatory capacity, redundancy and problem-solving routines that underpin environmental, infrastructural, institutional and socio-cultural resilience.

Theoretically, the case underlines that resilience in cross-border governance is not a static attribute of places but an emergent property of institutional architectures. EGTCs at EU external borders can act as boundary-spanning organisations that connect cohesion, neighbourhood and enlargement logics and "harden" previously loose cooperation into durable governance nodes. Resilience here depends less on any single infrastructure or project than on the capacity of the EGTC to combine hard and soft interventions, to maintain a professional core administration and to embed joint monitoring, planning and learning practices into everyday cross-border governance.

Policy implications follow on three levels. At EU level, support schemes should explicitly recognise EGTCs with third-country members as strategic partners for resilience, for example by providing long-term technical assistance and incentivising project portfolios that integrate risk management, basic services and capacity-building. At national level, the Hungarian core-funding model points to the importance of predictable institutional support; Slovakia and Ukraine would need analogous arrangements if they were to establish a Slovak-Ukrainian EGTC capable of playing a comparable resilience role. At regional and local levels, actors should prioritise basin-based risk monitoring, integrated waste systems, border-efficiency projects, joint training and multilingual service provision when designing cross-border strategies.

The study has clear limitations. It focuses on a single case, relies mainly on documentary sources, and cannot offer a systematic outcome evaluation of the EGTC's interventions. Future research should therefore undertake comparative analyses of EGTCs at different internal and external borders, combine qualitative governance analysis with quantitative indicators of territorial change, and pay closer attention to local perceptions of how cross-border institutions affect everyday resilience.

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POLISH BORDERLANDS IN TIMES OF UNCERTAINTY. A HANDFUL OF SOCIO-CULTURAL SCENES AND REFLECTIONS

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Abstract:

This article attempts to examine a series of events that have taken place in the Polish borderlands over the last decade and which have been directly or indirectly caused by various European or global upheavals (migration crises, the COVID-19 pandemic, etc.), collectively referred to as the polycrisis. In addition to identifying and briefly describing specific phenomena, my aim is to place them into two theoretical categories from the field of border(lands) studies (rebordering and debordering) and three interrelated, more general categories (polycrisis, times of uncertainty and resilience). I conduct my reflections in an institutional order (the internal borders of NATO and the European Union followed by the borders with other neighbours), while pointing to their further internal differentiation. I conclude each section with a summary outlining the specific characteristics of a given borderland block.

Keywords:

Debordering, Polish borderlands, polycrisis, rebordering, resilience, times of uncertainty.

Introduction

The expression "times of uncertainty", although it has only recently returned to public discourse, seems to have already gained such a strong position therein that it can easily take on (or perhaps has already taken on?) the form of a hackneyed cliché. However, this appears to be more a sign of the times than of intellectual mediocrity on the part of those who use this category, as these people – in accordance with their mission – strive to document, describe and name specific phenomena, thereby filling this category more fully and constantly with updated, more local content. This is also the aim of this chapter: to recall and present selected facts from the reality of the Polish borderlands in recent years, to place them in the context of specific analytical categories and thus to testify that this region of Europe is also struggling, in its own way, with the challenges of uncertain times.

The structure of this article follows from the above intention. I begin with a brief theoretical reflection on the concepts that are key to me as well as I make an overview of the geographical context of the statements. In the three subsequent sections, which constitute the essence of my considerations, I refer to selected scenes from the Polish borderlands: from those that

form both the EU internal and external borders (in this case, divided into the borderlands with Russia and Belarus and the one with Ukraine), each part additionally accompanied by several more general points that are supposed to direct our attention towards borderlands theoretical reflexivity. I summarise the whole in a way that would fit the illustrations and observations into some more general patterns, more or less applicable to Polish borderlands and neighbouring areas.

A theoretical note and setting the stage

The objective I set for this article stems from two important assumptions. The first relates to the ontology of borderlands, which "are without doubt specific ecological, political and social environments where people and communities have historically had to find their ways to cope with and within the structures of two or more states, as well as their transitions" (Andersen & Prokkola, 2022, p. 5). Currently, after several decades of development in border regions (especially those within the EU), both socially and economically, we are once again entering an era of tightening political control over these areas. And although the situation may vary in different contexts, in the face of crises that have shaped life in Europe, it is precisely the borderlands, as areas 'in between' and specific bridges or barriers, that are the first to experience change. This brings us to the second key assumption concerning borderlands: "It is rarely asked, however, how political borders and strengthened border securitization hinder the vernacular and regional resilience strategies in the face of environmental, economic and socio-cultural change" (ibidem). In this paper, I would like to take a closer look at these processes.

In order to organise my thoughts theoretically, I refer to two categories from the field of border(lands) studies and three more general ones. The first set consists of the widely used but opposing concepts of rebordering and debordering. The former tends to be defined as the process of making state borders less permeable, both literally (physically) and figuratively (in terms of ideas, social relations, etc.), whereas debordering has come to refer to the process of making these borders more permeable, also in both of the aforementioned meanings (e.g. Paasi, 2005; Popescu, 2012). It is worth noting that although the former phenomenon has dominated European border regions in recent years, indicators of the latter can also be found in selected locations, examples of which are also included in this article.

As for the three more general categories, i.e. those outside the scope of border(lands) studies, they are significantly interrelated. Firstly, there is the polycrisis, understood as the simultaneous occurrence of a range of negative phenomena of different nature that reinforce each other, thus leading to even more severe outcomes (one of which being rebordering, if we talk to borderlands specifically) – with the important stipulation that in many parts of the globe, the components of this polycrisis are much more destructive than what we encounter in Europe. Furthermore, adopting the perspective of unprivileged or excluded groups, we can see that for them this phenomenon offers an opportunity to usher in new paradigms of thinking (Ang, 2024), which is also locally present in the context under discussion. The second of the more general categories are the titular times of uncertainty, which I identify, for the purposes of the following considerations, with the years 2014–2025. Over the course of these twelve years, a series of events have taken place in Poland, Europe and globally that have had an impact (sometimes quite an overwhelming one) on the situation in the Polish borderlands – and therefore these events can be described as triggers of polycrisis and uncertainty. Their subjective selection, which will serve as a starting point for more general reflections here, includes:
-   the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation and its launch of a hybrid war in eastern Ukraine (2014);
-   the beginning of the so-called migration challenge in Europe (2015–2016); its effects, although not directly observed in the Polish borderlands, caused a rise in populist sentiments, extreme right-wing emotions and further gradual undermining of the foundations of the European Union (also in a cross-border context);
-   suspension of the local border traffic agreement between Poland and the Russian Federation (2016); although this event was of little significance on a pan-European scale (actually, it seems it was

barely noticed), it was nevertheless important and, in its own way, groundbreaking for thinking about the shape of Poland's relations with Russia and for the Polish-Russian neighbourhood (especially the border area);

- the official Brexit (2020), which showed that 'the impossible is possible' after all, reduced the EU's potential in economic and (geo)political terms, and emboldened Eurosceptic circles in other countries, to some extent reconfiguring the shape of public debate;

- the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects (2020–2022), which have been particularly severe for borderlanders;

- migration pressure brought about and maintained by Belarus, which has been affecting (since 2021) primarily Poland, Lithuania and Latvia, and which has influenced, among other things, the type of relations on the eastern borders of the three countries;

- full-scale Russian aggression against Ukraine (since 2022), which has caused, among other things, a massive influx of Ukrainian refugees into EU countries, but also certain changes in thinking about the functioning of the Polish-Ukrainian border;

- Donald Trump's return to the US presidency (2025), which led to a review of NATO's operating principles and the Alliance's relationship with the EU;

- the violation of Polish airspace by twenty Russian drones (2025), which can be understood as the most serious action by external forces against a NATO member state to date; this is also part of a broader phenomenon – the hybrid war waged by the Russian Federation against countries (primarily) on NATO's eastern flank.

The third of the more general categories that are key for me, resilience, is also closely related to the other two, as it is an obvious consequence of both crises and times of uncertainty; as such, it has occupied an important place in border(lands) studies analyses (see e.g. the entire volume of studies on this topic: Anderson & Prokkola [eds.], 2022), often in relation to the border areas themselves (cf. borderlands resilience). Essentially, resilience is the ability to overcome a difficult situation and even use it for future benefits by the local community or other people affected by it, using the resources they have at their disposal (Porczyński & Wojakowski, 2020). It is worth remembering that the goals set at one level (e.g. central) do not necessarily coincide with those desired locally (e.g. at the border), if only because of the different value systems in force there (Côte & Nightingale, 2011; Prokkola, 2022).

At the end of this section, with a view to showing the impact of these events on the Polish borderlands, it is worth providing some geographical context for the discussion. Poland borders seven countries: Germany (border length – 467 km), the Czech Republic (790 km), Slovakia (539 km), Ukraine (535 km), Belarus (407 km), Lithuania (103 km) and the Kaliningrad Oblast of the Russian Federation (210 km). Poland's accession to NATO (1999), the EU (2004) and the Schengen Area (2007) has had a decisive impact on the type of social, political, cultural and economic relations between this state and its neighbours. As a result, it has become customary to divide them into two categories: those with whom Poland shares membership in the aforementioned structures (Germany, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Lithuania) and those outside them (Ukraine, Belarus, Russia) – regardless of further internal, sometimes significant, differences within these two blocks due to historical and contemporary factors. This presentation scheme will also be used below.

Polish borderlands on the internal borders of the EU

In recent years, in addition to expanding and deepening forms of cooperation and blurring the awareness of the existence of national borders, waves of rebordering and debordering have been observed on Poland's borders with other EU member states. The migration crisis, which undermined previous trends on the western European borders, had virtually no impact on Poland's borders with Germany, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Lithuania. This was due to the main migration corridors bypassing this part of Europe – the closest one led through Hungary and Austria to Germany. This does not change the fact that in the eastern

part of the EU, there was an awareness of its insufficient preparation for this challenge, which led to questions (echoing the more heated debate in the western part of the continent) about the effectiveness and sustainability of the Schengen Agreement and, at some localities, to temporary suspension of its operating principles.

Serious restrictions on crossing the border were only introduced here as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is often overlooked that the cross-border lockdown had a particularly severe impact on borderlands – the more integrated the two parts of a given area were, the denser the network of relations between their inhabitants, and the more spheres of life were regulated by cross-border practices, the greater the impact (e.g. Böhm, 2021). Residents of border areas were often faced with choices such as keeping their jobs abroad versus maintaining normal relations with their families. This also led to other inconveniences in everyday life, related to maintaining cross-border social relations, cultivating land located on the other side of the frontier, keeping jobs dependent on visits by foreigners (tourism, trade, services, etc.), or, to put it more generally, practising various forms of cross-border cooperation. Needless to say, the biggest victims of these restrictions were the inhabitants of cities divided by the national border, which had become quite closely knit over the past two decades, especially in terms of everyday life.

In 2021, however, the migration crisis also affected the Polish borderlands, although initially it did not significantly disrupt the functioning of Poland's internal EU borders, leaving its negative mark primarily on the Polish-Belarusian border, where it was concentrated (see below). Over time, however, illegal migration also affected the permeability of the Polish-German and Polish-Lithuanian borders – migrants, whose destination has been Western Europe (especially Germany), also enter the EU and the Schengen Area via the Belarusian-Lithuanian and Belarusian-Latvian borders. In response, in July 2025, Poland introduced temporary controls and additional restrictions on its frontiers with Germany and Lithuania.[1] In the former case, this was a response to similar

measures taken by Berlin, but also, to some extent, a reaction to demonstrations by Polish right-wing populist groups organised around the so-called *Border Defence Movement* (Polish: *Ruch Obrony Granic*).

A separate issue is the threat posed by Russia's imperialist policy. It should be viewed not only in the context of the Polish-Russian borderland (discussed below), but also in relation to the so-called Suwałki Gap (the Polish-Lithuanian borderland). It tends to be perceived as a critical strip of land by some experts: approximately 70 km long, crossing Polish territory between the District of Kaliningrad and Belarus, whose occupation by the aggressor would cut off the land route connecting Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia with the rest of NATO and the EU; this gap is considered a potential weak link in the Alliance's eastern flank and, as such, has long been the subject of study by military analysts (Grigas, 2016).[2] The geostrategic importance of the Suwałki region and the media interest this generates mean that the Polish-Lithuanian borderland suffers from an outflow of tourists and investors put off by its proximity to Belarus and Russia.

It is no coincidence that I have not yet mentioned the Polish-Czech and Polish-Slovak borderlands. Indeed, apart from the pandemic restrictions, which were nationwide, it is difficult to point to any serious problems here, which clearly does not mean that these borderlands are free from various types of turbulence. One of them was the conflict concerning the Polish "Turów" mine, which had a negative impact on, among other things, water conditions in the Czech-Polish border region (see Wróblewski, Boháč, Böhm, 2023). In addition, in the cross-border region of Cieszyn Silesia, echoes of a local border conflict from over a hundred years ago can sometimes be heard (Zenderowski, 2021), which resulted in the division of this land between Poland and the then Czechoslovakia. As far as the Polish-Slovak border region is concerned, it is quite significant that one of the few problems there that has had a chance to reach a wider audience in Poland in recent years was the elimination of some bears – animals that migrate, in-

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[1]   At the time of writing, they were due to remain in force until April 2026.

[2]   The same can be said about the Lithuanian part of this borderland, where, moreover, an important railway line connecting Belarus and the Kaliningrad Oblast runs.

cluding across borders – on the Slovak side. Another rather niche topic, which has been present in scientific discourse for a long time, is the poor offer of cross-border public transport, especially at the local or regional level. It should be noted that all these issues are embedded in a given section of the Polish-Czech or Polish-Slovak border and usually resonate at this area only.

To sum up this point, we can say that along the borders connecting Poland with its EU and NATO partners, we can distinguish, on the one hand, the Polish-Czech and Polish-Slovak borderlands, which are relatively little affected by European and global turmoil; apart from the restrictions on crossing borders caused by COVID-19, we note only occasional and short-term difficulties caused by epidemiological threats (which, incidentally, sometimes also affect other borders). On the other hand, we have the Polish-German and Polish-Lithuanian borderlands, facing a more turbulent situation. As mentioned, in all these border areas, the reality of cross-border functioning is more difficult the more deeply integrated the people living on both sides of the border are.

At the same time, interesting phenomena can be observed on a social level. Somewhat paradoxically, with the overcoming of serious disruptions to everyday life, here and there (especially in divided cities) there seems to appear an increased awareness, and the tangible benefits, of living in a shared Schengen space (Böhm, 2022), which, however, should not be taken for granted. For as we know, most people do not tend to treasure what they have until they have lost it. In such cases, one can therefore speak of strengthening of borderland identity, especially that of the so-called borderland man. According to Zbigniew Kurcz's concept (2010, p. 288–289), this manifests itself in the following locally developed conviction: we, borderlanders, tend to lead different lives as regards borders, neighbouring states and foreigners (who more often are simply our acquaintances or neighbours) than our fellow nationals from the interior do.

Looking from an even broader perspective, we can see a deepened – and at the same time ideologically heterogeneous – reflection on the issues of European Union membership, sovereignty as well as the movement of people, capital and... germs (Kajta & Opiłowska, 2023). In the context of pandemic restrictions, voices (not necessarily previously present in the public sphere) have joined the broader debate on the realities of the Polish-German borderland, calling for a stronger role for nation states when it comes to, for example, control over their borders (Renner et al., 2022).

External borders of Poland and the EU: Borderlands with Russia and Belarus

Since the beginning of the systemic changes of the 1990s – and especially since the beginning of this century, when it became clear that the countries of Central Europe would join Western European structures – Poland's eastern borderlands have developed in a completely different way than the four intra-EU borderlands discussed above. In the context that is of interest to us, this means that the borderlands with Ukraine, Belarus and Russia, offering much less, also had much less to lose. However, since at least 2014, with Russia's annexation of Crimea and its provocation of war in eastern Ukraine, the latter country has more decisively distanced itself from Poland's other two non-EU neighbours – a situation that continues today, yet on an even larger scale.[3] Therefore, in this section, I will focus solely on the borderlands with Belarus and Russia, which have experienced almost exclusively rebordering processes over the past decade, and the Polish-Ukrainian borderland, where the situation is much more diverse, will be moved to the next section of the article.

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[3]   Without getting too deeply into history, it is worth mentioning that these two separate paths had already become apparent in 2003, when Poland, preparing for EU accession, introduced visa requirement for citizens of Ukraine, Belarus and Russia, among others. In retaliation, Russia and Belarus took similar steps, while Ukraine maintained visa-free travel regime for Polish citizens. What is more, since 1991, when the three independent states were established, only Ukraine has been able to ensure (albeit sometimes not without serious problems) a democratic method of electing its authorities (in the other two countries, these were only shorter or longer episodes). These circumstances do not change the fact that the collective term "eastern borderlands" tends to be used to describe all three Polish borderlands with non-EU countries, regardless of the fact that Poland borders Russia to the north and its north-eastern neighbour is Lithuania, a partner in NATO, the EU and the Schengen area.

As mentioned, restrictions on the free movement of people, triggered by the migration crisis of 2015, did not affect the areas discussed here. However, the following year, as a result of a complex internal situation and with the growing threat from Moscow in the background, Poland suspended its agreement with Russia on local border traffic, which had significantly revitalised the shared border region socially and economically during its four years of operation (Studzińska 2024). Left to its own devices, plagued by the problems typical of the EU's periphery, the region fell into even greater difficulties; these were exacerbated with the onset of the pandemic and subsequent introduction of further restrictions, and then with Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine. Observations from one of the border towns leave no room for doubt as to what life is like in this area today: "The absence of Russian tourists has had a devastating economic impact on this region, one of the poorest in Poland. Many residents struggle to make ends meet, having been heavily dependent on trade and cross-border connections with Russia" (Stokłosa, 2025, p. 147).

As a result, at the end of 2025, there are only two road border crossings between Poland and the District of Kaliningrad, where, according to Border Guard data, traffic is significantly lower than a decade ago. At the same time, the security of this frontier is being strengthened as part of 'the Eastern Shield' project, young residents of the region are looking for better living conditions in the centre of the country or abroad, and the lack of prospects for those who have remained in the border area is becoming increasingly apparent. All of the above-mentioned activities represent a clear regression in terms of the social conditions of the area in question, whose relatively normal cross-border development only gradually took place after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 (Studzińska 2024). Previously, since the establishment of this border after World War II, no social relations were maintained here, as the District was a military area, closed not only for foreigners, but also for regular citizens of the USSR.

The border with Belarus functioned somewhat differently at that time, but also within the restrictions of the Schengen Area. Although the authorities of that country traditionally viewed Poland and the developing cross-border practices suspiciously, the specific social conditions of this borderland – which connects not only business people and institutions, but above all families and acquaintances – made it possible after 1991 to recreate, develop and maintain intensive networks and interpersonal relations in this area. It was also spared the restrictions of 2015, and serious limitations only came into force here in connection with the pandemic, which, incidentally, put an end to the border crossing facilitations introduced by Belarus in previous years. The real crisis began in the summer of 2021, when refugees brought in for this purpose by President Lukashenko's regime (with at least the tacit consent of the Russian authorities) began storming the Polish-Belarusian border. This prompted the Warsaw authorities to erect a fence along a large part of the border and to close some of the border crossings. Later on, bilateral relations became even more tense. Minsk supported Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and at the Polish-Belarusian frontier, the aforementioned refugees started to be pushed by the regime into increasingly drastic behaviour. The borderland has become the scene of difficult, sometimes dramatic events, as many migrants have paid with their lives for attempting to cross the border.[4] In 2025, the situation began to gradually stabilise, but it is difficult to predict how events will unfold even in the nearest future.

At the same time, this four-year-long situation has significantly changed the character of the Polish-Belarusian borderland, where the previously reported cross-border practices have almost ceased. At the height of the crisis, only one passenger and one freight checkpoint was operational along the entire border (over 400 km long). Two others were restored in November 2025, but local entrepreneurs live now in uncertainty because, given the unstable bilateral relations, it is unclear how long these

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[4]   The cause of well over a hundred deaths (there are no exact figures) was mainly difficult terrain and weather conditions, inappropriate actions by Polish services, restrictions imposed by Polish authorities on providing assistance to those in need, and risky actions taken by migrants, often due to pressure exerted on them on the Belarusian side of the border. This also resulted in a growing threat to the health and lives of Polish officers, as well as one case of a refugee murdering a Polish border guard.

crossings will remain open. Moreover, many businesses have gone bankrupt in the last few years, and those that have survived will find it difficult to return to their previous operating conditions (Kołodziejczyk, 2025). All this has had serious social and economic consequences: lack of interest from investors and tourists, collapse of cross-border trade and small businesses, disrupted family and social networks, depopulation. An area once rightly identified with a specific socio-cultural atmosphere, a cross-border mosaic of languages and religious denominations, original Eastern cuisine and outstanding natural assets, is now commonly associated with the refugee crisis. This change is reflected in the literature on the subject: for several years now, reports and academic works focusing on this area have not concerned much Polish-Belarusian cross-border relations or the borderland as such, but primarily this broadly understood crisis. Importantly, the entire migration challenge essentially abstracts from the interethnic content specific to this borderland – to such an extent that now its role has been boiled down to geopolitically separating the EU and NATO, on the one hand, and Belarus, Russia as well as those subjects which have been used by these states in an instrumental manner.

As I have tried to show it, the Polish-Belarusian and Polish-Russian borderlands are areas that have been particularly affected by various crises in recent years – related to the pandemic, and even more so with artificially induced migration pressure from African and Asian countries, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine (in which Belarus supported the aggressor), and the previously signalled uncertainty about the fate of the area connecting both borderlands (the Suwałki Gap). The latter two phenomena are particularly relevant in the context of Donald Trump's re-election as President of the United States – a man who works to weaken the European Union and undermines the cohesion and credibility of the North Atlantic Alliance, most of all its Eastern flank. And even if some media reports on these issues are somewhat exaggerated, the Polish borderlands with Belarus, Russia (and also Lithuania), the institutions and inhabitants there can still be viewed in the context of expectations regarding defence tasks (Laine & Petersson, 2025, p. 4–5). This, in turn, brings to mind asso-

ciations with the past, reinforcing the aforementioned figure of the borderland man, who is the first one, and on a unique scale, to face particular challenges (Kurcz 2010).

External borders of Poland and the EU (borderland with Ukraine)

As mentioned above, for a long time now, the Polish-Ukrainian borderland and neighbourhood have remained distinct in many respects from the Polish borderlands with Belarus and Russia. In the last decade, these differences have become much more pronounced, with the result that in the Ukrainian context we can talk not only about rebordering, but also about debordering. The former, it should be noted, is primarily reflected in the still insufficient number of Polish-Ukrainian border crossings and their inadequate capacity (Jaroszewicz & Mrozek, 2020) or the suspension (since the pandemic) of local cross-border events in many localities; one of such enterprises was the so-called European Neighbourhood Days, during which it was possible to cross the border in places where there is normally no border crossing. Much more can be said about debordering, however.

When it comes to decision-making, it is important to mention Russia's annexation of Crimea and the outbreak of war in Donbas as catalysts for a change in narrative; since then, European discourse has imagined Ukraine as a victim that requires support from the European Union (Bürkner, 2017, 2020). This fact contributed to the EU's decision in 2017 to abolish visas for Ukrainian citizens entering the Schengen Area. In mid-2022, just a few months after Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the European Council granted Ukraine the status of an EU candidate country, which was a sign of support for the initiatives undertaken and a good prognosis for the future.

When it comes to specific, tangible measures, three border crossing facilitations are particularly worth mentioning here (Dębicki 2025a). Firstly, since the end of 2016, more passenger trains have been running between Poland and Ukraine, which has increased the permeability of the (generally low-capacity) common border. Suffice it to say that over the course of a decade, the number of

these connections has increased from two to eleven pairs per day, which is undoubtedly impressive, even if it is mainly due to a particularly low starting point. Secondly, during the most intense wave of refugees from war-torn Ukraine, Poland simplified the procedures for crossing the common border and opened additional checkpoints (including for pedestrians). Although this was only a temporary measure, it could raise questions as to why it cannot be permanent, as is the case at other external EU borders. Thirdly, in recent years, investments have been made (some of which have already been completed) in the development of cross-border corridors (mainly rail), and plans for the future are also promising in this respect. It is worth noting that in two places where the aforementioned European Neighbourhood Days were organised before the pandemic, the event is currently continuing despite the war.

This debordering was also evident on a social level and in the realm of ideas and imaginaries, manifesting itself in the support that refugees received in Poland, including on the border itself. This assistance was seen as another dimension of neighbourliness as a result of cultural resilience: the transformation of the "multiculturalism industry", i.e. the marketing exploitation of the multi-ethnic past of the borderland, into a certain cultural flexibility, as well as the interpenetration of institutional and private cooperation (Wojakowski 2025, pp. 171–172, 185). This change is particularly significant not only in the context of negative experiences that left their mark on bilateral relations in the past, especially in the border region, but also due to the relatively low level of interest that Ukrainian neighbours or Ukraine in general enjoyed in the Polish part of the border region in the years preceding the Russian military escalation (Dębicki 2025b). It should be added that currently, attitudes towards migrants in the border region are (much) less open, which corresponds to the patterns observed throughout Poland.

All these circumstances allow us to conclude that on the Polish-Ukrainian border – in contrast not only to the Polish-Russian and Polish-Belarusian borders, but also to Western European borders – the aforementioned elements of polycrisis have translated into not only rebordering but also debordering. It goes without saying that any manifestation of the latter process is particularly valuable in the current situation, as it allows us to speak of a unique form of borderland resilience: not only of the bouncing-back type, expressed in attempts to overcome difficulties and return to the previous state of affairs, but also of the bouncing-forward type, which essentially involves transforming the crisis into further stages of development (cf. Balogh & Svensson, 2022; Laine 2022).

To sum up the reflections on Poland's borderlands with its three non-EU neighbours, it should be emphasised that over the last decade, the tendency towards internal differentiation within this group, usually referred to simply as the post-Soviet bloc, has become more pronounced. While Russia and Belarus are sinking into dictatorial practices that also affect their neighbours, Ukraine, which has been particularly hard hit, is laboriously forging its future within a group of cooperating democratic states. These divergences have an impact on the type of cross-border relations between Poland and these countries. While the borders with Belarus and Russia have become lines separating increasingly different worlds and hostile camps, and the borderlands there are associated with arenas of escalating confrontation and isolation, the Polish-Ukrainian border, although it currently separates a zone of peace from a zone of war, still functioning in accordance with the regulations applicable to the EU's external borders, is gradually being incorporated into the process of modernisation and Europeanisation, resulting in greater permeability.

In this context, it is also worth mentioning the distinction between a social borderland, characterised by a relatively extensive network of cross-border interactions, and an administrative borderland, which is essentially based on a border that separates people, countries or cultures and hindering the development of cross-border practices (Kurcz, 2017, p. 59). So, while the Polish borderlands with Russia and Belarus are increasingly shifting towards the administrative variant, with a very strong security component, the Polish-Ukrainian borderland is developing in the opposite direction. Even if it should be noted that this process is slow and irregular, and its contours are most clearly visible against the background of the two abovementioned cases, this observation still seems

more optimistic than the search for a new idea for the development of the Polish-Russian borderland which would most likely be based on the belief that it is difficult to expect positive impulses from Russia and the Polish-Russian border (Studzińska, 2024, p. 744).

By the way, delving deeper into the issue of internal differences, it is worth noting that while the threat posed by Russia is well recognised, and reflections on this topic appear in the literature on the subject, the Polish-Belarusian borderland (but also the Lithuanian- and Latvian-Belarusian borderlands) tend to be overlooked in this context (Laine & Petersson, 2025, p. 2). The multidimensional format of military cooperation between Belarus and Russia, however, should leave no illusions here, and not only in the context of the sensitive Suwałki Gap.

Summary

The pandemic, the migration crisis, the aggressive stance of Russia and its ally Belarus, and the inauguration of an unpredictable US president – these are the most crucial events with European and even global implications, which are taking shape locally in ways specific to each borderland and neighbourhood. And although neither the first nor the second set isolated above constitute a monolith, in the eastern borderlands we are facing rather borderlines, while in the internal Schengen ones we are dealing rather with borderscapes (Brambilla, 2015). At the same time, certain opportunities are opening up in some of the areas discussed, although these too are fraught with a considerable degree of uncertainty.

Interestingly, the borderland where we observe not only negative but also positive phenomena is the one that currently separates the zone of peace from the zone of war, where good practices and optimism should therefore be hardest to identify. The above-mentioned examples of debordering at the Polish-Ukrainian border, although few in number, confirm the thesis that a polycrisis can be an opportunity to improve the situation of those who have hitherto been largely disadvantaged. In other words, this is a manifestation of resilience – in this case, borderland resilience – which means emerging from the crisis stronger.

Speaking of times of uncertainty, it is reasonable to assume that we are currently seeing only part of these phenomena and that further turmoil is to be expected. Our times are marked by dynamism and change, which primarily affect borderlands and demand an appropriate, resilient response that can lead to more serious transformation. As Jussi Laine (2022) put it: "A resilient world is a world of becoming".

A decade ago, when reaching the place where the borders of Poland, Lithuania and Russia meet, it was possible (albeit illegally) to enter the part of the space around the obelisk marking that point, which belongs to Russia. A few years later, this area was separated from the Polish and Lithuanian sides by barriers, and now the entire area around the tripoint is surrounded by barbed wire. Reaching the peak where the borders of Poland, Slovakia and Ukraine meet (Polish: Krzemieniec, Slovak: Kremenec, Ukrainian: Кременець), we see a small open clearing and a symbolic monument, around which tourists stroll carefree (albeit illegally), and the trampled ground testifies that this is not an exceptional situation. Both scenes, concerning the same political arrangement – the tripoint of two EU member states and one non-member state – do not, of course, change the regulations on crossing the EU's external borders in any way, as these pictures are symbolic in nature. However, as we know, symbols also have meaning.

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THE IMPACT OF EMIGRATION ON THE ETHNICITY OF SLOVAKS IN TRANSCARPATHIA

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Abstract:

The paper's aim is to analyse the impact of emigration abroad on the ethnicity of Slovaks in Transcarpathia. To address the research aim, field research was conducted in the Slovak-Ukrainian localities of Transcarpathia in 2024 and 2025. The research is theoretically anchored in the situational approach to ethnicity. The findings indicate that emigration posed a significant challenge for Slovaks even prior to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and the conflict has exacerbated this trend. Emigration results in a notable decline in the Slovak population in Transcarpathia, thereby reinforcing assimilation into the Ukrainian majority.

Keywords:

Emigration, ethnicity, Slovakia, Slovaks, Transcarpathia, Ukraine.

Introduction

Transcarpathia is Ukraine's westernmost region, bordering the European Union's (EU) members – Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania. The region thus has multiethnic, multicultural, and multireligious character consisting of Ukrainians, Rusyns, Hungarians, Romanians, Russians, Roma, Germans, Jews, and Slovaks, etc. According to the last Ukraine's census in 2001, 5,695 people in Transcarpathia (0,45 % of the entire Transcarpathian population) declared themselves as Slovaks (Tyvodar, 2010, p. 54). Slovaks are localized in the west of the region. Stats of the 2001 census show that 75 % of them live in settlements of the Uzhhorod rayon which borders with Slovakia. It is difficult to anticipate the number of Slovaks today, because of ongoing emigration, assimilation, and revitalization processes, but according to our findings during the field research, the number is lower than in 2001. We found out that emigration abroad is one of the main factors that causes the decline of Slovaks in Transcarpathia. Emigration is interconnected with assimilation and efforts of preservation of the Slovak ethnicity. Emigration from Transcarpathia and its impact on the Slovaks remaining in the region was not the target of scientific research yet. Urgency of the research of the topic is multiplied by the Russian invasion of Ukraine which is crucial factor stepping into the migration and ethnicity of Slovaks.

Methodology

The paper's primary aim is to analyse impact of emigration on the ethnicity of Slovaks in Transcarpathia. To achieve this objective, we conducted field research in Transcarpathia from 11 March to 11 June 2024, which we supplemented with brief investigations in July,

August, October 2024, and another research from 5 to 30 May 2025. Field research aims to get data through unmediated, personal contact with the studied community (Soukup, 2014, p. 60). The primary research technique for data collection was unstructured and semi-structured individual and group interviews with individuals from the Slovak-Ukrainian localities using a pre-prepared questionnaire. In total, we interviewed 111 individuals, of whom 48 were Slovaks, 39 Ukrainians, and 24 people of Slovak origin who declared Ukrainian or mixed ethnicity. Of the individuals who identified themselves as Slovaks, 42 were Roman Catholics (5 were undetermined and 1 Orthodox). Including people of Slovak origin, 51 out of 72 such respondents were Roman Catholics. The interviews were conducted in literary and dialect forms of Slovak and Ukrainian.

In the empirical part of the paper, we do not incorporate quotations from every respondent; instead, we selectively utilize quotations from certain respondents that most effectively exemplify the research findings. Information about respondents is in the Appendix No 1. Since the topic of emigration, ethnicity and war could be sensitive, we anonymize respondents (for their protection) and present only their sex, year of birth, locality, ethnicity and language of the interview. Respondents were informed of the aims of our research and if they verbally agreed, we recorded the interviews on the phone. Because of our (researcher's) Slovak ethnicity and cultural background, we are aware of possible research or confirmation bias towards the Slovak minority in Transcarpathia. All possible effort to minimize our bias and subjectivity was done during the implementation and interpretation of the research.

In addition to the interview, the participant observation technique was applied at several cultural and religious events. We visited the cities of Uzhhorod, Mukachevo, Perechyn, and the villages of Velykyi Bereznyi, Turia Remeta, Huta, Onokivtsi, Storozhnytsia, Hlyboke, Serednie, Antalovtsi, Rodnykova Huta, Kolchyno, Klenovets, Dovhe, and Lysychovo. We also visited the Centre of Slovak Culture in the 4th Lyceum in Uzhhorod. The only school in Transcarpathia where Slovak is the teaching language. As a subject or voluntary course is taught in schools in Antalovtsi, Dovhe, Perechyn, Mukachevo, Storozhnytsia, Turia Remeta, and Uzhhorod.

The active Slovak associations are based in Uzhhorod – Matica Slovenska in Ukraine, Uzhhorod Association of Slovaks, and The Transcarpathian Cultural and Educational Association of the Slovak Women "Dôvera". Folklore ensembles with Slovak dance or singing repertoire are Liptaki (Velykyi Bereznyi), Turianska Dolyna and Paradnitse (Turia Remeta), Hutianochka (Huta), Arnika, Nasha Fayta, and Betiari (Storozhnytsia), Kamaratky and Antalovchanochka (Antalovtsi), Hutnitski Vechirky (Rodnykova Huta), and The Honoured Academic Transcarpathian Folk Choir in Uzhhorod performs folk songs and dances of all Transcarpathian ethnic minorities including Slovak one. Facebook page Slovaks of Ukraine informs about the activities within the minority.

Ethnicity and Slovaks abroad

Ethnicity constitutes a fundamental concept within the humanities and social sciences. Multiple theories and approaches offer divergent perspectives on this concept. This study adopts the situationalist approach, initially conceptualized by Fredrik Barth in the 1960s, as articulated in his introduction to *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organisation of Culture Difference* (1969). Barth posits that ethnic groups are not static entities with inherent characteristics. Instead, he contends that ethnic groups and their boundaries emerge through mutual interactions and relationships. According to Barth, an ethnic group exists when individuals self-ascribe a particular ethnicity and when social environment similarly recognizes and perceives them as such. Both self-identification and external identification are pivotal in the formation of ethnicity (Barth, 1969, p. 13-14). Accepting this premise necessitates the inquiry: under what circumstances do individuals ascribe ethnicity to themselves and others, and act upon it? This leads to the conclusion that ethnicity is a situational status. The characteristics emphasized in social interactions are not predetermined, nor is the relevance of ethnicity in every situation. Ethnicity may hold significance across all social contexts, in select spheres, or not at all.

In the 1980s, Jonathan Y. Okamura introduced the concept of *situational ethnicity*, highlighting the considerable variability in ethnic declaration, contingent upon the prevailing social context and the individual's interpretation and perception of the situation. In certain contexts, ethnicity may be a pertinent factor influencing interaction, while in others, it may not. *Situational ethnicity* encompasses both cognitive and structural dimensions. The cognitive aspect pertains to the subjective interpretation of the situation and the subsequent ascription of ethnicity to oneself or others. However, this ascription is not entirely free choice, as it occurs within a specific social context, constituting the structural aspect, which is characterized by various constraints imposed on individuals, stemming from the societal structure of relations (Okamura, 1981, p. 454-456). Joana Nagel also discusses the situational, voluntary, and dynamic characteristics of ethnicity. She posits that ethnic boundaries, identities, and cultures are continuously negotiated and constructed through social interactions both within and beyond the ethnic group. Nagel further conceptualizes ethnicity as a product of both internal and external identification, wherein people select from a range of ethnicities defined by socially and politically constructed categories, which may confer various advantages or disadvantages (Nagel, 1994, p. 153).

We find the situationalist approach to ethnicity particularly advantageous for examining the Slovak minority in Transcarpathia. Throughout the 20th century, this region experienced shifts across several political systems, each with distinct policies regarding ethnic minorities, including Slovaks. These systems ranged from Magyarization (until 1914 and during 1939-1944), to the status of a state-forming nation during the Czechoslovakian period (1919-1939), to assimilation policies in the Soviet Union (1945-1991), and finally to the recognition of the Slovak minority and the guarantee of its minority rights in independent Ukraine post-1991. During these periods, identifying with the Slovak ethnicity could present advantages, disadvantages, or be of little relevance. Therefore, manifestation of the Slovak ethnicity depended on current situation. As noted by Thomas Hylland Eriksen (2019, p. 28), it is not feasible to homogenize ethnic groups, as not all members necessarily share all characteristics deemed typical of a given group. Slovaks of Transcarpathia is not a homogeneous group; rather, they exhibit diverse manifestations. These range from a tepid attitude towards ethnicity, characterized by a lack of ethnic expressions beyond personal self-identification with Slovak ethnicity to active community members who endeavour to preserve and promote their ethnicity and its selected manifestations.

Ethnicity can be selectively activated or mobilized. Eriksen (2012, p. 117) posits that a group may activate ethnicity through internal activities (directed inside the group) related to shared language, religion, and the notion of common origin, as well as through external activities toward other groups such as competition, stereotypes, hostility, and boundary symbols. Boris Michalík (2012, p. 95-101) further elaborates on the activation of ethnicity within the ethnic minority's environments, identifying six key factors: family environment, mother tongue learning, associational life, commercialization of traditional culture, support from the mother country, and individual personal interest. These factors contribute to the stimulation of ethnicity, which is inherently based on differences from other ethnic groups. Ladislav Lenovský (2017, p. 247) asserts that elements of ethnicity that most distinctly represent differences from others are emphasized, particularly linguistic and cultural identity among Slovaks abroad. For Lenovský, the relations between language, culture, and identity forms the foundational pillar of the minority identity, which must remain robust to prevent assimilation due to external or internal pressures. National cultural institutions, such as schools, churches, and associations, play a crucial role in preserving ethnicity by conducting educational and social activities. According to Ján Botík (2011, p. 17-18), these institutions are vital as they symbolize the spiritual and cultural identity of Slovaks abroad, thereby reinforcing their sense of belonging.

Research on Slovaks in Transcarpathia, although before 2014, concurs that language, culture, and religion (Roman Catholicism, which distinguishes them from the Greek Catholic and Orthodox majority) are perceived as key attributes of their ethnicity (Boleráczová, 2006, p. 84; Kokaisl – Štolfová – Zychová – Hanuš, 2014, p. 70). Based on our research, we

would also include self-identification with ethnicity, identification by others, and awareness of one's origin as essential attributes. The population of people in Transcarpathia identifying as Slovak has been experiencing a prolonged decline, despite concerted efforts by some members of the minority to counteract this trend. Mojmír Benža, who conducted ethnographic research among Slovaks in Transcarpathia during the late 1990s alongside other collaborators, asserts that Slovak ethnic consciousness was predominantly present among the middle-aged and older generations at that time, and it was closely associated with religious identity (Benža, 1998, p. 60). Post-1991, assimilation trends among Slovaks, which were established during the Soviet Union (USSR) era, persisted.[1] However, the 1990s witnessed a "renaissance" of ethnicity, akin to other post-socialist nations, where ethnicity emerged as a significant factor influencing social interactions. Following the USSR period, during which state policies sought to diminish the relevance of ethnicity, the 1990s saw a segment of Slovaks expressing increased interest in their heritage and articulating their ethnic interests (Makara, 1999, p. 69-70). Two contrasting trends are present among Slovak in Transcarpathia: the assimilation and weakening of ethnicity, and conversely, the revitalization and efforts to preserve ethnicity and its perceived attributes. Our research findings suggest that assimilation is significantly exacerbated by the emigration of primarily young and middle-aged individuals abroad, particularly to Slovakia. Other scholars, such as Molnar and Molnar (2010, p. 490), also attribute the decline in the Slovak population in Transcarpathia to factors such as migration, assimilation, and low birth rates.

Since the dissolution of the USSR and the establishment of independent Ukraine in 1991 its citizens have begun to migrate abroad. Unlike Ukrainians, for instance, Slovaks from Transcarpathia benefit from simplified entry into Slovakia if they possess a certificate (status) of a Slovak living abroad. Data from the Office for Slovaks Living Abroad (ÚSZZ) between 2012 and 2025 indicate that hundreds of applications for such certificates are submitted

from Ukraine annually, making it the second-highest country in terms of applications after Serbia (ÚSZZ, 2025). However, this does not imply that all individuals with a Slovak certificate have emigrated to Slovakia, nor that only those with this status migrate. Prior to the full-scale war in 2022, migration abroad was primarily economic, driven by work and study opportunities. Many people were migrating seasonally and were regularly returning to Transcarpathia. Post-2022, many individuals also migrated for security reasons, while economic migration persists.

Research results

The ethnicity and the activities of Slovaks

Unlike in the USSR, after 1991 Slovaks have had the opportunity to express their ethnicity in domains previously prohibited or significantly restricted by the state, such as education, associations, churches, and the media. Concurrently, previously unavailable opportunities for migration abroad emerged, which Slovaks began to utilize. According to respondents, Slovaks have had unrestricted options since 1991 to develop. Respondent No. 1 generally described it: "There are no obstacles, since the 90s, yes, since the times of Ukraine it has changed a lot, for the better, of course. We see it in television, we also have a school, it can be taught [the Slovak language: author's note], there are also associations. Even the Slovak philology at the university, they can go study the Slovak language. National minorities have received more rights, yes, because those events, that is normal, it can be organized normally, to participate in those folklore festivals."

The respondent primarily emphasized the benefits for the minority in terms of education, media, and association activities, also mentioning the Department of Slovak Philology at Uzhhorod National University, although the Slovak language was taught at the University since 1950s. For the preservation and development of the ethnic minority is democratic environment with guaranteed rights crucial, yet it is even more important that the minority actively utilizes these opportunities. The impetus must originate within the minority itself, as Šatava (2009, p. 49) notes, even the most democratic environment does not automatically

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[1]   About the Soviet ethnic policies, see, e.g.: Brubaker (1996), Kahanov (2019), or Lavrynenko (2019).

prevent the assimilation of an ethnic group if the group itself does not wish to utilize its opportunities. Slovaks continue to avail themselves of these opportunities today, yet they remain unable to fully prevent assimilation.

Associations have played a significant role in maintaining and shaping ethnicity, emerging almost immediately after the establishment of independent Ukraine. The folklore ensemble Liptaki was founded in 1991 and had its first performance in 1992, while the Matica Slovenská in Ukraine was established in 1993; both remain active today. Respondent No. 2 perceives the significance of associations primarily in the dissemination of the Slovak language and culture: "Thanks to the creation of Ukraine, we were able to establish our associations and promote our culture here, and as a result, we still speak some Slovak now, and the situation has changed." This respondent also underscores the change in the political system and the emergence of Ukraine, which enabled Slovaks to exercise the minority rights guaranteed by the newly formed state. According to respondent No. 3, the opportunities acquired had a positive impact on Slovaks, who were able to use them and cultivate a positive self-image: "All this had a positive impact on the development of Slovak culture and Slovak art. It was such an advertisement."

After 1991, the Slovak language classes were introduced in certain localities, and a school offering instruction in Slovak was established in Uzhhorod. On one hand, this initiative helps in preserving the language as a significant attribute of their ethnicity; on the other hand, it facilitates emigration to Slovakia for education, as children proficient in Slovak can more readily gain admission to Slovak secondary schools and universities. Despite the ambivalent consequences, respondents viewed the introduction of the Slovak language instruction in schools as a positive influence on ethnicity. Among Slovaks, language is perceived as a crucial ethno-identifying element, although it is not an unequivocal indicator of ethnicity. Respondent No. 1 recalls the inception of the Slovak language instruction in Turia Remeta: "Well, Slovak started to be taught at school, but as a course, three hours, and the teacher was Anton Peter, an honoured teacher of Ukraine, also a Slovak by nationality, ours from Turia

Remeta, so he started it at school. It was just a course, and the classes were so mixed that in those classes, in fact, there were tenth and eleventh and elementary school grades, different grades, whoever wanted Slovak."

Respondent No. 4, who instructs voluntary courses of the Slovak language, history, and culture in Serednie, also underscores the importance of transmitting the language and culture to future generations. She warns that failure to do so may result in the complete assimilation of the Slovak minority: "We give priority to the language, priority to traditions, preservation of all that and in addition to that, education, so we also educate those young Slovaks [...]. They have to learn those traditions, they not only should, but they have to, because if they will not pass them on, it will die. I say that if we do not preserve it now, in two years no one will need it."

In discussions concerning ethnicity, respondents frequently transitioned to topics such as the number of individuals who speak the language or attend the Roman Catholic Church, using these factors to infer the Slovak identity, despite their acknowledgment that this is not universally applicable. Beyond educational institutions, associations, and the church, family and its environment have been pivotal in preserving the language and ethnicity. All respondents concurred that activities within schools, associations, churches, and the media are vital; however, the primary impetus for sustaining the language and ethnicity must originate from the family. Respondent No. 5 noted that the language has been preserved primarily because it was spoken at home: "It has been preserved in a way that we spoke only with it in home with parents, just like I am doing now. With parents. We did not speak in Ukrainian or Russian."

Everyday communication among some Slovaks in Transcarpathia still occurs in standard or dialect forms of Slovak, predominantly among middle-aged or older individuals; the younger generation predominantly speaks Ukrainian, although some continue to use Slovak in specific contexts. According to the respondents, the number of such individuals is diminishing. Respondent No. 6 encapsulated this as follows: "All of us, when we meet like this, the locals, we all talk in dialect, but not the

children anymore, some children still talk with their parents like that, but most no longer do."

The role of Roman Catholicism as an ethno-identifying element for Slovaks has been previously discussed. Its significance lies not only in the conduct of masses (partly) in Slovak, providing the believers with opportunities to engage with the language, but also in the fact that masses represent one of the few remaining venues where the Slovak community regularly convenes and communicates. When inquiring about Slovaks, respondents typically referenced the number of Roman Catholics in the village and their church attendance as a basis for estimating their numbers. The Roman Catholic churches were often referred to as the Slovak churches, or when discussing Slovaks, they would refer to Roman Catholics. Respondent No. 7 described the situation of Slovaks in Dovhe: "There still are. They go to church, Slovak church." Similarly, respondent No. 8 commented on Antalovtsi, somewhat hyperbolically stating: "On Sunday there's mass there, at 11 Kyiv time, always. All the Slovaks are there together."

Respondent No. 8 evaluated the role of the church, asserting that it played a significant role in facilitating children's acquisition of the Slovak language through various courses and camps. The respondent acknowledged that learning solely within the church or school is insufficient, emphasizing the necessity of the family environment for the preservation of both language and ethnicity: "As long as people speak at home, the Slovak path is still followed. Because school is one thing, the church also provided a lot, because everything in the church was in Slovak, children had the camps in Slovak, so we learned a lot of Slovak there, that was really good, but now it is what it is."

In Velykyi Bereznyi, respondents also recognized the ongoing benefits of the church to the Slovaks. Beyond masses as a gathering place for Slovaks, the church facilitated the formation of a folklore ensemble, which emerged among believers attending Roman Catholic masses. This is confirmed by a segment from a group interview involving three respondents:

Respondent No. 9: "Without church, we would not have ensemble, nothing would be done, no Slovak language in school."

Respondent No. 10: "All people gather here, around the church."

Respondent No. 11: "Until today."

Despite the efforts of Slovaks in various domains, that have positive effect on the Slovak ethnicity, according to respondents, their population in Transcarpathia is diminishing, as confirmed by respondents across all visited locations, irrespective of ethnicity or age: "Now there are fewer of them, fewer families, but I do not know how many" (respondent No. 12). The Slovak efforts are maybe slowing the assimilation but is not turning it back and ethnicity is eroding. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has significantly impacted the demographic composition in the surveyed areas. Ukrainian internally displaced persons have arrived in all locations, further increasing the Ukrainian population. Respondent No. 6 described the situation with internally displaced persons in Storozhnytsia: "The war has changed everything, because now we have a lot of people from the east in Storozhnytsia too, and that is a lot. They are buying houses. The needy have left where they can live, and some stayed here, you know, it is such a village of the rich. So those who can buy land and build a house in a year have stayed here." According to the Information and Computing Centre of the Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity of Ukraine (ICC), 123,552 internally displaced persons from the other areas of Ukraine were registered in Transcarpathia as of 15 November 2025 (ICC, 2025).

Emigration

In all surveyed locations, respondents concurred that the primary challenge for the preservation of the Slovaks in Transcarpathia is emigration, predominantly to Slovakia, but also to a lesser extent to Czechia and other EU countries. All respondents knew people who emigrated to Slovakia and most of them has some emigrants in their families as well. Emigration subsequently leads to the assimilation and decline of those who remain. Therefore, situations to activate[2] the Slovak ethnicity are declining. Respondent No. 4 described the situation, noting that after the onset of the Russian invasion in 2022, she co-organized humanitarian aid from Slovakia for Slovak families and discovered that the Slovak population in

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2   By the terminology of Eriksen.

Serednie was smaller than anticipated. She attributes this decline to migration. It is noteworthy that she estimated their numbers based on church attendance: "We counted on there being 7,000 of them [in Transcarpathia: author's note], but now it is much smaller, who declares, the migration is quite large. Now it is not only Slovakia that is a priority, now the EU as well [...]. Well, we went to those families, based on how they go to church and to older people who do not go anywhere anymore, but we know about them that they are Slovaks, because some of them are those who do not have a family. Well, either the family is already somewhere beyond the border, and they are left alone and so on, so there are different social conditions for that [...]. Well, imagine that we were counting with 100 such families that remain in Serednie, because it was about Serednie, that remain in Serednie, that they, definitely, are Slovaks and there were no longer 100 households, 70 remained and that is very few."

Similar information regarding emigration to Slovakia and the EU was also provided by respondents from other locations. The issue for the minority is that, prior to the Russian invasion in 2022, some individuals migrated abroad seasonally and returned to Transcarpathia. However, following the Russian attack, many have emigrated permanently and do not return, or only do so occasionally. A significant factor is the ongoing mobilisation of men (between 25-60 years of age) into the army. This implies that men working in Slovakia, for instance, would not be permitted to return abroad if they return to Ukraine and they could be conscripted into the army, a scenario some wish to avoid. Consequently, entire families are leaving, and if they are unable to sell their homes, they leave them abandoned. Respondents in a group interview in Hlyboke summarized it as follows:

Respondent No. 13: "A lot of people have left. To work. We have just walked around village and there is empty house, there another one, another one, so many have left."

Respondent No. 14: "And young men are trying, maybe abroad, to Czechia, Slovakia, Poland, earn some money and buy something."

Respondent No. 15: "And the ones who have left do not want to come back because of mobilisation."

Respondents have identified several push factors (pushing people from Transcarpathia) contributing to migration, including Ukraine's challenging economic conditions, low salaries, and ongoing war. Pull factors in Slovakia and other EU countries (pulling people there)[3] are superior educational opportunities, favourable labour market conditions, higher salaries, and enhanced social welfare. Notably, the most frequently cited motivations are the prospects of better education and better working conditions abroad. These factors predominantly influence young individuals to pursue studies in Slovakia and subsequently remain there for employment, or to migrate further within the EU. Respondent No. 2 articulated this sentiment: "They want to study at your place and then practically stay there [...]. In 10-20 years, there will be a small minority, smaller. If the economic situation here does not change for the better... There is a problem with work here."

The inclination to study in Slovakia was also highlighted by younger respondents. They have numerous acquaintances, both Slovak and non-Slovak, who chose the secondary or tertiary education in Slovakia. Respondent No. 12 asserted that children from Slovak-speaking families predominantly choose to study in Slovakia: "There are people from the minority who speak, whose parents speak Slovak, they go to study to Slovakia immediately." Respondent No. 16 stated that many individuals from his social circle have also pursued education in Slovakia and intend to remain there. He further noted a prevalent trend among Ukrainians to learn Slovak, facilitating their relocation to Slovakia. Thus, proficiency in the Slovak language is also a pragmatic decision, driven not by ethnicity but by the desire to emigrate to Slovakia. "There are people of the Slovak origin who have emigrated to Slovakia, my classmates and it seems like they want to stay there. So many, many live in Slovakia, even non-Slovaks are learning Slovak, because they want to study in Prešov, Košice, Bratislava." Respondent No. 3 corroborates the testimony of respondent No. 16, indicating that individuals who pursue education in Slovakia often do not return to Transcarpathia, primarily due to economic factors. Since 2022, security concerns

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[3] By terminology of push and pull factors' concept of Lee (1966).

have also contributed to this trend: "Another thing is that hardly anyone wants to return here, even more so now when there is a war, but even before, because of the salaries, because over there, our student makes more money doing a part-time job than someone here who comes back and gets a starting salary after university, so it is only logical that they would rather look for work in Slovakia or even in Czechia or somewhere else."

The Russian invasion in 2022 has exacerbated this emigration trend, not only due to security risks in Ukraine but also because of the deteriorating economic conditions forcing people to emigrate. This situation has led to family separations, with some members emigrating while others remain, or in some cases, entire families relocating. Emigration decisions are made individually within families and are influenced by the prevailing circumstances and available opportunities, as not everyone who wishes to emigrate is able to do so. Respondent No. 6 illustrates the situation with an example from Storozhnytsia: "If there would not be war, people would not leave as whole families, it would hold together more, because again, they would talk at home, they would take their children to church. Everything would be alive, but the war sped everything up a lot."

A notable trend in emigration is the pragmatic use of ethnicity, as some individuals seek to obtain a certificate of Slovak living abroad from the Office for Slovaks Living Abroad. While individuals with genuine the Slovak ethnicity apply for this certificate, respondents indicate that many in Transcarpathia acquire it for pragmatic purposes. Respondents noted that some individuals technically qualify for the certificate due to Slovak ancestry, yet their ethnicity is no longer Slovak, and they have not engaged with the minority's cultural life. Respondents commented on this phenomenon, for instance: "The youth are already at your country. The older people. The younger ones come when they need to get that status of 'Slovak living abroad', it helps them" (Respondent No. 2). "Maybe some people want to know their roots, others maybe because they want to get a Slovak abroad status, that is also a motivation, yes" (Respondent No. 1).

Impact of emigration

One of the most frequently discussed consequences of emigration is the decrease of the youth who would otherwise participate in the cultural activities of the minority. In addition to the youth, respondents have noted a significant absence of men, as many have remained abroad and are either unwilling or unable to return, have enlisted in the military, or are avoiding conscription and thus limit their public appearances. It is not solely the youth and men who emigrated before and during the invasion, but these groups were most frequently mentioned by respondents. This situation is illustrated by the respondents' statements. The first statement pertains to the involvement of individuals in folklore groups, while the second is more general: "There is a war, and many kids have left abroad [...]. Now, with the war, there are no men to sing" (Respondent No. 17) and "Then many Slovaks, expatriate Slovaks, who had the opportunity to travel, work in Slovakia but also in other countries, so that is also the case, there are men missing from families" (Respondent No. 1).

The phenomenon of emigration and the decline in the Slovak population have led to increased assimilation. Assimilation is a common and often natural occurrence between ethnic majorities and minorities. During the USSR, the state actively promoted conditions conducive to assimilation and restricted the minority rights of Slovaks. This situation evolved with the advent of an independent Ukraine, where Slovaks were afforded greater freedom to travel and migrate, thereby facilitating the assimilation of those who remained. The cultural and linguistic closeness between Slovaks and Ukrainians in Transcarpathia easing social interactions and relationships, which, according to respondents, have historically been non-conflictual. All Slovaks are proficient in Ukrainian, and those socialized during the USSR era also speak Russian. Mixed marriages are common. Respondent No. 7 illustrates it: "Everything has mingled, you know? Slovak married Ukrainian, Ukrainian married Ukrainian. For example, I am Slovak, and I married Ukrainian. She was Greek-Catholic but converted to Slovak to Roman-Catholic." As noted by this respondent, religi-

ous conversion, particularly between Roman and Greek Catholics, is not uncommon.

Respondent No. 8 also highlights mixed marriages and the subsequent adoption of the Ukrainian ethnicity by descendants, which is apparently predominant trend in the mixed marriages and the Slovak ethnicity is being marginalized this way. The adaptation of Slovaks, as discussed by the respondent, appears to be common, although it cannot be generalized to all families or considered a definitive characteristic of Slovak behaviour. The respondent further associates the transmission of ethnicity with the use of the Slovak language: "Now, in my opinion, it is decreasing, but why? Because families are merging, well, not only Slovaks are marrying Slovaks. And when, for example, someone new comes to the family and does not speak Slovak, Slovaks adapt to him so that he understands, and what? And when the family does not speak, when the young children do not hear the Slovak language, so it disappears."

The Slovak language, perceived as a crucial attribute of ethnicity, is gradually vanishing from everyday communication in the Slovak-Ukrainian localities, particularly among the youth, who predominantly converse in Ukrainian and only occasionally in Slovak. In mixed marriages, it is common for a child to speak Slovak with one parent and Ukrainian with the other, while in public, at school, and in youth groups, where Ukrainians predominate, they converse in Ukrainian. Alternatively, a parent may speak Slovak, while the child, understanding Slovak, responds in Ukrainian. This is exemplified by Respondent No. 18: "For example, our group, all fathers, but mothers are Ukrainian, and fathers are, they are mingled and between each other do not speak Slovak. For example, my brother, my nephew and my son, I spoke to them in Yovra[4] dialect but between each other, they speak Ukrainian."

The standard Slovak, along with its dialects, is increasingly absent from everyday communication among the younger generation, as it is primarily spoken by their grandparents and occasionally their parents. Similarly, Ukrainian dialects are also diminishing as the youth increasingly adopt standard Ukrainian. As Respondent No. 16 observed: "The youth

factually do not preserve even Ukrainian dialects we speak, many pass to Ukrainian. So, it is a question. It is poorly preserved."

An example of the gradual erosion of the Slovak ethnicity is evident in religious life. Roman Catholicism has served as a significant ethno-identifying element for Slovaks; however, the form of religious practice is evolving due to the decline of Slovak believers and the rise of Ukrainian ones. In the Slovak-Ukrainian localities with Roman Catholic churches, a major issue is the gradual shift in the language of masses. The change arises from the increasing number of Ukrainian believers at the expense of Slovaks, with the youth, irrespective of their origin, primarily using Ukrainian. Consequently, Ukrainian is progressively becoming the dominant language of the liturgy. In practice, this results in parts of the mass being conducted in one language and parts in another. Some congregants, particularly Slovaks and the older and middle generations, wish to preserve Slovak, while Ukrainians and the younger generation favour Ukrainian. The promotion of Ukrainian is further facilitated by the deficit of Slovak priests. In the 1990s, masses in the research localities were conducted entirely in Slovak, as priests either came from Slovakia or were Slovak speaking. However, this situation has changed. At the time of the research, only two priests from Slovakia were serving in Transcarpathia, in Dovhe, Lysychovo, Storozhnytsia, and Uzhhorod. Predominantly, Ukrainian and Polish priests serve in the localities, attempting to conduct parts of the mass in Slovak. The example of liturgical language illustrates how emigration and assimilation are transforming the Slovak-Ukrainian localities. For instance, in the village of Onokivtsi, Slovak masses have ceased due to the dwindling Slovak population. Respondent No. 19 explained: "It does not have meaning, do you understand? If I and two more women understand and the youth, the youth does not understand what is going on, what is being talked about. So, all masses are in Ukrainian."

Respondent No. 6 highlighted the tensions in conducting religious services, noting that the younger generation predominantly speaks Ukrainian. Concurrently, she emphasizes the church's role in preserving the Slovak ethnicity in Storozhnytsia. She stated: "Currently, approximately half of the congregation prefers to

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[4] Old name of Storozhnytsia.

speak Ukrainian, while the older members continue to speak Slovak. Although our children understand Slovak, they no longer use it at home or desire it in church services. Among the 15 young attendees, only three or four prefer a Slovak mass. However, without the church, Slovak would likely not persist in Storozhnytsia. Historically, we have had Slovak priests and sisters, maintaining this tradition."

The village residents have long advocated for a Slovak priest, a position unfilled since 2022, until the arrival of a Slovak priest in August 2025. The introduction of Ukrainian into the liturgy has faced resistance from some Slovak congregants across surveyed locations, underscoring the significance of faith for those wishing to retain Slovak elements in the mass. Concerns arise that the liturgy may gradually become Ukrainianized, as the youth predominantly speak Ukrainian, as noted by respondent No. 18: "We are resisting because they prefer Ukrainian, and we do not. This includes priests and all aspects. The children do not comprehend what they read during the masses. For instance, they read but do not understand the content, which is why some advocate for readings in Ukrainian. However, we fear it will start with one reading, then another, eventually leading to an entirely Ukrainian mass." Conversely, there is a determination to preserve Slovak in the church, as expressed by Respondent No. 1: "We conduct mass in Slovak. The liturgy is in Slovak, but sermons are in Ukrainian due to the presence of Ukrainian priests. Nonetheless, we have not encountered significant efforts to Ukrainianize the service. There was an attempt a few years ago, but it was unsuccessful as our Slovak community did not accept it."

Interviews with priests who have served or are currently serving in the studied localities offer a slightly different perspective. The priests whose statements are used in this analysis are Ukrainians, yet they endeavour to conduct portions of the masses in Slovak to accommodate their congregants. However, they emphasize that they cannot focus solely on the ethnicity of the believers and strive to cater to the majority. Typically, the Slovak-Ukrainian masses are held once a week; however, in Perechyn, biweekly, alternating with a Ukrainian, a pattern also observed in Dovhe. In Lysychovo, the mixed mass is conducted only once a

month. The decline in the use of Slovak as the liturgical language is attributed to the decreasing number of Slovak believers and the increasing number of Ukrainian ones, a trend further exacerbated by the influx of internally displaced persons. An illustrative case is Serednie, where, unlike in the villages of Antalovtsi and Hlyboke, the issue of the language of masses has reemerged. Respondent No. 20 noted: "There is a language issue in Serednie, because we are having two kinds of masses now. Not long ago, from the start of the war, because many internally displaced people have arrived. We have a group of kids, which has escaped from Mariupol here. Of course, they do not speak Slovak, only Ukrainian."

Another priest (Respondent No. 21), who served in the surveyed localities from 1987 to 2011 and remains in contact with the locals, expresses scepticism regarding the preservation of Slovak as the liturgical language in Transcarpathia. He attributed this to emigration, which has led to a decrease in the Slovak population, with those remaining gradually assimilating: "Whether you like it or not, this time brings about the fact that everything will be Ukrainian, minorities simply emigrated, what, for whom?"

Discussion

The emigration of Slovaks from Transcarpathia should be contextualized within the broader framework of migration from Ukraine to the EU countries. This phenomenon affects not only the Ukrainian ethnic majority but also Transcarpathian ethnic minorities, including Hungarians, Romanians, and Roma, among others. A comparative analysis of our research on the emigration of Slovaks and its impact on the ethnic identity of those remaining in Transcarpathia with studies on the migration of Hungarians or Ukrainians reveals several parallels.

For Hungarians, Hungary serves as the primary destination for emigration, analogous to Slovakia for Slovaks. However, a notable distinction is that Hungary actively implements measures to encourage this migration. According to Erőss – Kovály – Tártai, who examined migration from Transcarpathia to Hungary, the onset of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2014 intensified migration to Hun-

gary, which continues to promote it through specific kin-state policies. The authors highlight, for instance, a relatively lenient citizenship policy that facilitates access not only to Hungary but also to the entire EU for people of Hungarian descent in Transcarpathia (Erőss – Kovály – Tártai, 2016, p. 24-25). It is important to note that the status of a Slovak living abroad does not equate to Slovak citizenship, although individuals with this status can acquire it through a simplified procedure. This has motivated Transcarpathian Hungarians to emigrate over the past decade, particularly after 2022, when security concerns, including military conscription, were added to economic motivations.

According to Erőss – Kovály – Molnár – Tártai, emigration is the primary factor contributing to the decline in the Hungarian population in Transcarpathia from 151,516 in 2001 to an estimated 131,000 in 2017 (Tártai – Molnár – Kovály – Erőss, 2018, p. 113, 118, 121).[5] Political scientist Sándor Bertolon projects that by 2025, the Hungarian population in Transcarpathia could number only around 70,000-80,000 (Bertolon, 2025, p. 268). This reduction, coupled with the influx of Ukrainians (especially post-2022), exacerbates assimilation trends among the Hungarian minority, despite their numbers being significantly higher than those of the Slovaks. Furthermore, a distinct linguistic boundary between Hungarians and Ukrainians impedes assimilation, although it continues.

The population of Ukrainians in Transcarpathia is not diminishing; rather, it is relatively increasing due to internal migration within Ukraine. Nonetheless, Ukrainians are also migrating to the EU. Matúš Žac examines migration trends between Ukraine and Slovakia through the lens of classical migration theories. Our research findings on Slovak migration indicate that they can also be conceptualized within the framework of these theories, as part of the migration from Ukraine to Slovakia and other EU countries. Žac analyses migration from Ukraine to Slovakia through various theoretical perspectives, including the theory of push and pull factors, the theory of social networks, the theory of dual labour markets, the

theory of the new economy of labour migration, the theory of the world system, and the theory of cumulative causes (Žac, 2024, p. 23-25).

Our research contributes not only to the discussion on migration and its implications between Ukraine and Slovakia but also to the broader context of migration and the existence of the Slovak diaspora abroad. Similar migration processes are occurring in other European countries with an autochthonous Slovak minority, such as Serbia, Romania, Croatia, and Hungary. Juraj Marušiak and Sanja Zlatanović, are engaged in research on migration abroad and its impact on the Slovak community in Vojvodina, Serbia. Their findings align with ours. The emigration of Slovaks from Serbia to Slovakia has analogous consequences for the minority remaining in Serbia as the emigration of Slovaks from Transcarpathia. According to them, migration renders the Slovak community in Vojvodina a transnational community, divided between those residing in Slovakia and those in Serbia. This is also true for families that frequently migrate between the two countries (living there and there). In Bački Petrovac, the number of abandoned Slovak houses is increasing, often purchased by Serbs, which gradually raises the proportion of Serbs in the city. Consequently, the ethnic composition of this city is changing, as evidenced by the prevalence of Serbian signs on streets, in shops, and other public buildings instead of Slovak. Emigration, like the case of Slovaks in Transcarpathia, predominantly affects the younger generation, educated individuals, and people of working age, who could potentially lead the organization of minority life. The decline in youth also poses a challenge for classes and schools where the Slovak language is taught, which are decreasing in Serbia, thereby intensifying assimilation (Marušiak – Zlatanović, 2025, p. 572).

When the population of an ethnic group within a specific territory diminishes, the pressure for assimilation on the remaining members intensifies. The decrease often leads to a decline in the group's activities and their impact (although this is not universally the case) between the minority and the majority. This dynamic facilitates assimilation. Ethnologist Leoš Šatava posits that ethnic minorities frequently need to assert their ethno-

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[5] In addition to emigration, the authors also mention secondary causes: assimilation, the arrival of Ukrainians from other areas, low natural increase). So those causes are practically identical to the Slovaks of Transcarpathia.

identifying characteristics to affirm their distinction from the majority (Šatava, 2009, p. 47). A decrease in individuals demonstrating these characteristics weakens the group's cohesion. Consequently, opportunities for expressing minority ethnicity diminish, as motivation wanes, potentially leading to the complete disappearance of such expressions and a shift towards majority ethnicity. The smaller the minority relative to the majority, the greater the necessity to engage with the majority's language and cultural norms, thereby marginalizing minority ethnic attributes.

These processes are currently expedited by emigration of Transcarpathian Slovaks, resulting in secondary consequences of assimilation, which concurrently alters the situational expression of the minority's ethnicity. In essence, individuals cease to identify as Slovaks and lose awareness of their Slovak heritage, with the Ukrainian element becoming predominant. Some individuals of Slovak descent now identify as Ukrainians, while others strive to maintain their Slovak ethnicity, expressing it situationally despite the decreasing opportunities in Transcarpathia. However, the process of assimilation is not inherently linear, and the trend may change in the future.

Conclusion

The paper aimed to identify and analyse the consequences of emigration on the ethnicity of Slovaks in Transcarpathia. The study is based on the *situational ethnicity* concept. The research results are composed of statements from respondents we interviewed during the field research in Transcarpathia in 2024 and 2025. Emigration of Slovaks, primarily to Slovakia, Czechia, and to other EU countries, has been a persistent phenomenon since the 1990s and continues to the present day. Individuals capitalize on the opportunity to study and work abroad due to the more favourable and stable economic conditions compared to Ukraine. Predominantly, individuals from the younger and middle generations emigrate for educational and employment purposes. Prior to the Russian invasion in 2022, migration was often seasonal or shift-based. However, post-2022, migration has become more permanent, with entire families relocating, as the war has exacerbated Ukraine's economic situation. Many men are

reluctant to return to Ukraine from abroad due to the risk of mobilisation.

Emigration is not exclusive to Slovaks but also affects other ethnic groups in Transcarpathia. Migration and the acquisition of residence in Slovakia are facilitated for those holding the status of Slovaks living abroad. Consequently, individuals apply for this status, either out of a sense of identity or for pragmatic reasons. These motivations are not mutually exclusive, nor are they universally present. Individuals with Slovak ancestry, who predominantly identify as Ukrainians in most contexts, also apply for certificate. However, they may also situationally recognize their Slovak ethnicity.

A logical consequence of emigration is the reduction of Slovaks in Transcarpathia, which in turn affects the ethnicity of those who remain. This often results in a loss of perceived ethnic attributes and a subsequent shift towards the Ukrainian ethnicity – assimilation. Assimilation becomes more challenging to resist as the Slovak population diminishes and the Ukrainian majority increases. Another adverse consequence of the Russian invasion is the influx of internally displaced Ukrainians into the Slovak-Ukrainian localities, further altering the ethnic composition in favour of Ukrainians. The Slovak ethnicity is predominantly maintained among the older and middle-aged generations, with minimal presence among the younger generation across all studied localities. Among the younger generation, the Slovak ethnicity is often a pragmatic means to obtain the status of a Slovak living abroad.

Signs of the gradual erosion of the Slovak ethnicity are evident in various domains significant to Slovaks in Transcarpathia, such as education, religious institutions, community life, and family. Emigration thus exacerbates pre-existing assimilation trends between Slovaks and Ukrainians in Transcarpathia. Respondents of both the Slovak and Ukrainian ethnicity perceive emigration as the primary challenge to Slovaks in Transcarpathia, as increased emigration complicates efforts to counteract assimilation.

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KONCEPT LIBERÁLNEHO FAŠIZMU
V SPOLOČENSKO-POLITICKOM
A MEDIÁLNOM DISKURZE

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Abstract:

This article analyzes the phenomenon of liberal fascism, its connotations and its use in socio-political and media discourse. Through analyzing theoretical sources, we compare the main aspects of individual ideologies, aiming to comprehensively and objectively best the content of the term liberal fascism and its legitimacy in interdiscourse and the academic environment. The article contains interpreted the author's research and focused on the opinion of experts from history and political science on liberal fascism; based on this, we formulated the corresponding conclusions. The text is based on the author's rigorous thesis.

Keywords:

Discourse, fascism, fiberal fascism, liberalism.

Úvod

Liberálny fašizmus – pojem, ktorý v posledných rokoch zaznieva nielen zo strany politikov, ale aj laickej verejnosti a stanovisko k tejto relatívne novej terminológii poskytujú taktiež vedeckí pracovníci z oblasti histórie či politických vied.

Systém hodnôt a ideí, ku ktorým sa liberalizmus hlási je individualizmus, teda dôraz na jednotlivca, osobná sloboda, rovnosť, tolerancia, racionálna diskusia či minimalizovanie zásahov štátu. Navzdory tomu fašizmus vyznáva identitu spoločnosti ako organického celku na úkor jednotlivca, presadzuje etatizmus – maximalizovaný zásah štátneho aparátu, antisemitizmus, vodcovstvo, boj či nacionalizmus.

Položme si teda otázky: Môže byť fašizmus liberálny alebo liberalizmus fašistický? Je spojenie liberalizmu a fašizmu v podmienkach demokracie oxymoron, alebo sa stal paradoxom reflektujúci vývoj politických ideológií a myslenia v spoločnosti?

Na prvý pohľad sa môže zdať, že ide o relatívne nový pojem, ktorý z historického hľadiska nemá nijakú oporu. Hoci prepojenie liberalizmu a fašizmu do jedného uceleného pojmu nabralo na popularite až v posledných rokoch, jeho datovanie siaha do 30. rokov 20. storočia, kedy tento termín prvýkrát použil spisovateľ H. G. Wells vo svojom prejave na Oxforde, kde vyzýval k využitiu fašistických prostriedkov, ktoré budú slúžiť liberálnym cieľom (Siegel 2009). Na Wellsov termín „liberálny fašizmus" nadviazal Jonah Goldberg, ktorý spopularizoval tento pojem a v roku 2008 vydal knihu s rovnomenným názvom: *Liberal Fascism: The Secret History of the American Left, From Mussoli-*

ni to the Politics of Meaning, ktorá vyvolala obrovskú diskusiu v politických a akademických kruhoch pre svoju kontroverziu. V anotácii Jonah Goldberg (2008) uvádza, že kniha ponúka nový pohľad na teórie a praktiky, ktoré definujú fašistickú politiku. Autor zároveň pripomína, že pôvodní fašisti boli naľavo a že liberáli od Woodrowa Wilsona cez Franklina Delano Roosevelta až po Hillary Clintonovú obhajovali politiku a princípy, ktoré sa nápadne podobali politikám a princípom Hitlerovho národného socializmu a Mussoliniho fašizmu. V tejto spornej knihe autor obracia predsudky naruby a má v úmysle ukázať nám skutočný význam liberálneho fašizmu, a zároveň tvrdí, že mnoho aspektov progresívnej politiky má podobnosti s fašistickou ideológiou.

Mnohí historici, politológovia a vedci (ako napr. Matthew Feldman, Roger Griffin, Kevin Mattson a iní) považujú Goldbergovu knihu za prehnanú a historicky nepresnú. Poukazujú na to, že fašizmus je a vždy bol historicky aj ideologicky spájaný s krajnou pravicou a je v úplnom protiklade s ideálmi liberalizmu a progresivizmu. Kritici liberálneho fašizmu poukazujú na to, že tento termín môže skôr slúžiť na polarizáciu a diskreditáciu politických oponentov než na nejakú odbornú diskusiu či serióznu akademickú analýzu. Autorova kniha je často vedcami a akademikmi označovaná za propagandistickú, ktorej cieľom je prekrútiť a prispôsobiť terminológiu ako aj historické fakty tak, aby presne zodpovedala tomu, ako autor prepája fašizmus s liberalizmom a progresivizmom.

Pojem liberálny fašizmus v slovenskom verejnom prostredí

Liberálny fašizmus sa stal súčasťou diskusií, predvolebnej kampane a politického boja o mandát a hlas voliča, ktorého počiatok zaznamenávame približne v čase parlamentných volieb do Národnej rady Slovenskej republiky konaných v roku 2016, kedy sa do parlamentu dostala krajne pravicová nacionalistická a neonacistická politická strana Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko.

Líder politickej strany Marián Kotleba[1] vo svojich prejavoch, príspevkoch a vystúpeniach často vystupoval s kritikou voči liberálnym stranám a politikom, ktorý podľa neho presadzujú diktátorský režim podobný fašizmu pod záštitou liberálnych hodnôt. V jednom z príspevkov, ktoré ĽSNS pravidelne uverejňuje na svojej oficiálnej webovej stránke pri príležitosti výročia skončenia 2. svetovej vojny označil liberálov ako skupinu liberálnych fanatikov, ktorí šíria protiruskú fašistickú propagandu (Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko 2022). Podobnú rétoriku, kde spája liberalizmus s extrémizmom, fanatizmom či fašizmom propagoval aj na svojom YouTube kanáli,[2] svojich politických protivníkov zvykli charakterizovať ako liberálnych extrémistov, pričom v snahe o ohradenie sa voči tejto ideológii zaviedli neadekvátny pojem – liberálny extrémizmus (Šimková 2020). S podobným názorom pracuje Vladimír Šnídl,[3] ktorý rovnako predpokladá, že prepájanie liberalizmu s fašizmom sa začalo objavovať približne v období parlamentných volieb v roku 2016, kedy výrazne vzrástla frekvencia používania pojmu fašizmus v súvislosti so zvolením ĽSNS do parlamentu. V tomto vývoji zohrala svoju úlohu aj alternatívna mediálna scéna, ktorá otvorene podporovala Mariána Kotlebu, a zároveň prispela k šíreniu pojmu liberálny fašizmus (osobná komunikácia, 9. jún, 2024).

Webová stránka Antiliberál, ktorej sloganom je „Odhaľovanie neoliberálneho diabolského zla" v sekcii definície pojmov charakterizoval liberofašizmus ako „doktrínu, kedy ‚milovníci slobody' vnucujú túto bezbrehú slobodu svojim spoluobčanom násilnými prostriedkami", či liberálny extrémizmus ako „motivovaný programami a postojmi alebo ideológiami, ktoré smerujú k potláčaniu základných ľudských práv a slobôd, ktoré obha-

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[1]   Slovenský, krajne pravicový politik, v rokoch 2005-2006 pôsobil ako vodca neonacistického politického hnutia Slovenská pospolitosť, ktoré bolo v roku 2006 rozpustené rozhodnutím Najvyššieho súdu za nesúlad s Ústavou SR a extrémistické prejavy. V 2020 ho Špecializovaný trestný súd uznal za vinného za trestný čin založenia, podpory a propagácie hnutia smerujúceho k potlačeniu základných práv a slobôd.

[2]   Účet na YouTube zrušila spoločnosť Google v 2023 z dôvodu porušovania noriem komunity. V ich prípade nešlo o prvý prípad, ich kanál bol zmazaný spoločnosťou aj v roku 2020 za šírenie nenávistných prejavov a zdravotníckych dezinformácií.

[3]   Vyštudovaný politológ a zakladajúci reportér slovenského *Denníka N*. V roku 2017 napísal knihu *Pravda a lož* na Facebooku, kde sa venuje témam ako sú hoaxy a konšpiračné teórie.

jujú, podporujú alebo podnecujú nenávisť, násilie alebo neodôvodnene odlišné zaobchádzanie voči skupine osôb alebo jednotlivcovi pre ich príslušnosť k inému názorovému prúdu, národu, národnosti, pre ich pôvod, fyzické či psychické odlišnosti alebo pre ich náboženské vyznanie, ak je zámienkou pre predchádzajúce dôvody. Typickým znakom liberálneho extrémizmu je popieranie rovnosti všetkých ľudí. Na jednej strane nadraďuje určitú skupinu spriaznených osôb, na strane druhej ponižuje názorových oponentov. Cieľom liberálnych extrémistov je vytvorenie politického systému na báze nerovnosti ľudí, založenej na spriaznenosti s ideologickou doktrínou otvorenej tyranskej spoločnosti" (Antiliberál s.a.).

Ďalšie (alternatívne) médium, ktoré sa venuje konceptu liberálneho fašizmu, patrí aj stránka Dav Dva,[4] kde autor vystupujúci pod pseudonymom Ondrej Gorod II (2020) vo svojom článku „Liberálny fašizmus nie je oxymoron, ale krutý paradox zvrátenej doby. Jeho existenciu dokazujú filozofi, politológovia aj politici", zverejnil výroky a vyjadrenia publicistov, filozofov či politikov, ktorí by mali potvrdzovať legitímnosť používania tohto pojmu. Jedným z politikov, ktorí operujú s pojmom liberálny fašizmus a je zahrnutý aj v spomínanom článku je aj Ľuboš Blaha, ktorý spracoval 8 analógií, v čom sa liberáli správajú ako fašisti. Nasledujúce zhrnutie ôsmich analógií poskytuje prehľad jeho argumentov o podobnostiach medzi fašistickým a liberálnym správaním:

Podľa Ľuboša Blahu liberáli, rovnako ako aj fašisti, kriminalizujú iné názory a ideológie, ktoré nekorešpondujú s jej hodnotami a nedokážu tolerovať nič, čo nie je liberálne. Autor nachádza ďalšiu súvislosť medzi týmito ideológiami v presvedčení, že liberáli sa snažia eliminovať slabších prostredníctvom mechanizmov voľného trhu, zatiaľ čo vo fašizme bola eliminácia postavená na rasových motívoch. Ďalej upozorňuje na analógiu medzi liberálmi a fašistami, najmä v obhajobe korporátnej kapitalistickej ekonomiky, ktorá likvidovala ľavicové strany a odbory a ako príklad uvádza Pinochetov režim v Čile. Vo svojej úvahe Ľuboš Blaha poukazuje aj na podobnosť medzi liberálnou globálnou ekonomikou a štrukturál-

nym rasizmom, kedy veľmoci zotročujú rozvojové štáty, aby naďalej bohatli a udržiavali tak ekonomickú nerovnováhu podobne ako totalitné režimy, ktoré využívali ekonomickú nerovnosť na upevňovanie svojej moci. Ďalšiu paralelu Ľuboš Blaha nachádza v súvislosti s liberálnymi postojmi, ktoré podľa neho podporujú americké vojnové konflikty, zbrojenie a nepriateľstvo voči určitým národom, čím chce poukázať na ekvivalenciu medzi nenávisťou fašistov voči iným národom a súčasnou rusofóbiou medzi liberálmi. V rámci rozpracovania ôsmich hlavných analógií Ľuboš Blaha ešte uvádza, že ak hovorí o liberálnych fašistoch neznamená to, že tieto dve ideológie považuje za totožné, ale to, že liberáli v mnohom preberajú fašistické správanie, preto ich označuje za liberálnych fašistov (Blaha 2019).[5]

Ak sa na liberalizmus a fašizmus pozrieme z ideologického hľadiska, už na prvý pohľad je jasné, že ide o kontradiktórne ideológie. Zatiaľ čo liberalizmus je ideológia postavená na individualizme a osobnej slobode, fašizmus ju úplne odmieta a svoje presvedčenia stavia na tom, že skutočná sloboda predstavuje podrobeniu sa vôli vodcu. V liberalizme tvoria spoločnosť jednotlivci, zatiaľ čo spoločnosť vo fašizme je jeden organický celok tvorený rasou či národnosťou. V rámci politického systému je demokracia v liberálnej ideológii postavená na slobodných voľbách, je tvorená systémom bŕzd a protiváh, kde sa jednotlivé zložky moci vzájomne kontrolujú tak, aby ani jedna zo zložiek vlády nemala absolútnu moc a predchádzala tak zneužívaniu moci. Fašizmus presadzuje totalitu, kde je všetka moc koncentrovaná v rukách jednej autority, ktorá kontroluje všetky aspekty života v štáte, a ktorá má absolútnu rozhodovaciu právomoc. V liberalizme autorita pochádza od ľudu, ktorý ju volí a je založená na súhlase ovládaných. Fašizmus je vo svojej podstate antiliberálny. Samotná ideológia fa-

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[4]   Verejná databáza webových stránok ju označila za stránku, s neserióznym, klamlivým, podvodným, konšpiračným alebo propagandistickým obsahom.

[5]   Týchto 8 bodov bolo zverejnených aj na facebookovom účte Ľuboša Blahu, ktorý bol natrvalo zablokovaný spoločnosťou Meta na základe pravidiel týkajúcich sa šikany, obťažovania, šírenia nenávisti, hoaxov a informácií v súvislosti s Covid 19 (Struhárik 2022). Voči jeho vystupovaniu sa opakovane ohradila aj Slovenská akadémia vied, Blaha však tieto výzvy ignoroval čo vyústilo do Vyhlásenia členov Akademickej obce Ústavu politických vied SAV, v ktorom ho vyzývali k ukončeniu jeho pôsobenia v akadémii (Benedikovičová 2022).

šizmu jasne proklamovala, že vznikla ako protipól voči všetkému, čo liberalizmus predstavoval. Vychádzajúc z uvedených skutočností môžeme zhodnotiť, že 8 analógií Ľuboša Blahu sú zásadne nesprávne a ide o svojvoľné ohýbanie terminológie, ktorá je postavená tak, aby presne zapadla do ním predkladaného konceptu. Je preto dôležité si uvedomiť, že pridávanie akýchkoľvek prívlastkov k ideológiám z nich nerobí relevantné, plnohodnotné ani legitímne pojmy.

Pojem liberálny fašizmus v politickom a verejnom diskurze

Termín liberálny fašizmus býva používaný v situáciách, kedy sú liberálne politické ideológie a hnutia obviňované z používania fašistických taktík alebo metód na dosiahnutie svojich cieľov. Termín je kontroverzný a často používaný v politickom diskurze ako pejoratívne označenie. Pochádza z myšlienky, že niektoré liberálne alebo progresívne hnutia môžu byť autoritárske, môžu potláčať slobodu prejavu a názorovú rozmanitosť, a to všetko v mene presadzovania svojich hodnôt a cieľov. Hlavné charakteristiky, ktoré môžu byť pripisované konceptu „liberálneho fašizmu", môžu teda okrem autoritárstva zahŕňať aj cenzúru či *cancel culture*.[6] Je dôležité poznamenať, že tento termín je často používaný s cieľom diskreditovať liberálne ideológie a môže byť viac rétorickým nástrojom než objektívnym opisom. Kritici termínu tvrdia, že je nepresný a zavádzajúci, pretože fašizmus má historicky špecifické konotácie spojené s krajnou pravicou, národným socializmom a totalitnými režimami, ktoré sú ideologicky odlišné od moderného liberalizmu.

V nemecky hovoriacich krajinách jestvuje termín „*begriffsbesetzung*" využívaný v spoločenských vedách, ktorý sa dá voľne preložiť ako „konceptuálne obsadenie" alebo „prispôsobenie pojmu". Hoci je táto terminológia prevažne doménou psychológie, nájde využitie aj v oblasti politológie, keďže ho môžeme interpretovať ako situáciu, v ktorej si strana alebo hnutie „privlastní" nejaký pojem a modifikuje ho tak, aby odrážal ich ciele a postoje. Tento proces vo výsledku vidíme aj v používaní termínu liberálny fašizmus, ktorý je pojmovo interpretovaný tak, aby bol v súlade s tým, čo

chce emitent často manipulatívne odkomunikovať. Ide o výrazne zavádzajúci a špekulatívny termín, ktorý je zameraný predovšetkým na vyvolanie emócií, rozporov a rozdelenie spoločnosti, čím dochádza k posúvaniu významov jednotlivých pojmov a prispieva k polarizácii v politickom, mediálnom a verejnom diskurze. V takejto spoločnosti môžu rôzne ideológie vrátane liberalizmu podliehať ostrej kritike, nepresnému označovaniu či stieraniu akýchkoľvek rozdielov medzi ideológiami, čo môže vyústiť k ešte väčšej polarizácii.

K takémuto stieraniu rozdielov v súčasnom verejnom diskurze dochádza medzi liberalizmom a fašizmom. Vladimír Šnídl považuje koncept liberálneho fašizmu za umelo vytvorený, ako snahu o predefinovanie pojmov a termín, ktorý nemá žiadny obsah. Liberálny fašizmus vidí ako účelový pojem, ktorý je využívaný v rámci dlhodobej negatívnej kampane proti liberálom alebo voči tým, ktorí sa hlásia k liberalizmu, výsledkom čoho je ich negatívna nálepka (osobná komunikácia, 9. jún, 2024). S podobným konceptom pracuje aj Marek Mach,[7] ktorý liberálny fašizmus považuje za kombináciu dvoch pojmov, ktorý majú ľudia spojený s negatívnou konotáciou. Problémom je, že ľudia, ktorí tento pojem používajú ho nespájajú so zmysluplnou definíciou, ale skôr s emocionálnym obsahom (osobná komunikácia, 8. jún, 2024).

Ako sme už spomínali, termín liberálny fašizmus je prevažne doménou dezinformačných a konšpiračných stránok, ktoré vystupujú v pozícii alternatívnych médií či zdrojov. Túto rétoriku však používa aj mnoho politikov ako napr. členovia strany ĽSNS, Ľuboš Blaha, Róbert Kaliňák, ktorý na jednej z tlačových konferencií definoval liberálny fašizmus ako snahu o oslabovanie ľudských práv pod rúškom liberalizmu, alebo Štefan Harabin, ktorý nazval aktivistov z O.Z. Inštitútu ľudských práv liberálnymi fašistami[8] či Andrej Danko, ktorý pri príležitosti 75. výročia Slovenského národného povstania v Banskej Bystrici vystúpil s preja-

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6   Zničiť alebo poškodiť niekoho v zmysle sociálnej alebo verejnej ostrakizácie.

7   Aktivista, zakladateľ iniciatív *Mladí proti fašizmu*, *Mladí za klímu* a projektu *Správy Mladí*. Laureát Forbes 30 pod 30, držiteľ Novinárskej ceny za roky 2018 a 2019, SDG ceny v kategórii Líder do 30 rokov a ceny TTSK za mimoriadny prínos (Mladí proti fašizmu s.a.).

8   Reakcia Štefana Harabina na udelenie titulu „homofób roka" za rok 2018.

vom, kde varuje pred extrémizmom zo strany fašizmu, ale aj liberalizmu. Tento pojem sa natoľko spopularizoval, že sa stal súčasťou verejného diskurzu najmä v súvislosti so sociálnymi sieťami bez hlbšieho pochopenia alebo preskúmania jeho obsahu.

V tejto súvislosti je dôležité položiť si otázku, prečo sa stal liberálny fašizmus takým fenoménom, prečo nabral na populárnosti aj medzi laickou verejnosťou a za akým účelom a v akom kontexte je využívaný politikmi aj napriek tomu, že z hľadiska histórie a politických štúdií nemá nijakú oporu?

Pri operovaní s pojmom liberálny fašizmus politici často pracujú s emóciami ako sú hnev alebo strach, a zároveň ponúkajú svoj vlastný politický koncept, ktorý by im ponúkal ochranu pred nebezpečenstvom, ktorý liberálny fašizmus podľa nich pre spoločnosť predstavuje. Rovnaký koncept využíva aj fašizmus, ktorý tiež pracuje s negatívnymi emóciami a má za cieľ ochrániť svoj národ pred dekadenciou a spoločným nepriateľom.

Mnohé nepodložené informácie spolu nemusia dávať zmysel, pokiaľ ponúkajú jednoduché vysvetlenie, ktoré percipientovi dodáva pocit kontroly. Kľúčovým predpokladom pre úspešnosť dezinformácií je podliehanie konfirmačnému skresleniu, tzv. konfirmačný bias,[9] preto dezinformačné kanály či politická rétorika ponúka práve to, čo chceme počuť a čo si chceme myslieť a informácie, ktoré narúšajú náš koncept, máme sklon automaticky odmietať (Béreš 2020). Anne Applebaum (2020, s. 54) píše, že „emocionálna príťažlivosť konšpiračnej teórie spočíva v jej prostote. Vysvetľuje komplexný fenomén, poradí si s náhodou, veriacemu ponúka upokojujúci pocit špeciálneho, privilegovaného prístupu k pravde."

Sociologický ústav SAV v rámci projektu „Pandemické pravdy", ktorý bol realizovaný v novembri a decembri 2023, skúma problematiku konšpiračných teórií medzi krajinami V4, ktorého výsledkom je percentuálny podiel ľudí, ktorí podliehajú konšpiračným teóriám. V rámci pandémie COVID-19 konšpiračným teóriám na Slovensku verilo až 56 % opýtaných, hoaxom týkajúcich sa antivedeckých konšpiračných teórií[10] verilo 55 % respondentov, čo je najvyšší podiel v rámci krajín V4 (Klobucký, Mrva 2024). V auguste 2022 uskutočnila výskum Univerzita sv. Cyrila a Metoda v Trnave v rámci európskeho operačného programu „Riešenie spoločenských ohrození v dôsledku pandémie ochorenia COVID-19". Centrum pre bioetiku v spolupráci s agentúrou Focus zisťovali hodnotu tzv. konšpiračného indexu na Slovensku, ktorý predstavoval hodnotu 30,27. V rámci štúdie publikovanej francúzskymi vedcami v júni 2021, kde skúmali tento index medzi 22 krajinami, najvyššiu hodnotu dosiahlo Turecko s indexom 25,29; najnižšiu hodnotu malo Dánsko 6,29. V kontexte tejto štúdie je Slovenská republika držiteľom rekordu, čo sa týka podliehaniu konšpiračným teóriám (Sýkora 2022).

Vzhľadom na uvedené môžeme konštatovať, že vysoké percento a index, ktorý odráža mieru dôvery v konšpiračné teórie, ktoré sú úzko prepojené s dezinformáciami, prispieva aj k nekritickému pohľadu na liberálny fašizmus. Práve nekritický pohľad a konfirmačné skreslenie môžu napomáhať šíreniu nejasných, nepresných či skreslených informácií.

Ako už vieme, cieľom politického diskurzu je získať, udržať a realizovať politickú moc, a práve tento cieľ zohráva kľúčovú rolu pri výbere jazykových prostriedkov a vnútornej logiky textu. Z pohľadu diskurznej analýzy je mimoriadne dôležité zistenie, že prezentovanie hrozieb určitému spoločenstvu sa stáva najjednoduchšou a najvhodnejšou formou ideológie konsolidácie, teda vytvárania ekvivalencie medzi rôznymi univerzálnymi významami a formovania jednotnej, vnútorne konzistentnej identity. Táto stratégia môže fungovať pri zjednocovaní rôznych skupín tvorených v spoločnosti pod jedným cieľom, alebo ich môže spájať v rámci „boja" proti spoločnému nepriateľovi (Štefančík, Dulebová 2017).

Rovnaký princíp politického jazyka používa aj George Orwell (1988) vo svojom diele *1984*. George Orwell v ňom utvoril nový jazyk, tzv. „newspeak", ktorý bol koncipovaný tak, aby

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[9] Selektovanie, vyhľadávanie alebo prijímanie informácií, ktoré potvrdzujú naše existujúce presvedčenie a hypotézy.

[10] Percento opýtaných, ktorí súhlasia aspoň s jedným z tvrdení: „Väčšina výskumov verejnej mienky, ktoré sa týkajú volebných preferencií alebo politických otázok je zmanipulovaná"; „Liek na rakovinu alebo iné závažné ochorenia už existuje, ale farmaceutické firmy nám to taja" a „Globálne otepľovanie je výmysel" (Klobucký, Mrva 2024).

obsahoval iba jazykové prostriedky nevyhnutné na každodenné využitie. Newspeak bol tvorený slovami, ktoré boli zámerne navrhnuté na politické účely, ktoré formovali myslenie a postoj prijímateľa tak, aby vyhovoval politickej ideológii režimu. Slovná zásoba bola neustále okliešťovaná, aby sa zabránilo zložitým myšlienkovým procesom, ktoré by mohli viesť k podpore kritického myslenia. Podobnú paralelu „orwellovského" konceptu politického jazyka môžeme vidieť aj v súvislosti s liberálnym fašizmom. Pri akceptácii spojenia liberalizmu a fašizmu ako ucelenej teórie môžeme pozorovať absenciu kritického postoja, ktorý by nabádal k preskúmania jednotlivých pojmov samostatne a vytvorenie záveru na základe racionálnej argumentácie. Pri formovaní a definovaní pojmu liberálny fašizmus je možné sledovať, že znaky jednotlivých ideológií vrátane terminológie sú prispôsobené a ohýbané tak, aby vyhovovali predkladanému konceptu. Tento jav popisoval aj George Orwell v rámci newspeak-u anglickým slovom *doublethink,* ktorý označoval vieru v dva protichodné názory zároveň.

Kvalitatívna analýza: kľúčové témy a testované hypotézy

Pri skúmaní danej problematiky sme pracovali s erudovanými odborníkmi ako sú Jakub Drábik, Anton Hruboň, Jozef Lenč, Darina Malová, Stanislav Mičev či Radoslav Štefančík, ktorí nám v rámci kvalitatívneho výskumu poskytli svoje stanoviská a umožnili získať hlbší pohľad na historické a politické faktory liberálneho fašizmu. V rámci realizovaného kvalitatívneho výskumu sme sa pre potreby rigoróznej práce zamerali na zber dát formou výskumných otázok. K výskumným otázkam sme priradili odpovede respondentov s cieľom získať celkový prehľad a oboznámiť sa so zozbieranými dátami. Následne sme identifikovali kľúčové body a s využitím konštantnej komparácie sme ich medzi sebou porovnávali. Ďalším krokom bolo axiálne kódovanie, kde sme prepájali kódy z otvoreného kódovania a interpretovali vzťahy medzi nimi s cieľom identifikovať hlavné témy skúmaného fenoménu, a overiť pravdivosť alebo platnosť našich hypotéz.

Jednou z hlavných tém, ktorá výrazne rezonovala v názoroch odborníkov je negatívna konotácia. V spoločnosti stále prevláda úzus,

v rámci ktorého je fašizmus vnímaný vyslovene negatívne a chápaný ako zlo, voči ktorému je nutné sa ohradiť. Slovo „fašistický" je teda spojené s negatívnou konotáciou, a práve táto konotácia, v snahe delegitimizovať a znehodnotiť liberalizmus ako ideológiu aj ako politický koncept, sa využíva pri spájaní liberalizmu a fašizmu do koherentného celku. Prívlastkom fašistický je možné badať snahy degradovať liberalizmus na niečo, čím nie je a prisúdiť mu vlastnosti, voči ktorým ako ideológia vystupuje.

Ďalšou kľúčovou témou je pojmový zmätok. Keďže ide o konceptuálne a obsahovo prázdny pojem, tento termín je využívaný skôr ako prostriedok na vyvolanie terminologického zmätku, kde ide o zneužitie emócií (spojené s vyššie spomínanou negatívnou konotáciou) a využívanie neznalosti definičných znakov a hlavných konceptov jednotlivých ideológii na realizáciu vlastných politických zámerov a stratégií.

Výraznú úlohu zohráva aj naratív hrozby. Koncept fašizmu je postavený na dekadencii a emóciách, ktoré sa zakladajú na strachu pred spoločným (často fiktívnym) nepriateľom. Na podobnej báze funguje aj koncept liberálneho fašizmu, ktorý liberalizmus vykresľuje ako niečo škodlivé a negatívne, a stavia ho do roly nepriateľa, ktorý predstavuje hrozbu pre stabilitu spoločnosti a jej normatívny systém.

Najčastejším označením, ktorým bol koncept liberálneho fašizmu definovaný politológmi i historikmi je oxymoron. Liberalizmus a fašizmus sú dve samostatné ideológie s navzájom nezlučiteľnými prístupmi, ktoré si odporujú v základných tézach. Liberálny fašizmus v rámci jestvujúcich politických a ideologických systémov ako pojem, ani ako koncept neexistuje, a nie je uznávaný ani ako legitímna kategória. V určitom bode možno vnímať tento termín skôr ako propagandu než skutočne aplikovaný politický prístup.

Pri analýze dát sme pracovali s dvoma hypotézami:

Hypotéza 1: Liberálny fašizmus je nekoherentný a kontradiktórny termín, ktorý z hľadiska existujúcich politických a ideologických systémov ako koncept neexistuje.

V oblasti vedeckého prostredia je liberálny fašizmus termín, ktorý je kontradikciou a fikciou, ako aj výsledok terminologickej vôle. Tá zneužíva termín fašizmus s cieľom devalvovať

liberalizmus antidemokratickými a negatívnymi konotáciami. Ide o ideologický spletenec a prostriedok zneužívania, ktorý je skôr rétorickým nástrojom a zbraňou v politickom diskurze. Záverom testovanej hypotézy 1 je teda jej potvrdenie. Z konceptuálneho hľadiska ide o absurdný politický konštrukt, ktorý zahŕňa dva navzájom sa vylučujúce ideologické prístupy a v rámci akademických vedných disciplín nemôže byť legitímnou, ani platnou kategóriou.

Hypotéza 2: Liberálny fašizmus je forma autoritárskej liberálnej ideológie, ktorá prostredníctvom fašistických taktík presadzuje svoje politické záujmy a potláča všetky názory a prejavy, ktoré nekorešpondujú s jej postojmi.

Termín liberálny fašizmus v sebe obsahuje dve ideológie, ktoré si vzájomne odporujú a sú nezlučiteľné. Je v rozpore s logikou, aby ideológia na jednej strane potláčala slobodu a na strane druhej ju „vnucovala". Podobné rozpory nachádzame vo viacerých bodoch. Ďalšia logická nezhoda sa dotýka plurality názorov. Podstata názorovej plurality spočíva v akceptovaní širokého spektra názorov, preto je protirečením v argumentácii tvrdiť, že hoci je pre liberalizmus jedným z kľúčových princípov názorová diverzita, zároveň ju potláča, ak nekorešponduje s jej postojmi. V súvislosti s tým je liberalizmus obviňovaný zo šírenia a podnecovania nenávisti či násilia, hoci pravá podstata ideológie zastáva riešenie konfliktov v rámci racionálnej diskusie a demokratických procesov. Záverom testovanej hypotézy je, že hypotéza 2 sa nepotvrdila. Na základe uvedeného považujeme za dôležité opäť zopakovať, že pridávanie akýchkoľvek prívlastkov k ideológiám z nich ešte nerobí vedecky hodnotné alebo platné pojmy. Nie je totiž možné niečo v jednom kroku presadzovať a súbežne potláčať či obmedzovať.[11]

Záver

V centre liberalizmu stojí sloboda, tá je považovaná za najvyššiu hodnotu individualizmu, zatiaľ čo fašizmus individuálnu slobodu a hodnotu jednotlivca rezolútne odmieta. Ďalším základným princípom liberalizmu je názorová pluralita a diskusia založená na racionálnych argumentoch. Naproti tomu fašizmus

odmieta akýkoľvek názor, ktorý by mohol ohroziť autoritu vodcu, ktorá je nespochybniteľná a monopolná. Spoločnosť v liberalizme je tvorená jednotlivcami, ktorí sú si rovní. Vo fašizme je spoločnosť definovaná ako organický celok definovaný na základe rasy alebo národnosti, čo vedie k nerovnosti a nadradenosti jedného národa, resp. rasy, nad ostatnými. Rovnaká nerovnosť panuje aj v spoločnosti ako takej, ktorá je absolútne podriadená autoritárskej vôli vodcu či vládnucej elite. Ďalší zásadný rozdiel medzi liberalizmom a fašizmom je vo vnímaní demokracie. Kým fašizmus presadzuje jej totalitnú formu, v liberalizme je postavená na súhlase ovládaných, vyjadreného prostredníctvom demokratickej voľby. Moc, na rozdiel od fašizmu, nie je koncentrovaná v rukách jednotlivca alebo elity a uplatňuje sa v rámci platných legislatívnych štruktúr. Na základe uvedeného môžeme konštatovať logický rozpor v termíne liberálneho fašizmu. Ten je výsledkom spojenia dvoch kontradiktórnych ideológií, ktoré si protirečia v základných tézach a vzájomne sa vylučujú. Hlavné zistenie ukázalo, že ide o svojvoľné ohýbanie terminológie, kde sa neskúma podstata ani obsah jednotlivých ideológií, ale používajú sa skratkovité vyjadrenia, spočívajúce v ich jednoduchosti na diskreditáciu liberálnych politík či názorových oponentov. Prostredníctvom demagógie sú zámerne spájané ideológie, ktoré voči sebe vystupujú v absolútnom protiklade a už z princípu sa vylučujú.

V závere považujeme za dôležité uviesť, že je podstatné hodnotiť pojem liberálny fašizmus kriticky, pri skúmaní tohto termínu pristupovať k jednotlivým politickým ideológiám samostatne a nepoužívať terminológiu, ktorá môže zásadne skresľovať alebo mylne interpretovať prebiehajúce procesy v spoločnosti. Zároveň považujeme za dôležité poukazovať aj na (často zámerné) šírenie nepravdivých, nepresných a zavádzajúcich informácií, a demaskovať ich. Rovnako dôležité je aj to, akým spôsobom sa v spoločnosti realizuje spoločensko – politický a mediálny diskurz, ktorý by mal byť založený na vecnej diskusii, ktorá sa bude opierať o fakty a overiteľné informácie so zreteľom vyhnúť sa emocionálne vyhroteným reakciám. Pretože iba racionálny diskurz založený na faktografických údajoch môže prispieť k zmierneniu napätia a polarizácie v spoločnosti, čo môže vo výsledku podporiť kritické

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[11] K podrobným výsledkom a interpretácii výskumu bližšie pozri: Zubalová, 2025, s. 64-75.

myslenie, mieru vzdelanosti a efektivitu od-komunikovať myšlienky a postoje v spoločnosti bez ďalšieho rizika vzniku konfliktu a zväčšovaniu priepastných rozdielov vo všetkých oblastiach spoločenského života.

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VEK REVOLÚCIÍ. POKROK A ODPOR OD ROKU 1600 PO SÚČASNOSŤ

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História je pretkaná rôznymi zmenami, ktoré dodnes formujú našu súčasnú civilizáciu. Kým niektoré zmeny prebehli v tichosti a bez väčších dôsledkov, tak niektoré boli tak zásadné, že navždy zmenili chod ľudstva. Recenzovaná kniha Fareeda Zakariu prináša pôsobivý pohľad do histórie týchto zlomových okamihov dejín, a to od roku 1600 po súčasnosť. Počas celkovo 9 kapitol sa budú čitatelia môcť oboznámiť s tým, akým spôsobom vybrané revolúcie technologického, ekonomického či politického charakteru ovplyvnili chod našej civilizácie. Motivácia na napísanie tejto knihy bola vyjadrená už v samotnom úvode, kde Fareed Zakaria (2025, s. 18) konštatuje: „Už niekoľko desaťročí sledujeme svet v neustálom pohybe, so zrýchľujúcimi sa technologickými a ekonomickými zmenami, premenlivými koncepciami identity a rýchlo sa meniacou geopolitikou. Studená vojna ustúpila novému poriadku, ktorý sa začal lámať len niekoľko desaťročí po svojom vzniku. Mnohí oslavovali tempo a povahu týchto zmien, iní ich odsudzovali. Predovšetkým však musíme pochopiť ich rušivosť z fyzického a psychologického hľadiska, pretože dnešný svet zrýchľovania vyvoláva rôzne spätné reakcie. Musíme im porozumieť a reagovať na ne." Opätovne tak platí známa téza, že história je vynikajúca príručka pre súčasnosť a predvídanie budúcnosti.

Recenzovaná kniha je rozdelená na 2 časti. Prvá – historická – pasáž sa postupne venuje zmieneným revolúciám v konkrétnych štátoch západného sveta. Menovite ide o Holandsko, Veľkú Britániu, Francúzsko a Spojené štáty americké. V kapitole č. 1 s názvom „Prvá liberálna revolúcia – Holandsko" sa autor venuje tomuto malému štátu západnej Európy, ktorý dokázal nielen ovplyvniť vtedajšie väčšie mocnosti, ale postupom času sa dokázal vypracovať na jednu z ústredných svetových veľmocí. Fareed Zakaria postupne opisuje vplyv technologickej revolúcie, liberalizmu a s tým súvisiacej náboženskej tolerancie na sociálno-politické myslenie a vzostup holandskej spoločnosti. Práve tento príklad nám ukazuje, že kým iné európske štáty (predovšetkým Francúzsko) ostali vo svojom konzervatívnom svete odmietajúc mnohé výdobytky doby (či už technologické alebo myšlienkové), tak Holandsko svojou otvorenosťou dokázalo vybudovať mocný moderný štát, ktorý dominoval moriam. Ich vzostup však zastavilo už spomínané susedné Francúzsko, kedy kráľ Ľudovít XIV. prostredníctvom vojenskej intervencie spomalil postupný úpadok konzervatívnych nereformova-

ných monarchií. Zastaviť ich však nedokázal, a to vďaka novému holandskému panovníkovi Viliamovi Oranžskému, ktorý odmietol byť parížskou „bábkou". Liberálna revolúcia tak mohla, aj keď s menšími komplikáciami, pokračovať. Tentokrát sa však presunula do Anglicka.

V kapitole č. 2 s názvom „Slávna revolúcia – Anglicko" Fareed Zakaria analyzuje vzostup „holandského životného štýlu" tej doby v jednej z najtradičnejších monarchií sveta. Čitateľ sa tak postupne môže dočítať o vplyve reformácie na náboženskú spoločnosť, ale aj o postupnej tvorbe novej politickej identity. Zrozumiteľným a pútavým spôsobom opisuje postupný vznik a vplyv Whigov a Toryov na reformu monarchie, ako aj na postupnú prestavbu kráľovstva na konštitučnú monarchiu s čoraz väčším vplyvom parlamentu. Holandskú a anglickú revolúciu tak právom nazýva prívlastkom „úspešné", pričom jedným z dôvodov bolo to, že „elity hrali vedúcu úlohu, ale pri riadení politickej transformácie išli v ústrety základným ekonomickým zmenám a meniacim sa identitám" (Zakaria, 2025, s. 85).

V poradí tretia kapitola recenzovanej knihy nesie názov „Neúspešná revolúcia – Francúzsko." Ako nám nadpis môže napovedať, tentokrát sa autor zameral na zlyhanie revolúcie v jednom z najvplyvnejších štátov minulosti (i súčasnosti). Postupne tak analyzuje dôvody vzniku hnutia odporu v tejto tradičnej monarchii.

Dôvody vzniku Veľkej francúzskej revolúcie sú však zložité, čo konštatuje aj samotný Fareed Zakaria (2025, s. 91): „Francúzsko by mohlo za svoj rozvrat viniť určitú kombináciu skostnatenej politickej štruktúry, tlejúceho triedneho napätia, traumy z prehratej anglofrancúzskej vojny, opakujúcich sa rozpočtových kríz a neefektívneho vedenia." Skrátka šlo o kombináciu viacerých faktorov, ktoré v konečnom dôsledku vyústili až do násilnej revolúcie, ktorá však nepriniesla spoločnosti úľavu, ale práve naopak – ešte viac utrpenia. Autor sa postupne zameriava na dobytie Bastily a silnejúci vplyv radikálov okolo Maximiliena Robespierra. Ako je nám z histórie známe, francúzska revolúcia „požrala" svoje deti. Radikálni revolucionári boli buď sťatí gilotínou alebo v lepšom prípade uväznení. Porevolučná kríza však otvorila cestu novej výnimočnej osobnosti, ktorá ovplyvnila dejiny celej Európy. Fran-

cúzsko sa pomaly otváralo príchodu Napoleona Bonaparteho. Fareed Zakaria postupne predostiera čitateľom vzostup a pád tejto francúzskej osobnosti, pričom to dáva do kontextu s celkovou zmenou medzinárodného poriadku. Revolúcia vo Francúzsku tak nepriniesla liberalizáciu, resp. demokratizáciu režimu, ale priniesla vzostup nového autokrata, ktorý na jednej strane pozdvihol ducha francúzskeho nacionalizmu, avšak za cenu tisícov európskych obetí. Jeho mocenské ambície zastavilo až Rusko, resp. Anglicko pri slávnej bitke vo Waterloo.

V celkovo 4. kapitole sa Fareed Zakaria zameral na „matku všetkých revolúcií", ktorá mala prívlastok priemyselná. Iba málo historických udalostí zmenilo beh dejín celého ľudstva tak, ako práve táto transformácia celého priemyslu, hospodárstva a neskôr aj sociálnopolitického myslenia. Čitatelia sa môžu postupne oboznámiť s nástupom priemyselnej revolúcie vo Veľkej Británii, s čoraz väčším vplyvom medzinárodného obchodu, ako aj s postupným rastom životnej úrovne aj tej najchudobnejšej časti spoločnosti. Priemyselná revolúcia nepochybne zlepšila životy mnohým vtedajším obyvateľom, hoc to šlo na úkor extrémneho znečistenia životného prostredia, či postupného kolonializmu, ktorého dôsledkom bolo aj čoraz rozšírenejšie otroctvo. Postupný rozvoj Veľkej Británie však podľa autora spôsoboval žiarlivosť iných európskych mocností. Na výslnie hospodársko-ekonomických dejín sa tak postupne dostáva Nemecko, ktoré v histórii sveta ešte zohrá obrovskú úlohu. Autor však upiera zrak na iného aktéra – bývalú britskú kolóniu s názvom Spojené štáty americké.

V poslednej kapitole I. časti knihy sa Fareed Zakaria zameriava na americké dejiny. Postupne opisuje vplyv priemyselnej revolúcie, súboj Severu proti Juhu, etablovanie pravoľavého lineárneho ideologického spektra, ako aj na celkovú transformáciu niekoľkých kolónii v moderný národ nového sveta. V záverečnej pasáži kapitoly autor nevynecháva ani americké dejiny 20. storočia, kde prostredníctvom analýzy politiky vtedajších prezidentov načŕtava spôsob premýšľania aj súčasného amerického establishment-u. Aj tu môžu čitatelia vidieť signifikantný vplyv dejín na súčasné sociálno-politické myslenie nielen politických elít, ale aj elektorátu. Záverom I. časti autor

premosťuje do súčasnosti: „Aby sme pochopili politickú zmenu usporiadania našej vlastnej éry, musíme sa pozrieť na spoločenské zmeny, ktoré ju uviedli do pohybu: revolúcie v globalizácii, informačných technológiách a identite" (Zakaria, 2025, s. 189).

Druhá časť knihy sa venuje súčasným revolúciám. Zhodujeme sa s autorom, že v súčasnosti zažívame nie jednu, ale niekoľko revolúcii naraz. V celkovo 6. kapitole Fareed Zakaria upriamuje pozornosť na ekonomiku v kontexte globalizácie. Postupne popisuje výhody, ale aj nevýhody voľného trhu. Zároveň korektne poukazuje na veľkú prepojenosť štátov sveta, kde reakcia jedného štátu prinesie dôsledky pre mnoho iných národov. V tejto súvislosti explicitne poukazuje na obchodné vojny, ktoré sa dnes často používajú na presadzovanie politického vplyvu. V záverečných častiach kapitoly sa zamýšľa nad potenciálnymi alternatívami k voľnému trhu, demokracii a liberalizmu. Ako príklad pritom analyzuje Čínu, ktorá zaznamenala enormný hospodársky nárast, a to aj napriek tomu, že jej režim nie je liberálnou demokraciou. Autor upozorňuje na rolu mnohých populistov, ktorí v súčasnosti preferujú nacionalizmus, izolacionizmus či iliberálne štátne zriadenie.

V ďalšej kapitole knihy sa autor presúva od hospodársko-ekonomických tém v ére súčasnej globalizácie k ďalšej významnej zmene, ktorá nás formuje – technológiám. Postupný rozvoj IT technológií spôsobil neuveriteľnú transformáciu pracovných miest, ľudských vzťahov, vzdelávania, zdravotníctva či trávenia voľného času. Fareed Zakaria čitateľom predostiera výhody a nevýhody tejto technologickej revolúcie, ktorej vývoj (zdá sa) ešte ani zďaleka nekončí. Pred našou civilizáciou tak stojí neľahká výzva v podobe nájdenia balansu medzi výhodami a nevýhodami IT technológií. Autor si záverom kladie existenčnú otázku: „Ak počítače s umelou inteligenciou dokážu byť lepšími analytickými strojmi ako ľudské mozgy, čo potom zostáva pre ľudí?" (Zakaria, 2025, s. 264) Nájdenie odpovede na túto otázku podľa našej mienky bude mimoriadne zásadné, nakoľko to ovplyvní nielen nás ako individuálne ľudské bytosti, ale aj celé spoločnosti.

Predposledná kapitola knihy sa venuje otázke revolúcie identít. V histórii ľudstva máme mnoho príkladov, na ktoré poukazuje aj sám autor, kedy spoločenské, ekonomické i technologické zmeny priniesli nové otázky v oblasti identity. V ére globalizácie mnohí zažívajú krízu identity, oslabujú sa väzby na štát, resp. národ a u mnohých ľudí sa buduje idea svetoobčianstva. Kým jedni túto revolúciu vyzdvihujú ako pozitívny efekt globalizácie, druhí to kritizujú, a volajú po návrate k tradičným hodnotám a budovaniu patriotizmu. Čitatelia sa v tejto pasáži môžu oboznámiť s príkladmi niekoľkých revolúcií identít (napr. boj proti rasizmu, boj za práva sexuálnych menšín, či feministické revolúcie), ale aj s výzvami v súčasnosti, ktoré budú mať vplyv aj na programy kandidujúcich politických subjektov. K ekonomickej a technologickej revolúcii v ére aktuálnej globalizácie sa tak pridáva aj revolúcia identít, ktorá takisto zrejme prinesie novú transformáciu človečenstva.

V záverečnej kapitole Fareed Zakaria analyzuje vplyv historických a súčasných revolúcií na aktuálnu geopolitickú situáciu. Svet si počas svojej existencie prešiel niekoľkými typmi usporiadania medzinárodných vzťahov, pričom žiadna nevydržala večne. Výnimkou nebol ani unipolárny svet na čele s USA po rozpade Sovietskeho zväzu, nakoľko dnes sa podľa mnohých odborníkov nachádzame v multipolárnom svete, ktorý vyžaduje nové nazeranie na medzinárodné vzťahy a právo. Otázne podľa nášho názoru ostáva, či táto geopolitická revolúcia bude násilná, alebo diplomatická. Súčasné dianie vo svete nám nedokáže presne určiť odpoveď na túto zložitú otázku.

Fareed Zakaria svojou knihou „Vek revolúcií" ponúka pozoruhodne komplexný a zároveň čitateľsky prístupný prehľad najdôležitejších prelomových momentov, ktoré formovali našu civilizáciu od 17. storočia až po súčasnosť. Autor vyniká schopnosťou prepájať historické fakty so súčasnými výzvami, čím vytvára čitateľsky atraktívne a intelektuálne stimulujúce dielo. Silnou stránkou knihy je aj jej tematická štruktúra, ktorá umožňuje porovnať rôzne typy revolúcií – od politických a hospodárskych až po tie technologické a identitárne. Fareed Zakaria neponúka jednoduché odpovede, ale núti čitateľa premýšľať nad tým, ako minulé zmeny ovplyvňujú našu prítomnosť a čo môžeme očakávať do budúcnosti. Pre všetkých, ktorí sa zaujímajú o históriu, geopolitiku či spoločenské zmeny, je táto kniha hodnotným zdrojom poznania a inšpirácie. Odporúčame ju najmä tým čitateľom, ktorí nehľadajú len popis

dejín, ale chcú im aj porozumieť v širšom kon-
texte. „Vek revolúcií" je tak výnimočné dielo,
ktoré si rozhodne zaslúži pozornosť.

SÚČASNÉ VÝZVY A PERSPEKTÍVY SLOVENSKO-UKRAJINSKEJ CEZHRANIČNEJ SPOLUPRÁCE

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V priebehu uplynulých dvoch dekád sa jednou z hlavných tém výskumu v rámci Európskej školy border studies stala cezhraničná spolupráca na vonkajších hraniciach EÚ, vrátane jej významu pre realizáciu bilaterálnych vzťahov Európskej únie so susednými krajinami a realizáciu rámcovej Európskej politiky susedstva od roku 2004. Predmetom záujmu výskumníkov sa stal význam hraníc pre postavenie Európskej únie ako medzinárodného aktéra, ako aj úloha cezhraničnej spolupráce pri formovaní a fungovaní vonkajšej hranice EÚ ako „priepustnej" hranice, podporujúcej „europeizáciu" susedných nečlenských krajín Európskej únie, t.j. „vývozu európskych hodnôt a noriem" a zároveň „bezpečnej" hranice, chrániacej vnútornú bezpečnosť Európskej únie a Schengenského priestoru. Vedecký diskurz v tejto oblasti zahŕňa tiež vplyv stretu rozdielnych koncepcií fungovania štátu a občianskej spoločnosti na vonkajšej hranici Európskej únie na fungovanie a správanie regionálnych a lokálnych aktérov cezhraničnej spolupráce, ekonomické postavenie, odolnosť (resilienciu) pohraničných regiónov Európskej únie sociálne a hospodárske aspekty cezhraničnej spolupráce na vonkajšej hranici EÚ.

V uplynulých piatich rokoch sa stali zvlášť intenzívne reflektovanými a diskutovanými dopady pandémie COVID-19 a následne ruskej vojenskej agresie na Ukrajine na charakter hraníc a na vývoj cezhraničnej spolupráce. Kým obmedzujúce protipandemické opatrenia na prevenciu šírenia ochorenia COVID-19 počas pandémie v mnohých ohľadoch uzavreli schengenské hranice a hranica sa tak stala crash-testom existujúcich foriem cezhraničnej spolupráce a zároveň skúšobným teritóriom pre jej nové formy, ruská invázia na Ukrajinu ako nový exogénny faktor v mnohých ohľadoch opäť otvorila túto hranicu a výrazne ovplyvnila migračné toky a manažment hranice, ako aj formy a intenzitu cezhraničnej spolupráce. V júni 2022 sa Ukrajina v dôsledku vojnových udalostí zároveň stala kandidátskou krajinou na vstup do Európskej únie, čo prinieslo nové perspektívy z hľadiska jej integrácie do Európskej únie a teda i z hľadiska podmienok pre cezhraničnú spoluprácu v slovensko-ukrajinskom pohraničí.

Inštitút politológie Filozofickej fakulty Prešovskej univerzity v nadväznosti na svoj predchádzajúci výskum cezhraničnej spolupráce implementoval v rokoch 2022-2025 s podporou Slovenskej agentúry pre výskum a vývoj výskumný projekt s názvom „Slovensko-ukrajinská cezhraničná spolupráca počas a po pandémii COVID-19: faktory a perspektívy, dopad na politiky" (*Slovak-Ukrainian cross-border cooperation amid and after COVID-19 pan-*

demic: factors and perspectives, impact on policies; APVV-21-0057). Cieľom projektu bolo identifikovať vplyv pandémie COVID-19 a ruskej invázie na Ukrajinu na slovensko-ukrajinskú cezhraničnú spoluprácu. Hľadal príležitosti a obmedzenia cezhraničnej spolupráce, ktoré vyplývajú jednak zo zmeny inštitucionálneho rámca vzťahov medzi EÚ a Ukrajinou, ako aj z vládnej politiky Slovenska a jeho vzťahov s Ukrajinou, a jednak z faktorov vnímania a preferencií regionálnych a miestnych aktérov cezhraničnej spolupráce počas a po pandémii COVID-19, ako aj počas aktuálne prebiehajúceho vojnového konfliktu, ovplyvňujúcich ich schopnosť využiť existujúce a predpokladané príležitosti. Faktory a dôsledky pandémie a následne vojnového konfliktu na Ukrajine boli skúmané prostredníctvom klasických (kvalitatívna analýza pološtruktúrovaných rozhovorov, dotazníky a štatistická analýza kvantitatívnych dát) i novovytvorených výskumných nástrojov (formatívny kauzálny index životnej spokojnosti pre pohraničné regióny). Zmiešaný dizajn výskumu zahŕňal kvalitatívnu analýzu vyjadrení aktérov na nadnárodnej, národnej a regionálnej úrovni, kým na lokálnej úrovni získané kvantitatívne dáta boli analyzované štatistickými postupmi.

Hlavným cieľom záverečnej konferencie výskumného projektu APVV-21-0057, ktorá sa konala 20. – 22. októbra 2025 v Prešove, bolo diskutovať o zisteniach jednotlivých čiastkových výskumných úloh, realizovaných v dvoch pracovných balíkoch a konfrontovať ich s aktuálnym medzinárodným vedeckým výskumom v danej oblasti. Referáty zahraničných účastníkov konferencie priniesli nové pohľady na pohraničné oblasti ako priestor odolnosti (prof. Jussi Laine – Karelian Institute, University of Eastern Finland), ako aj socio-kultúrne reflexie pohraničných regiónov v čase neistoty (prof. Marcin Dębicki – Katedra sociológie pohraničia Vroclavskej univerzity). Regionálny kontext cezhraničnej spolupráce reflektovali príspevky Dr. Melindy Istenes-Benczi (Central European Service for Cross-Border Initiatives, Budapešť), ktorá predstavila EZÚS Tisza ako nástroj odolnosti pre cezhraničnú spoluprácu a prof. Myroslavy Lendel (Užhorodská národná univerzita), ktorá prezentovala výsledky výskumu súčasného stavu cezhraničnej spolupráce v Zakarpatskej oblasti Ukrajiny. Nadnárodný kontext pre podmienky cezhraničnej spolupráce v podobe scenárov európskej integrácie Ukrajiny účastníkom konferencie predstavil profesor Alexander Duleba, o dopade ruskej invázie na slovensko-ukrajinské vzťahy hovoril Dr. Ján Kubiš. Spomedzi členov riešiteľského kolektívu projektu APVV-21-0057 na konferencii vystúpili aj doc. Martin Lačný a Dr. Gabriel Székely, ktorí prezentovali výsledky čiastkových výskumov, realizovaných na regionálnej a lokálnej úrovni. Konferenčné príspevky zahraničných účastníkov konferencie sú publikované vo vedeckom časopise Inštitútu politológie FF PU v Prešove *Annales Scientia Politica*.

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