

DEVELOPMENT OF THE GEOPOLITICAL ORIENTATION OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC SINCE 1993

Filip Šandor*, Daniel Gurnák*

* Comenius University of Bratislava, Department of Regional Geography and Regional Development, Ilkovičova 6, 842 15 Bratislava, Slovakia, filip.sandor@uniba.sk, daniel.gurnak@uniba.sk

Development of the geopolitical orientation of the Slovak Republic since 1993

The aim of this paper is to map the development of the foreign relations of the Slovak Republic in the period 1993 – 2022. The political-geographical analysis is based on real Slovak external interactions with selected key powers (the US, Russia, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, and China) in the form of three thousand government visits. Using the classical geopolitics approach, we focus on data-driven research represented by official Slovak government visits. We compare these results throughout the government periods and with the strategic official documents represented by the number of mentions of those countries. In addition, we pointed out the dichotomy between the Slovak government's interaction with Russia and Ukraine since 1993. The analysis results show that while the US and Russia have a prominent position in the official foreign policy documents, the reality embedded in Slovak interactions based on government visits is focused on geographically closer countries such as Germany and France.

Key words: political geography, foreign policy, classical geopolitics, critical geopolitics, Slovak Republic

INTRODUCTION

The position of Slovakia in Central Europe and its historical experience and cultural realities determine the political and public discourse about where Slovakia belongs and what geopolitical orientation it has. In this regard, the most common opinion touches on the heading east or west dichotomy. The discussion about the development and geographical orientation of Slovak foreign policy mainly concerns the analysis of the country's overall influence, contacts and orientation to the West (US) or to the East (Russia). For example, discussing relations with Russia represents a dividing line in Slovak politics (Marušiak 2017). The geopolitical orientation of the Slovak population is illustrated in the poll where 50% of respondents in October 2014 stood for the statement that "Slovakia should strive for a balanced position between Russia and the West". In June 2022, 44% of respondents supported the statement (Mesežnikov and Bútorová 2022). For this reason, the west-east vector of Slovakia's orientation is the most suitable determinant in the analysis of many authors devoted to long-term research of Slovak foreign policy.

The paper aims to evaluate the Slovak foreign policy orientation's development from 1993 – 2022. Based on an analysis of bilateral relations with key world powers, our analysis is based on the quantitative aspects of political relations with selected world powers: the US, Russia, the United Kingdom (UK), Germany, France, and China. We compare the foreign policy vectors of Slovakia during the 30 years of its independent existence based on the textual analysis of the strategic foreign policy documents and empirical analysis of real data based on the foreign policy meetings of the Slovak government officials. Another partial goal is to elaborate the

dichotomy between Slovakia's declaration and real actions with Ukraine and Russia throughout the 30 years of the Slovak foreign policy.

THEORETICAL CONCEPTS AND APPROACHES

Foreign policy (or international relations) and geography were already intertwined in the works of Gottman (1951) and Spykman (1938). Spykman's famous quote (1938, p. 29) that geography is the most important factor in the foreign policy of states because "it is the most permanent" has still been confirmed despite technological advances. For example, in the case of economic relations, the distance factor in the period 1990 – 2000 compared to the period 1870 – 1970 is weakened by only one third (Disdier and Head 2008).

The current scientific discipline of International Relations is dominated by positivism and scientific realism, while in geography, postmodern approaches dominate. This deepens these two disciplines' differences and communication difficulties (Kofroň 2012). International relations are focused on theories, their generation, and testing, while a strong nomothetic approach and modelling dominate the works. Agnew (2016) argues that the boundaries in the current dominant theoretical-methodological approaches of political geography are not permanent and unambiguous. In critical geopolitics, a strong post-positivist descriptive approach, conceptualization, and discourse analysis prevail (Kofroň 2012). Geopolitics has negative historical associations, and the current trend rejects any connection to real politics (Višňovský 2018). As a result of the fixation on textual analysis, critical geopolitics is also called anti-cartographic (Haverluk et al. 2014), and reservations concern practically all aspects of the discipline – practical, content, ideological, methodological, and even epistemological (Kurfürst and Baar 2016). Critical geopolitics, originally formulated in the early 1990s, emphasized the texts and speeches associated with elites' spatializations of international politics (Dittmer and Gray 2010). The role of the observer is emphasized, which is focused on language and discourse analysis, thereby rejecting the rationalism of classical geopolitics (Agnew 2016). It is concerned with geographical assumptions and designations when the discursive construction of social reality is shaped by specific political agents (Kuus 2017). Discourses have a virtual and not an actual existence (Ó Tuathail and Agnew 1992). In this approach, the study of the daily work of diplomacy is core for understanding the structure and identity of the foreign service (Jones and Clark 2015 and Essex et al. 2019) or the relationship between geographical knowledge and diplomatic practice (Kuus 2016).

An alternative to the dichotomy between classical deterministic geopolitics and critical geopolitics can be their combination, mutual comparison and confrontation. While geopolitics as a text (critical geopolitics) is only one of the many possibilities for representing world politics (Müller 2013), constructivist geopolitics significantly contributes to the interdisciplinary debate between political geography and international relations (Fard 2021). Fard (2021) proposes a bridging of classical and critical geopolitics. According to him, world politics and the actions of political actors can be understood in the context of objective and subjective space and use positivist-constructivist methods. Constructivist geopolitics thus emphasizes that, on the one hand, anarchy arises from the distribution of power and, on the other hand, from individual ideas (Fard 2021).

Concerning International Relations as a scientific discipline, three main theoretical approaches prevail. Realism speaks of the state as a rational actor in international relations, which pursues its national interests in an environment of anarchy and uses force to enforce them. Idealism (liberalism) supports the possibilities of cooperation and the existence of international law and ideas. Constructivism responded to these two approaches, which criticize positivist theories and understands the world as a construct of the mind, placing a person at the centre of decision-making (e.g., foreign policy).

Xierali (2006) and Xierali and Liu (2006a and 2006b) outlined a positivist approach to the research of the geography of diplomacy based on above mentioned theoretical approaches and directions of international relations, such as realism and liberalism (idealism). He quantitatively analyzed the number of diplomatic personnel in the US using models over 20 years. In this way, foreign policy, economics, and geography are gradually intermingled in political geography and economics.

In fact, not a single approach can comprehensively explain certain phenomena in foreign policy, and therefore it is necessary to combine and examine them across theories. For example, we can see this in the first sentences of the first *Foreign Policy Focus of the Slovak Republic for 1993*: “The principles of the Slovak foreign policy are based on generally recognized norms of international law, the UN Charter, the final documents of the CSCE (Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe) and the documents of the Council of Europe. As a new sovereign state, the Slovak Republic strongly declares its orientation towards a market economy, a pluralist political system, and respect for human rights, including minorities” (MFEA SR 1993). These words clearly support an idealistic (liberalist) view of Slovak foreign policy. However, in contrast to that, a realist approach associated with constructivism followed below: “Other specific principles resulting from the geopolitical position, national culture, historical traditions and psychology are above all realism in assessing Slovakia’s own place in the European context, adaptability to decisive cultural, political and economic trends and an unprejudiced openness to cooperation initiatives coming from different sides” (MFEA SR 1993).

In this regard, Slovakia had clearly defined goals aimed at institutional liberalism (idealism), but at the same time, it comes from the reality of international relations and classical geopolitics, in which space is perceived objectively and deterministically. This combination is also illustrated by the introduction to the document, which presents Slovakia as a small country “which has only limited possibilities to ensure its own defence and security, which itself is undergoing a large-scale social and economic transformation and which lies in the centre of the European continent, which is also changing” (MFEA SR 1993). However, in 2023 it was stated that the “Geopolitical anchoring of the Slovak Republic is defined not only by geography but also by way of managing society – its values” (MFEA SR 2023).

Although the increase in publications devoted to geopolitics and political geography is growing worldwide, minimal interest in mapping Slovak foreign policy can be observed in Slovak geography. The development of political geography in Slovakia took place only after 1989, while the papers of political geographers mainly focused on integrating Slovakia into the EU and NATO and its geopolitical position (e.g. Michaeli and Istok 2002 and Blažík 2004 and 2006). After the integration of Slovakia in 2004, the topic of foreign policy among Slovak geographers disappeared for a while. The Slovak political geography deals mainly with public administration and electoral geography. However, this excludes geographical fac-

tors and distance when analyzing foreign policy by political scientists and, thus, the absence of a more comprehensive approach in research. At the same time, the rapid development of accessibility and diversity of data directly provides suitable conditions for examining the Slovak position (even after integration into the EU and NATO) and the spatial focus of foreign policy in relation not only to security and political issues but also to issues of new challenges and topics, such as economic diplomacy, public diplomacy, development cooperation, cyber security, and others.

Within the Slovak geographical literature, the Slovak foreign policy was analyzed by Grác and Slavík (2010), followed by Šandor and Guriňák (2019). Brhlíková (2014) devoted herself to the geopolitical position of Slovakia in the EU, and Goda and Čiefová (2019) to cultural diplomacy. The possibilities of applying GIS in the Slovak foreign policy were analyzed by Šandor et al. (2020). Obviously, the research on Slovak foreign policy or its geopolitical position has been left to the political science community and journals on international relations, exception is, e. g. Guriňák et al. (2014). A more detailed analysis of the development of the Slovak foreign policy is provided by Duleba (2012), Török (2013 and 2014) and Terem et al. (2017).

METHODS

We consider official government visits as the most dynamic interactions which are studied politically or econometrically (e. g. Nitsch 2005, 2007 and 2018, Grant 2011, Yasar et al. 2012, Ekmekci and Yildirim 2013, Lebovic et al. 2016 and Cavari and Ables 2019).

This paper uses quantitative descriptive methods in two dimensions based on classical geopolitics. One is dedicated to analyzing government members' and high-level state officials' foreign visits. In this regard, we have also analyzed the structure (Ministries) of the visits and contextual realities related to international development in the respective periods during the 30 years.

We collected data from Slovak government resolutions which contain the destination and the government official's name (prime minister, minister, state secretary and director of other central state administration bodies). However, these resolutions do not contain the purpose of the foreign trip, and thus, this remains the main obstacle to identifying the pure bilateral character of Slovak relations. Beneš (2012) is surprised by the scientific community's lack of interest in a systematic analysis of foreign trips of government officials, as data on these trips are relatively easily available. In the Central European region, there is a lack of a systematic analysis of the foreign trips of the top state representatives, which would cover a longer period and could identify the geopolitical orientation of the state (Beneš 2012).

The analyzed countries were chosen based on the highest number of government visits from Slovakia (see Fig. 1), and due to the fact that those countries are often in public discourse, they have enormous world economic, military and security importance and are also the permanent members of the UN Security Council (except Germany). In addition, from the Slovak point of view, Germany has been added as the long-term most important Slovak trade partner and one of the key members of the EU.

Additionally, to conduct an empirical analysis of the Slovak government's interaction, we collected all mentions of analyzed countries present in the strategic go-

vernment documents such as the *Foreign Policy Focus of the Slovak Republic* (FPF SR) during the period 1993 – 2020, and *Manifestos of the Government of the Slovak Republic* (MG SR) during the period 1995 – 2020. The study of official texts indicates whether geopolitical visions support political decision-making and how political elites perceive geopolitical events (Müller 2013). Winham (1969) lists content analysis as one of the four basic research techniques in Foreign Policy Analysis. The content analysis focuses on the moment of decision-making in the creation of foreign policy in order to find out how the given moment (situation) is perceived by competent leaders – policymakers, especially in their communication. The real implications of the mention of states and especially the contextual realities in the main government documents often provoke a stormy political and public debate. For instance, adopting the new *Security Strategy of the SR* in 2017 was rejected for political reasons (some government parties did not agree with the designation of Russia as a state with the connotation of a threat to the SR). However, the new Security Strategy was finally approved at the beginning of 2021 (MD SR 2021).

RESULTS

Foreign government visits from Slovakia

Central Europe was always the region where several powers promoted their foreign policy interests. According to Brhlíková in 2014, the decisive states whose interests currently affect the geospace of Slovakia are the US, Russia, Germany and France (Brhlíková 2014). We assume this can also be applied in 2023, even after Russian aggression in Ukraine. Germany has a high economic and security interest in the region. Volner (2004) claims that Slovakia has very little chance of breaking out of the sphere of German influence. This is also related to the competition for influence between Germany and Russia in this region. Slovakia is also in the middle of a clash between the interests of Russia and the US (Brhlíková 2014). Baar (2018) believes that if the states of Central Europe want to remain independent and democratic in the coming decades, they should cooperate more closely with the US. The position of Slovakia is on the eastern geopolitical border of the EU, which is a critical zone of probable geopolitical conflicts, and also lies on the border between Huntington's civilizations (Brhlíková 2014). The specific position of Slovakia within the EU lies in the fact that it lies on its border, it is the easternmost country of the Eurozone in Central Europe, and it also lies on the Schengen border, which represents a potential line of geopolitical pressure between Russia and the EU (Volner 2004).

The largest number of Slovak foreign trips went to France (916), Germany (835), the US (489), Russia (456), the UK (322) and China (152). Regarding the Slovak Prime Ministers, they mostly visited France (33), Germany (28), the UK (12), the US (11), Russia (10) and China (3). The rotating principle of the presidency also determines the number of visits to EU member states in the Council of the EU, which increases the number of visits to France (in 2000, 2008 and 2022), Germany (in 1999 and 2007) and the UK (in 2005). The average increase in the number of Slovak visits to the states which held the EU presidency was 71% (by France), 73% (by the UK), and 208% (by Germany) in comparison to the years before the presidency. In addition, a significant increase (74%) in visits to France in 2019 is related to the Slovak presidency in The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, located in Paris. Despite this clearly multilateral char-

acter of these vi-sits, Germany and France consistently represent the closest bilateral partners from the world powers regarding the international visits of Slovak government officials.

Overall, it is important to note that most Slovak visits went to the neighbouring states (Fig. 1). The realist approach shows the distance and neighbouring effect as the most important factor here. Slovakia has its multisectoral cooperation (throughout several ministries) with the neighbouring states, even if the relations might degrade during some periods (for example, with Hungary).

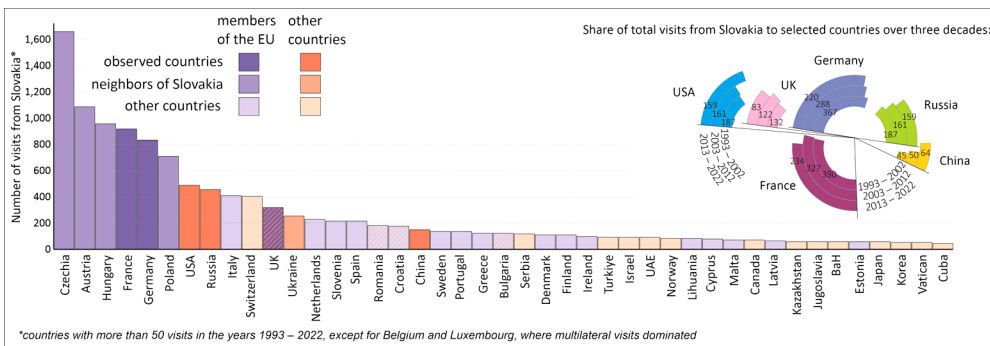


Fig. 1. Number of government visits from Slovakia to the top 43 states in 1993 – 2022

Source: Government Office of the SR (2020).

During the government of V. Mečiar, Slovakia was criticized for its increased orientation towards Russia, which is also confirmed by the high number of visits in that period. However, those visits had an economic character with an effort to resolve open issues from history (Russian debt, energy). The government also declared that it sought to intensify mutual trade (MFEA SR 1997). Of the 92 visits to Russia during the then government period, 53% of the trips were made by ministers or state secretaries of the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Economy. Madeleine Albright's well-known quote about Slovakia as a "hole" on the map of Europe (SME 1998) illustrates the ambiguity of foreign policy, but especially the violation of democratic standards in the young country. However, this expression is also often used nowadays – see SME (2008), Tódová and Kostolný (2015) and Dzurinda (2018).

After the change of government in 1998, the most significant turn in the history of the foreign policy of Slovakia occurred. The new government of M. Dzurinda declared a clear goal of catching up with the missed integration process into Euro-Atlantic structures and adapted its foreign policy to those goals (Terem et al. 2017). After successful integration into the EU and NATO, the first government of R. Fico in 2006 – 2010 can be characterized as an effort to confirm its place in Euro-Atlantic structures, but with the two-track communication of foreign policy topics, particularly a strong emphasis on Russia. The Manifesto of the Slovak Government mentioned the striving for strengthening cooperation with Russia, with the building of a foreign policy orientation on the four world directions (Török 2013).

After eight years of the government of R. Fico and P. Pellegrini, the new governments of I. Matovič, E. Heger and Ľ. Ódor expressed their clear support for the Euro-Atlantic path and clear support for Ukraine after Russian aggression.

Overall, France and Germany are characterized by a higher number of visits, which is due to several factors. These continental powers within the EU are geographically and politically the closest partners for Slovakia. This is reflected in an average of twice as many visits as to the US or Russia. The well-known rivalry between the US and Russia in the Slovak public sphere was not entirely reflected in real interactions. More trips were made to the US during every government except V. Mečiar's government and the first government of R. Fico in 2006. Even the second government of R. Fico in 2012 – 2016 and even the two governments of Fico and Pellegrini in 2016 – 2020, were characterized by fewer visits to Russia than the first government of M. Dzurinda in 1998 – 2002. In this context, it should also be noted that the number of visits to the USA increases yearly due to the UN General Assembly meeting.

China has a marginal position compared to the other monitored countries, with a rising trend since 2013. The highest number of visits was experienced in 2019 (17), 2016 (11) and 2000 (11) – Fig. 2.

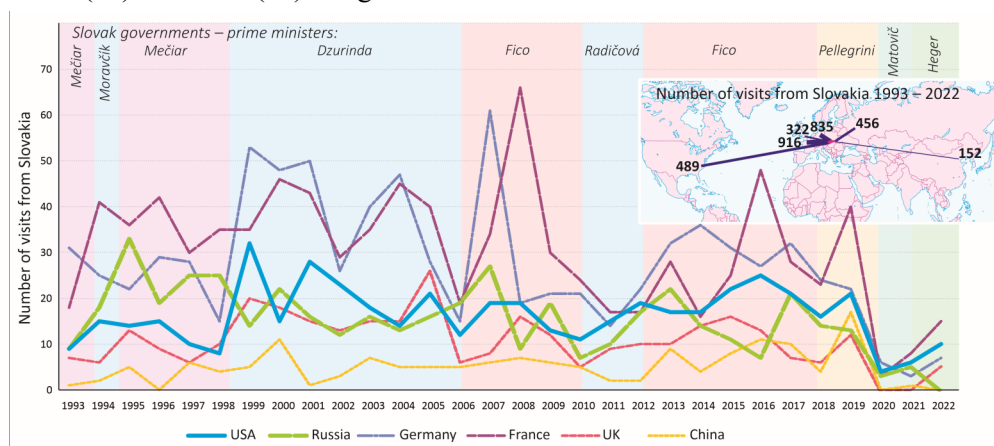


Fig. 2. Number of government visits from Slovakia to the analyzed six countries in 1993 – 2022

Source: Government Office of the SR (2020).

Analyzing the structure of visits, Russia and China differ most from the other four states by the largest share of visits from the Ministry of Economy (Russia 20%, China 17%) and then the Ministry of Finance (Russia 16% and China 16%), while other states have the largest share from the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs (MFEA) – Fig. 3. Two-thirds of the visits to the US were from the MFEA, Economy, Finance, and Defence, which indicates the deepening of basic political-military and economic relations. Specific relations with respective countries also illustrate the second position of the Industrial Property Office of Slovakia, which counted for an 11% share of all visits to Germany. This relates to the significant trade and economic relations between Slovakia and Germany. In France, the third Department that carried the most visits from Slovakia was the Nuclear Regulatory Authority. This was reflected in the fact that Slovakia and France are dependent on share of total nuclear energy production.

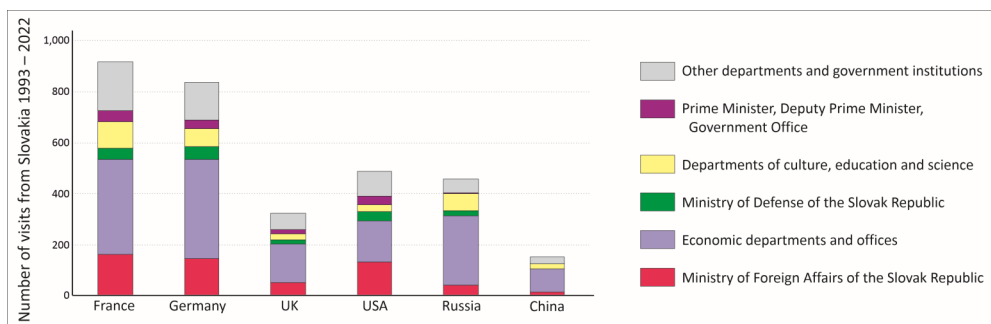


Fig. 3. Number of government visits from Slovakia according to ministries in 1993 – 2022
Source: Government Office of the SR (2020).

Russia vs Ukraine

Russia maintained an important position in the intensity of visits even after the outbreak of the gas crisis (2009) or after the annexation of Crimea (2014). In this context, Duleba (2016, p. 95) claims that “A priori mistrust towards Ukraine, as well as a priori trust towards the Russian Federation, belong to the two basic diseases of Slovakia’s Eastern policy since 1993”. Concerning this, it is noteworthy that Russia was visited almost twice as much as Ukraine on average during each government since 1993 (except the governments of I. Radičová, I. Matovič and E. Heger). Ukraine exceeded visits from Slovakia only in 2002, 2005, 2008, 2021 and 2022 (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4. Number of government visits from Slovakia to Russia and Ukraine in 1993 – 2022
Source: Government Office of the SR (2020).

Naturally, since 1993, there has been controversy in professional and political circles about which state is more important for Slovakia in terms of its interests or with which state Slovakia should cooperate more, which turned into a kind of dividing line in Slovak politics (Marušiak 2017). Ukraine was declared a priority in

developing relations in the FPFs as a neighbouring country, but Russia was Slovakia's most important energy supplier. Russia has traditionally been favoured as a more important partner in this discourse. The faster process of development of cooperation between Slovakia (and thus the intensity of visits) with Ukraine could be hindered by its own unstable internal development as well as the historical awareness (or prejudices) of some Slovak groups about Slovakia being closer to the position of Russia than Ukraine (Duleba 2012). Although Russia has almost twice the number of absolute visits than Ukraine, we found that higher-ranking officials travelled more to Ukraine than Russia.

Mentions of countries in strategic documents of Slovak foreign policy

In the most important government document – MG SR, out of the six examined countries, only France was not mentioned, despite the traditionally good relations between France and Slovakia. However, Germany, the UK, and China appeared only once in 30 years. Overall, the US was mentioned eleven times with an absence only in 2016. Despite the higher frequency (twelve times), Russia is mentioned in MG SR mainly in the economic-trade contextual dimension. In addition, the largest number of Russian mentions can be observed in 2010, when the Slovak government of the right-centrist coalition can be characterized as “pro-Russian” and thus speak of a qualitatively stronger focus on this state regarding friendship. For this reason, the predominance of mentions of Russia over the US cannot be absolute, but it definitely declares the significance of the Russian role in Slovak foreign policy (either positive or negative). A quantitative shift can be seen in the US, especially in the last MG SR in 2020 (three times), while Russia and other states were absent (except the UK – 1 mention).

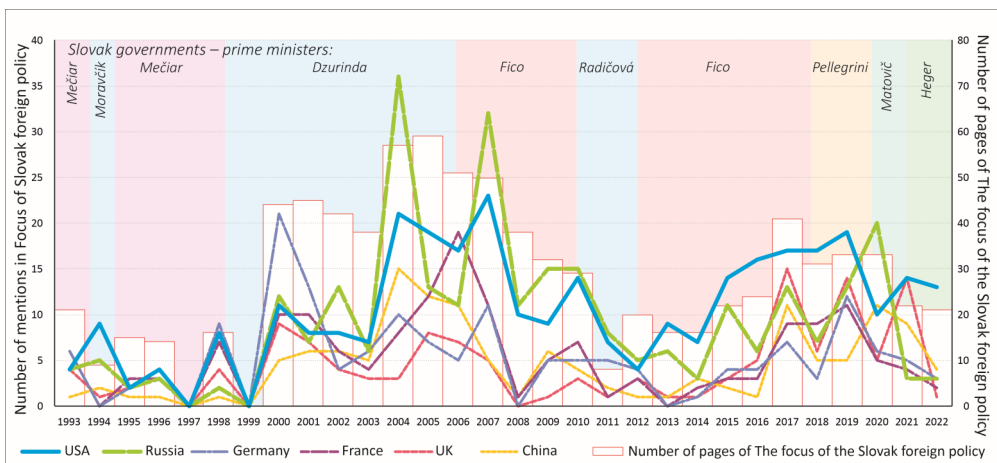


Fig. 5. Number of mentions dedicated to the analyzed six states in FPF in 1993 – 2022

Source: MFEA SR (1993 – 2022).

As with the MG and the FPF, the frequency of mentions of the US and Russia was the highest among the analyzed countries for a long time (Fig. 5). The US was mentioned mainly in security cooperation concerning NATO. Russia was given space mainly from the trade and economic dimension, mostly during the first Fico

government, which also reflects the MG from 2006 concerning the “activation of relations with Russia” (Government Office of the SR 2006). A large space was devoted to Russia between 2004 and 2020, but it has been minimal since then. For the UK, the years 2017 and 2021 are specific, when above-average attention was paid to it in connection with Brexit.

DISCUSSION

After joining the EU and NATO, practically no relevant political force openly questioned Slovakia’s Western orientation. Consolidation of continuous policy towards some countries (especially authoritarian ones) was insufficient during some government periods, which is related to realism in international relations. Given this, some nation-state interests are interwoven in cooperation with the world’s leading countries if it is particularly in line with the most important interest of a small state – to survive as a state entity.

This context also had direct effects on complicated relations with Russia. Duleba (2016) talks about the three-faceted nature of the Slovak policy concerning Ukraine and Russia, since the Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the President (and we can also add the Speaker of the National Assembly of the Slovak Republic) had different views on the crisis in Ukraine since 2014. However, this has not been the case since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, when the position was unified across the three highest constitutional representatives. Despite widespread opinion in the media, the pro-Russian orientation of the Slovak government after 2010 does not confirm the number of visits to Russia, which is smaller than to the US and even smaller than during the first government of M. Dzurinda. Furthermore, the number of mentions of Russia in the FPF was lower than that of the US in the given period, except for 2020. However, Russia had an important role in Slovak foreign policy, and after the US, it was most often mentioned in the strategic documents. The Slovak governments contextually perceived Russia as an important partner, but the cooperation mainly concerned the economic and trade dimensions, which were also reflected in the real interactions of government officials. However, it is not possible to speak of an unambiguously consolidated position of Slovakia concerning Russia due to the different rhetoric of some Slovak government representatives to the domestic public (before the beginning of the war in Ukraine in 2022, 55% of Slovak respondents perceived the Russian president positively (Klingová 2022)) and real steps in the field of foreign policy, including a common approach at the level of EU institutions. Nevertheless, integration into the EU remained the primary Slovak national interest, while the effort to dialogue with Russia was secondary (Marušiak 2017). However, Krejčí (2016) claims that the biggest problem for Slovakia is the lack of ability to clearly define its vital interests and uncompromisingly defend them in Brussels.

A qualitative difference in the textual analysis of the analyzed states can be observed after 2004 when third countries (outside the EU) were viewed through the prism of the EU’s common foreign and security policy. The Focus of the Slovak Foreign Policy in 2008 (MFEA SR 1993 – 2022) states that “the basic framework determining the bilateral relations of the Slovak Republic is our membership in the EU”. Bilateral and current European issues are intertwined – it is a two-way process when high-quality bilateral relations with EU member countries are a prerequisite for the successful operation of the Slovak Republic on EU soil, and conversely, ...”

US, EU, and NATO represent top mentions in all elaborated strategic documents. The US is discussed mainly in terms of supporting integration efforts before 2004 and later as a state providing “security guarantees” (MG SR 2010). In the case of the US, the presence of a defence cooperation discourse in FPF is clear, but to a different degree in different governments. While in 2013, the Slovak government was in favour of “preserving an adequate US military presence on the European continent” (MFEA SR 2013, p. 9), in 2022, the Slovak government wanted to focus on “increasing the overall political and economic engagement of the US in Central Europe” (MFEA SR 2022, p. 8).

According to results, neighbouring states were more important for the Slovak foreign policy due to the higher number of visits. In addition, the presence of mentions of neighbouring states (especially the V4 states) in the strategic documents was also in the foreground in almost every FPF. This demonstrates the highest priority of Slovakia to the Central European area and the effort to have good relations with its neighbours, which can immediately affect Slovakia.

However, this was not applied to Ukraine in relation to Russia, which is contradicted by Chana (2013), who states that states close to each other are more prominent than distant ones. Here we have to search for other factors, such as internal development in Slovakia, political parties and their opinions. Nevertheless, we agree with Chana (2013) that distant states rarely interact and that the distance factor is still relevant today, despite technological advances. Physical distance is often a correlate of emotional and cultural distance, so the proverb “out of sight, out of mind” continues to be essential in today’s interconnected world (Chana 2013). Hence, the discussion about the distance concerning Tobler’s rule (1970) can be overcome by some states’ GDP, trade or military weight. For instance, Germany counted an average 22.78% share of Slovak exports and 19.80% of imports during the whole research period, which can explain the reason for more visits from Slovakia than to neighbouring Poland. This logic can also be applied to Russia, which counted for 10.78 % of imports to Slovakia (mainly oil and gas) and 2.45% of exports, while Ukraine counted only 1.27% of imports to Slovakia and 1.23% of exports.

CONCLUSION

Three decades of Slovak foreign policy have been marked by dynamic development influenced by changes in the domestic political environment. After initial hesitation, Slovakia has integrated into Euro-Atlantic structures and achieved significant diplomatic successes in recent years.

In this paper, we analyzed the spatial aspect of the foreign policy of the Slovak Republic during the ten governments from 1993 – 2022. We applied quantitative methods within classical geopolitics, analyzing the foreign visits and mentions of the selected key world powers. The analysis showed that the US and Russia are continuously strongly represented in strategic documents. This also testifies to the strong discourse in relations with these powers on the political scene and in Slovak society. Germany and France have a similar intensity of representation, whereas their position in the political interactions of Slovakia is more significant. In comparison to them, the UK has smaller importance. Similarly, relations with China are more declaratory than confirmed by real political interactions.

The discourse about the US-Russia rivalry is not clearly represented in our finding, while we pointed out the prevalence of Slovak visits to the US, with the exception of two of ten governments. However, this can be scrutinized more complexly in further research using more aggregated data, focusing on more complex relations with both countries through agreements and respective visits (and visits of other foreign policy actors such as the President or Parliamentary Speaker).

While this paper adds to the discussion about new data-based research (a potential research gap) of the foreign policy orientation of Slovakia, the limit of our research concerns the data on government visits. We do not know the exact purpose of more than 3,000 visits from Slovakia to countries worldwide, so we can undoubtedly claim that not every visit was associated with pure bilateral relations. In this context, it is necessary to perceive the visits as political interactions of the state as a political-geographical entity on the map. Additionally, this research might be an example for other Central European states.

Our research also confirms that Slovak foreign policy depends to a large extent on the current government, which influences changes in the spatial aspect of foreign policy. Geography and distance confirm that the neighbouring countries play the most important role in Slovak foreign policy.

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Filip Š a n d o r, Daniel G u r ň á k

VÝVOJ GEOPOLITICKEJ ORIENTÁCIE SLOVENSKEJ REPUBLIKY OD ROKU 1993

Príspevok analyzuje vývoj zahraničných vzťahov Slovenskej republiky v období rokov 1993 – 2022. Politicko-geografická analýza sa opiera o strategické zahraničnopolitické dokumenty a najmä reálne politické interakcie SR s vybranými mocnosťami – USA, Rusko, Nemecko, Francúzsko, Spojené kráľovstvo a Čína. Prienikom kritickej geopolitiky a klasickej geopolitiky aplikujeme metódy dekonštrukcie textu vybraných strategických dokumentov vlád (programových vyhlásení vlád SR, zameraní zahraničnej politiky SR) v konfrontácii s reálnymi vonkajšími prejavmi ich zahraničnej politiky v podobe zahraničných návštev. Výsledky analýzy ukazujú, že kým v diskurze o postavení jednotlivých skúmaných štátov majú v strategických dokumentoch hlavné postavenie najmä USA a Rusko, reálne prejavy vonkajších vzťahov SR v podobe návštev vládných činiteľov sa zameriavajú na bližšie štáty, ako Nemecko a Francúzsko. Spojené kráľovstvo je v deklaratívnej i praktickej rovine skôr v úzadí slovenskej zahraničnej politiky a vzťahy s Čínou sú síce výraznejšie deklarované v dokumentoch, no ich praktická realizácia má nízku intenzitu.

Výsledky tiež ukázali, že slovenskí vládni činitelia viac cestovali do USA ako do Ruska okrem obdobia rokov 1993 – 1998 a 2006 – 2010. Naopak, uprednostňovanie Ruska pred Ukrajinou vo vládných návštevách bolo v rozpore s deklaratívnou rovinou dôležitosti susedného štátu (Ukrajiny).

Na základe analýzy vyše 3-tisíc politických interakcií s kľúčovými štátmi sveta v podobe návštev slovenských vládných reprezentantov sme ilustrovali reálnu zahraničnopolitickú orientáciu SR, ktorá je orientovaná najmä na Nemecko s Francúzskom, na kľúčový tandem EÚ. Z hľadiska dynamiky vývoja sa ukazuje, že zahraničná politika SR do veľkej miery závisí od aktuálnych vládných garnitúr, ktoré ovplyvňujú zmeny priestorového aspektu zahraničnej politiky.



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