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Research Articles

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Research Articles

From Grassroots Humanitarianism to Mutual Aid: Citizen Responses in Poland and the Czech Republic to Russia's War in Ukraine

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ABSTRACT

Russia's full-blown war in Ukraine created an unprecedented humanitarian crisis in Europe. By the end of 2022, over eight million Ukrainians had become refugees throughout Europe, with more than 11 million crossing Ukraine's borders (UNHCR Operational Data Portal). The Ukrainians have fled to many countries, but Poland and the Czech Republic have received some of the largest numbers of Ukrainian individuals seeking protection. The multilayered response to this influx of people has been impressive and surprising, with ordinary individuals showing up at the border to provide food and transportation while ordinary citizens and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) mobilized to create local systems of humanitarian assistance. This paper explores grassroots citizens' aid in Poland and the Czech Republic from February 2022 until August 2024. It argues that in both countries, private individuals and small volunteer-run groups organized creative grassroots initiatives that went beyond providing immediate material assistance. Solidarity with Ukrainians also fueled citizen-led mutual aid and transformative spaces of care aimed at altering existing institutions and practices and integrating Ukrainians.

KEYWORDS	grassroots humanitarianism, mutual aid, voluntarism, Ukrainian refugees, Poland, the Czech Republic
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INTRODUCTION

Russia's full-blown war in Ukraine, which began in February 2022, led to an unprecedented humanitarian crisis in Europe. In one week of the war, more than one million people sought refuge in neighboring countries. By the year's end, over eight million Ukrainians had become refugees[1] throughout Europe, with more than 11 million crossing Ukraine's borders (UNHCR OPERATIONAL DATA PORTAL). The Ukrainians have fled to many countries, but Poland and the Czech Republic have received some of the largest numbers of Ukrainian individuals seeking protection; by July 2024, 1.8 million Ukrainians had applied for temporary protection in Poland, and over 600,000 did so in the Czech Republic by August 2024 (UNHCR OPERATIONAL DATA PORTAL). The Ukrainian refugee crisis constitutes the most substantial migration event in the Czech Republic's contemporary history (BRYAN ET AL. 2023).

Since the beginning of the full-scale war, the multilayered response to this influx of people has been both impressive and surprising, with ordinary individuals initially showing up at the border to provide food and transportation while citizens and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) mobilized to create local systems of humanitarian assistance and small volunteer-run groups engaged in mutual aid. Although the war is ongoing, it is essential to take stock of these grassroots responses, and evaluate their importance to the provision of aid, as well as their potential impact on Polish and Czech society. In this paper, we explore the following questions: To what extent has grassroots aid encouraged new forms of activism or even social movements within these societies? Do these forms of assistance and activism reveal and replicate historical forms of dissent mobilization to oppose Russian oppression in these countries? Or do they represent novel spontaneous acts of goodwill?

These informal, ad hoc forms of aid, deemed both "impressive" and "generous" by the United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, were also quite unexpected given the harsh reaction refugees and asylum seekers provoked previously in Central and Eastern Europe (UNOHC 2022). In Poland, for example, both the government and the public indicated that they were opposed to migrants and refugees coming into the country in 2015, and they did so again in 2021 (TILLES 2021). In response to a surge of people trying to enter Poland from Belarus, a 2021

poll found that more than half of the Polish population (55%) was opposed to allowing people to come to Poland, while almost half were even supportive of building a wall to keep migrants out (IBID.). Similarly, a 2016 poll in the Czech Republic found that almost two-thirds of Czech citizens were opposed to taking in refugees from war zones (HOVET 2016). The 2015 EU refugee relocation plan, which sought to distribute asylum seekers from Greece and Italy across member states, faced strong opposition from Central and Eastern European countries.[2] The Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia voted against the quotas. While Poland eventually voted in favor of the quotas and pledged to accept 100 refugees, it later reneged (QUELL 2020). As Jarosław Kaczyński, the leader of Poland's Law and Justice Party (PiS) put it, this is because *"migrants carry all sorts of parasites and protozoa, which [...] while not dangerous in the organisms of these people, could be dangerous here"* (CIENSKI 2017).

Yet, when Russia launched its full-scale war on Ukraine in late February 2022, forcing Ukrainians to flee, Poland and the Czech Republic's attitudes and behavior shifted suddenly, given the Central Europeans' more positive views of Ukrainians than of refugees from the Middle East (BLOMQVIST MICKELSSON 2025; ZOGATA-KUSZ ET AL. 2023), and numerous initiatives were created not only by the governments,[3] but also by Polish and Czech citizens (BRYAN ET AL. 2023; JELÍNKOVÁ ET AL. 2024; MACKOVÁ ET AL. 2024; BLOMQVIST MICKELSSON 2025; ZOGATA-KUSZ ET AL. 2023). While the Czech and Polish governments decided not to activate the EU Temporary Protection Directive for Syrian refugees during the migration surge in 2015 (MACKOVÁ ET AL. 2024), both governments almost immediately granted legal status to Ukrainians via a temporary protection directive, while also granting Ukrainian refugees access to the respective country's social welfare system (e.g. free health care and education).[4] Importantly, the war also prompted city governments and citizens to act, as they showed up at the border, for example, with food, clothing, and transportation. As the Mayor of Medyka, a border town in Poland, explained, *"These refugees have lost almost everything. We need to help them. Even if that means we'll have to learn to live with less"* (SALTMARSH 2022).

In the war's first three months, private citizens in Poland spent as much as $2.1 billion supporting Ukrainian refugees, according to the Polish Economic Institute's estimates, while the Polish government pledged $3.4 billion for this cause for 2022 (ROSMAN 2022). In the Czech Republic,

individuals and NGOs organized legal and psychological services for Ukrainian refugees, in addition to providing significant amounts of material aid. By the end of the summer of 2022, private Czech citizens had donated almost $80 million in aid for Ukrainians – far more than what was collected for previous natural or human-induced disasters (WESELOWSKY 2022). And by the end of the year, Czechs donated five times more than in previous years, with most of the funds meant to help Ukraine.[5]

In the initial days and weeks after the full-scale invasion, migrant-assisting NGOs and volunteer movements were among the first to respond to Ukrainian refugees' needs, providing the majority of the aid for them (BRYAN ET AL. 2023; CULLEN DUNN – KALISZEWSKA 2023; JELÍNKOVÁ ET AL. 2024; MCMAHON 2022; MIRGA-WÓJTOWICZ – TALEWICZ-KWIATKOWSKA – KOŁACZEK 2022). In both countries, private individuals organized creative grassroots initiatives that went beyond supplying immediate material assistance by providing housing, teaching refugees new skills, and helping them integrate into society. Although the Polish and Czech governments each played an important role in providing humanitarian aid for Ukrainians fleeing the violence in their country, this article is focused on the informal, spontaneous, and makeshift responses that were driven by volunteers, or what we call grassroots humanitarianism. Some of these initiatives and demonstrations of mutual aid are new and spontaneous, as they were formed in response to the dramatic situation in Ukraine, while others have operated for a longer time period, since they had been created during previous humanitarian crises and then adopted and expanded for the new reality in the spring of 2022.

Although many terms can be used to describe how ordinary citizens and volunteers initiate and deliver aid, we use two terms in particular – grassroots humanitarianism and mutual aid – because they both capture the small-scale, bottom-up character of these activities, as well as the location where the humanitarian activities are carried out. Anne-Meike Fechter and Anke Schwittay (2019: 1772) define this as aid that is provided by citizens to strangers in need who live in the citizens' own communities (and not in some far away locale). However, we argue that these grassroots initiatives are not always just short-term, ad hoc, apolitical acts focused on providing immediate relief; sometimes this behavior represents, reflects, and shapes civil society activism within these countries. As scholars examining grassroots humanitarianism toward refugees in Belgium and Germany observe,

this aid includes short-term relief, but it can also include advocacy work and activities aimed at supporting sustainable development and longer-term structural changes in the host country with the aim *"to improve migrants' precarious situation in the future"* (VANDEVOORDT – FLEISCHMANN 2020: 188). To describe and understand the initiatives that exist over an extended time period and move beyond immediate relief, we use the term *mutual aid* (SPADE 2020A, 2020B; CARSTENSEN – SEBIT 2020) in our analysis of grassroots initiatives in Poland and the Czech Republic. Mutual aid involves individual efforts but also the work of groups and communities that come together to provide support, resources, and assistance based on solidarity with the refugees. These efforts thus sometimes seek structural changes and aspire to create new institutions and mechanisms to receive and integrate refugees.

Building on these concepts, our comparative study of Poland and the Czech Republic since February 2022 makes two related arguments. First, we argue that this continuum of grassroots organizing has not only helped meet the immediate needs of refugees, but it has also altered social relationships in these societies. By providing mutual aid to refugees, citizens' initiatives and organizations are building solidarity with the refugees and are starting to create alternative institutions and spaces of collective care. We see mutual aid as an important aspect of this grassroots organizing that brings individuals and groups together. Second, although this research is preliminary and these actions are difficult to evaluate at this point, we argue that these grassroots initiatives are upending the existing global humanitarian system, which is dominated by large international organizations based in North America and Western Europe. We cannot predict the future, but there are reasons to believe that this do-it-yourself (DIY) citizen activism will have lasting effects on Ukrainian refugees, the Polish and Czech societies, and the provision of humanitarian aid in other places (LSE Department of International Development 2023).

In the next section, we explain the methodology of our paper and the questions we posed during our semi-structured interviews. Section II provides some historical context for our framing concepts – grassroots humanitarianism and mutual aid – which are relatively new terms that emerged from several different disciplines interested in humanitarianism, international development, and social movements (FETCHER – SCHWITTAY 2019; SPADE 2020A, 2020B; MCGEE – PELHAM 2018; SANDRI 2017; VANDEVOORDT – FLEISCHMANN 2020). The scholarship

from which these terms emerged is large and interdisciplinary, but in using these particular terms, we call attention to the size, motivations, and activities of these bottom-up initiatives, as well as their relationships to other actors to differentiate them from large aid organizations and similar terms. Section III turns to our case studies, which describe and analyze a few small-scale grassroots aid organizations that, while informal and operating on the margins of the established humanitarian industries in Poland and the Czech Republic, demonstrate the important links between providing aid to Ukrainians and activism and collective action. Since these activities are ongoing and changing, we conclude with some general observations, as well as the potential impact of these grassroots activities on refugees, these countries' civil societies, and the global humanitarianism industry.

METHODOLOGY

This research uses an inductive qualitative approach based on field work and interviews conducted in Poland and the Czech Republic between June 2022 and August 2024, as well as a textual analysis of secondary sources written in English, Czech, and Polish. When we started conducting the interviews and fieldwork on this topic in the summer of 2022, there were few peer-reviewed articles on this topic. As we continued our research, more articles emerged along with gray literature from foundations, international organizations and local NGOs, as well as books written in Polish (RUDNICKI 2023; KALINOWSKA 2023) and Czech. In both countries, we used semi-structured interviews, allowing the interviewees to express ideas in their own words and to move in a different direction while still providing comparable data. We also employed reflexive practices, including ongoing self-reflection and consultations with each other to ensure a balanced and comprehensive approach to the research.

In Poland, 35 semi-structured interviews were conducted in the summer of 2022 and throughout the spring and summer of 2023. These interviews were conducted in Polish or English with officials from Polish humanitarian organizations and government agencies, as well as with citizens directly involved with providing assistance. These interviews were conducted in public places and lasted no longer than one hour. In the summer of 2022, ten semi-structured interviews were conducted. In the spring and summer of 2023, while McMahon was a Fulbright Scholar at Adam

Mickiewicz University, 25 interviews were conducted in Warsaw, Krakow, Lublin, and Poznan. In addition, this author was a participant observer at conferences and workshops discussing and analyzing the reception and integration of Ukrainian refugees in Poland. In the Czech Republic, participation in aid activities and 28 semi-structured interviews were conducted in the summers of 2022, 2023, and 2024, and in January 2024 with individuals directly involved with providing humanitarian assistance as well as those receiving assistance in Prague.

This article describes and analyzes the activities of two grassroots initiatives in Poland, *Women Take the Wheel* (*Kobiety Za Kółko*), and *Wrocław's Central Railway Station Initiative*. These groups from Poland were chosen for their similarities: both were formed immediately after the war began, were created by private individuals, and were focused on the immediate needs of refugees. However, they are still quite different. While *Women Take the Wheel* organizes in-person aid online and still exists, *Wrocław's Central Railway Station Initiative* organized and implemented in-person aid but only for a short period. In the case of the Czech Republic, we highlight the work of two organizations, *Prague's Main Train Station Initiative* (*Iniciativa Hlavák*) and *Grandmas without Borders* (*Babičky bez hranic*). These organizations were also created by private individuals without any government involvement when they began, and while they focus on the immediate needs of refugees, they also engage in pro-migrant advocacy and integration. Both organizations are located in Prague, the Czech capital, which has received a disproportionate number of Ukrainian refugees. Both organizations also provided assistance to refugees prior to Russia's invasion of Ukraine: *Prague's Main Train Station Initiative* was established during the migration surge in 2015; *Grandmas without Borders* has a longer history going back to their dissent against the Czech communist regime prior to 1989, but more recently this group has been engaged in pro-migrant advocacy for refugees from Syria, Chechnya, and Afghanistan.

By analyzing the activities of these four organizations in two Central European countries, this article provides a diverse sampling of the extensive and wide-ranging humanitarian aid offered in these countries while still demonstrating some overlap in how people organized their responses. Importantly, in each country we highlight one initiative that was created by women for women, with feminist ideals in mind. It is certainly the case that

many existing women's organizations, like *Grandmothers without Borders*, broadened their missions to include and assist Ukrainian refugees, while many new initiatives, like *Women Take the Wheel*, were formed in direct response to the war in Ukraine.

FROM LARGE INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS TO CITIZENS' AID

In this section, we summarize the interdisciplinary literature on humanitarianism, explaining how we arrived at the terms *grassroots humanitarianism* and *mutual aid* to describe the unfolding situations in Poland and the Czech Republic. To be clear, we do not suggest that these are the only terms that can be used in this regard, but we do contend that in the ongoing situation in CEE, they capture the actors and their activities well while differentiating them from the global humanitarian industry that emerged and developed after World War II. Grassroots humanitarianism and mutual aid, because they are carried out by individuals in their own communities, contain behavior and activities that are also traditionally associated with activism and social movements.

The modern humanitarian system has been dominated by governments, multilateral aid organizations, and large international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) from North America and Western Europe, which constitute the so-called three pillars of international aid (KENNEDY 2005; BARNETT 2006, 2011, 2017). While governments, or the first pillar of aid, provide direct bilateral assistance like loans and technical assistance, multilateral aid agencies like the United Nations (UN) are the second pillar and tend to leverage their authority and expertise to reform countries' macroeconomic structures and social policies (DEVELTERE – DE BRUYN 2009: 912). The third pillar of aid is associated largely with INGOs based in North America and Western Europe which carry out the work of governments and UN agencies working closer to the ground.

Governments, multilateral agencies, and INGOs dominate the humanitarian space, but they do not control it entirely. As scholars like Alison Schnable and Bertrand Taithe observe, although most of the relevant research overlooks or downplays citizen aid and grassroots humanitarianism, small-scale, individual efforts, the fourth pillar of aid, have always

co-existed with large, governmental organizations and initiatives (SCHNABLE 2016; TAITHE 2019; DEVELTERE – DE BRUYN 2009). In the 2000s, however, this heterogeneous group of do-it-yourself (DIY) activists started to attract more attention as the number and reach of these non-specialists grew (SCHNABLE 2016).

The fourth pillar of international aid includes a broad range of citizen initiatives that are privately funded and undertaken by individuals. Grassroots humanitarianism is one form of citizen aid that is implemented in the immediate area by those who are most familiar with local conditions; it draws attention to the location where the aid is provided and the actions carried out. Grassroots humanitarianism is decentralized, flexible, and fast-acting, seeking to meet the needs of people in one's community (FECHTER – SCHWITTAY 2019: 1769–1780). This kind of citizen activism and the localized networks it creates have a long and consistent history throughout Europe and North America, as they respond to people's needs at home but also abroad. In the past, these initiatives were not only locally rooted, but they demonstrated how global issues were mediated and responded to in the Global North (TAITHE 2019: 1782). Different from the large-scale efforts of UN agencies and the work of INGOs, the fourth pillar of aid is more explicitly connected to domestic politics, religion, and local society. And while many of the citizen initiatives' activities remain small-scale or even perfunctory, their actions can contribute to international solidarity and societal change.

Globalization, technology, and international networking have all contributed to the rise of citizen activism and grassroots humanitarianism, but so too have the poor performance and arrogance of governments, multilateral organizations, and INGO humanitarian organizations that dominate the global humanitarian system. As Michael Barnett and Peter Walker observed in 2015, expectations of humanitarian organizations increased significantly in the post-Cold War period, but the organizations often did not respond adequately or appropriately, and relief work was considered *"something that is done to others, not alongside them"* (BARNETT – WALKER 2015: 131). In fact, the criticism of the organized and hierarchical network of states, donors, international organizations, and INGOs comes from many places, and includes anthropologists (TICKTIN 2014), international relations scholars (ROTH 2019), and developmental economists (COYNE 2013). Researchers identify different specific concerns associated with the so-called "Humanitarian Club," but they share a common observation: in humanitarian crises, power

remains concentrated in the hands of wealthy donors from the Global North, and these actors largely perpetuate the status quo, giving little money or power to locals who could stimulate more effective results. For decades, large humanitarian organizations made promises to reform the system, sometimes allowing local organizations to diagnose a problem or implement aid projects, but they rarely allowed them to design projects or monitor them, which prevented meaningful systemic change (BARNETT – WALKER 2015).

The 2015 Syrian refugee crisis provoked a different humanitarian response in Southern Europe. According to Elise Pascucci and Maria Gabrielsen Jumbert, the grassroots reactions of ordinary citizens to this crisis challenged traditional humanitarian organizations and notions of citizenship, and created alternative structures of aid (PASCUCCI – GABRIELSEN JUMBERT 2021: 2). These grassroots responses worked in a localized and agile manner to restructure domestic institutions and expand notions of belonging. Ordinary citizens not only provided short-term relief, but they anticipated the long-term needs of refugees; their intention, according to Katerina Rozakou (2017: 100), was to engage in relationships with the refugees and to change the humanitarian system. At least in the case of Greece, these informal initiatives never considered the people they encountered in the streets as "beneficiaries," nor did they see their activities as "services" or even "humanitarian aid" (IBID.). Their activities were, instead, an effort to engage in partnerships with refugees beyond just gift-giving.

These grassroots humanitarians also took issue with the official humanitarian system, its bureaucratized principles, and its modes of action (PASCUCCI – GABRIELSEN JUMBERT 2021). Since these grassroots humanitarians were making changes in their community, some scholars started to interrogate their behavior as the beginnings of a new social movement bent on improving the rights of refugees and asylum seekers. Reflecting on specific aspects of social movement development, Dean Spade writes about a variety of crises and how individuals and communities respond when governments fail to act and leave people in need. Viewing mutual aid as an undervalued aspect of social movements, Spade emphasizes its importance as a bottom-up, local expression of radical collective care.

Mutual aid is considered radical because it is a *"form of political participation in which people take responsibility for caring for one another and*

changing political conditions, not just through symbolic acts or by putting pressure on their representatives in government but by actually building new social relationships" (SPADE 2020A: 136). Importantly, coordinated collective care created by individuals and grassroots efforts generates a sense of community or "communality," where people not only self-organize to help others, but in doing so, they rebuild the social fabric and, thus, experience their neighborhoods and country differently. Although often overlooked and undervalued, mutual aid and collective care demonstrate a longer-term commitment to changing institutions and social practices which are fundamental for building and sustaining social movements.

These ways of organizing and helping are neither new nor limited to humanitarian crises, but have always been part of anti-capitalist, anti-racist social movements and marginalized communities whose needs have not been met by formal systems of care (IBID.). While the idea and practice of mutual aid gained attention during the Covid-19 pandemic when individuals organized workshops, groups, and networks in many countries to help people in need, there is a long history of mutual aid in indigenous and underserved communities in the United States, as well as in left-leaning social movements that are critical of capitalism and government.

The immediate response of the global humanitarian system to the full-scale war in Ukraine was deemed both "unprecedented and generous," with the European Union, the United States, and other donor countries contributing significant amounts of money to support humanitarian needs (REFUGEE INTERNATIONAL REPORT 2022). Like other countries in Europe, the governments of Poland and the Czech Republic also stepped up quickly. However, it was the highly visible response of ordinary citizens, local NGOs, and small-scale community organizations, which was decidedly not orchestrated by the international community or any government, that attracted the most attention and recognition.[6] And in both Poland and the Czech Republic, various forms of locally inspired mutual aid flourished after February 2022 and have continued until the time of this writing. Commenting on the citizen-led aid that boomed in the first two weeks of the war, Hugo Slim warned that the *"creativity of locally-led aid must not be smothered and marginalized by the big beasts of the UN, Red Cross, and NGO world"* (SLIM 2022). Given the history and power of the formal humanitarian system, Slim's concerns at the beginning of the invasion are understandable. However, more than

two years into the conflict, the surge of local grassroots initiatives and local organizations providing assistance to Ukrainian refugees continues to be visible, their speed and flexibility recognized, and many of their efforts institutionalized.

Given citizens' multifaceted responses to Ukrainian refugees and the evolving literature on humanitarianism and mutual aid, the next section provides an in-depth look at four grassroots initiatives, two in Poland and two in the Czech Republic. In each of these cases, we examine their activities and analyze the extent to which their humanitarian outreach is immediate and short-term, or whether and how these initiatives are working to promote broader social or political changes, particularly those related to migration and integration.

FROM HELPING OTHERS TO BUILDING SOLIDARITY

The very day the Russian government initiated its attack on Ukraine in February 2022, the global humanitarian system reacted. Within a few days, the United Nations (UN), the European Union (EU), and its member states, along with the United States, pledged record amounts of money to provide life-saving humanitarian assistance to protect the citizens of Ukraine. Ukraine's neighbors, specifically Poland and the Czech Republic, had been known for their hardline positions against accepting refugees and migrants. Both countries had developed modern asylum systems in the 1990s after transitioning to democracy, accepting refugees from the Balkan wars in the 1990s and migrants from other countries around the world, but neither country had a long or significant history of refugee initiatives (HARGRAVE – HOMEL – DRAŽANOVÁ 2023).

Yet, in February 2022, their governments immediately criticized Putin for his actions and promised to protect and help Ukrainians. Their strong reaction to Russia's war in Ukraine and the refugees that flooded their countries is neither surprising nor revolutionary, considering Poland and the Czech Republic's political history vis-à-vis Russia and the Soviet Union (ANDREJUK 2023). Although Katarzyna Andrejuk's analysis is focused on Poland's response and is based on over 100 statements of public stakeholders in documents, speeches, and general discourse, it is inarguably the case that the Czech Republic – like Poland and Ukraine – had also been

stuck in the Soviet Union's sphere of influence for decades. Ukraine's proximity to the Czech Republic, fears of a renewed Russian expansionism in Central Europe, and the historical trauma of the 1968 Soviet invasion, which crushed the Prague Spring reform movement, significantly fueled the Czech support (JELÍNKOVÁ ET AL. 2024: 5).

Therefore, it was not surprising that as an act of solidarity, some Czech nationals sent the symbolic amount of 1,968 Czech crowns ($80) to Ukraine – in addition to providing other aid – to help it defend itself against Russia and to commemorate the invasion (MULLER 2022). For both the Polish and Czech governments and people, Ukraine was defending "them," as well as the rest of Europe, from Russia. Thus, *"the need to join the fight against the aggressor and to help was realized not by military action in the country of war, but by humanitarian action in the country receiving refugees"* (ANDREJUK 2023: 7). As Macková et al. (2024: 15) argue, the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine "led to a societal and political consensus regarding helping refugees" in both Poland and the Czech Republic. In their view, *"this consensus was strengthened by the geographic and cultural proximity of refugees and the structure of the migration wave that consisted of many vulnerable groups, including women and children"* (IBID.).

While each government planned its response and INGOs raised money, ordinary individuals and civil society organizations in Poland and the Czech Republic acted immediately, rushing to the border with food and clothes and organizing a range of services and support. In both countries, much of the aid came from local citizens who organized spontaneously to provide small-scale assistance (food, clothing, transportation). As the war continued into the summer of 2022, various activities aimed at providing for long-term needs (apartments, training, jobs) were also created, not only to address those long-term needs, but also to help integrate Ukrainians into the local society (CULLEN DUNN – KALISZEWSKA 2023). Citizen aid is difficult to track and measure, but like others, we argue that in Poland and the Czech Republic, grassroots humanitarian action not only upended the existing global humanitarian system, but some of the initiatives, in fact, morphed into examples of mutual aid and tried to restructure aspects of Polish and Czech society. The following section identifies two small-scale grassroots initiatives in each country, first the ones in Poland and then those in the Czech Republic.

POLISH RESPONSES

On March 12, 2022, the Polish parliament adopted a comprehensive law that provided Ukrainians fleeing the war with protection and the right to work in Poland (OFFICE FOR FOREIGNERS 2022). Ukrainian refugees were also given access to free health care and public education. This and subsequent laws gave Ukrainian families seeking shelter in Poland one-time payments to help cover expenses like food and school supplies. Local governments in Poland responded even faster. Every Polish city organized relief and integration efforts differently, but most worked with local civil society organizations, health care professionals, and citizen groups. Since many of the cities that received the largest numbers of Ukrainian refugees were led by mayors from opposition parties (Warsaw, Gdansk, Wrocław), city officials complained that the national government was getting the credit for the country's well-managed crisis while they – local governments and ordinary Polish citizens – were the ones paying for and doing the work (WANAT 2022).

The reaction of the Polish government and local NGOs to the influx of Ukrainian refugees has been substantial and inspiring, but it was the actions of private Polish citizens and volunteers that surprised and impressed the world, earning the country the title of a humanitarian superpower (GF. – BRZEZINSKI 2023). Especially in the first months of the war, most of the aid for Ukrainian refugees in Poland was spontaneous, and provided by individuals and informal ad-hoc needs-based partnerships (RUDNICKI 2023). As the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants observed in July 2022, Polish citizens demonstrated both "solidarity and generosity" in responding to the Ukrainian refugees (OHCHR 2022).

It is difficult to estimate precisely how much money or in-kind assistance private individuals provided for Ukrainian refugees in Poland during 2022. One survey found that a month and a half after the beginning of the war, 75% of Poles polled indicated that they provided in-kind assistance; 59% contributed financially while 12% organized aid initiatives, 8% accepted refugees in their homes, and 6% were volunteers at refugee reception points that were created around the country (CBOS 2022: 8). Polish citizens, moreover, overwhelmingly supported the assistance and activities provided to Ukrainians by Polish society (96%), NGOs (85%), local government (83%), the central government (79%), and the Catholic Church (55%)

(IBID.: 10). Over time, the private citizen involvement decreased. Nevertheless, since the beginning of the conflict, a stable percentage of Polish citizens, averaging around 80%, have indicated that they are in favor of continuing to accept and support refugees from Ukraine (CBOS 2023: 4)

According to Olga Byrska, within the first few months of the full-scale war, hundreds of volunteer initiatives were created to lay the foundation for the humanitarian aid in Poland (BYRSKA 2023; RAZEM 2024; RUDNICKI 2023). And as the war continued and state and local actors failed to provide the needed support, Polish humanitarians started to establish small-scale and informal initiatives aimed at integrating Ukrainians into Polish society. Of the hundreds of spontaneous initiatives that have emerged, the following highlights just two. These examples not only highlight how these activities unfolded, but they also illustrate the continuum of citizen aid, from providing immediate material goods to creating programs aimed at providing longer-term community support and promoting integration.

Because the most obvious and sustained grassroots assistance in Poland surfaced in railway stations throughout the country, which witnessed, *"as never before, mass mobilizations of thousands of ordinary people and a true explosion of citizens' commitment to the cause of the refugees"* (DOMARADZKI ET AL. 2022), we first discuss the Wrocław Central Train Station Initiative. Within days of Russia's invasion, ordinary citizens, usually prompted by Facebook posts and news that the city would be inundated by Ukrainians, showed up at train stations to help (Interview McMahon with Pawel Rudnicki, March 27, 2023, Wrocław). As one of the initiators of the relief effort in Wrocław recalls, *"The main concern was to ensure the safety of both those arriving and those staying at the station. It was also a matter of providing at least a minimum of care and assistance to those arriving in Wrocław"* (PERCHLA-WŁOSIK 2022: 171). Since the station's managers did not know how they would accommodate a large influx of people, they approached the "Stacja Dialog café" (Station Dialog Cafe) located within the main hall of Wrocław's main train station.

Since 2021, the café has been run by the *Christian Association Aid to the Church in Need*, an international non-governmental organization founded in Germany in 1947 that is linked to the Catholic Church. As a missionary café that received refugees, served drinks, and provided temporary shelter for asylum seekers, *Station Dialog* agreed to help with the influx of Ukrainians.

By engaging in "ad hoc crisis management," volunteers alleviated some of the stress placed on the national and local governments by providing Ukrainians with food, travel support, and shelter, if they chose to stay in Wrocław (IBID.). As the weeks went by, hundreds of citizens from Wrocław donned a yellow vest and worked a shift in the railway station. According to Pawel Rudnicki, the author of *Who, if Not Us? Community and Action at the Main Railway Station in Wrocław (Kto, jak nie my? Wspólnota i działanie na Dworcu Głównym we Wrocławiu)*, it was easy to become a volunteer at Wrocław's main train station, and, as Rudnicki says, *"I was looking for an opportunity to do something"* (Interview McMahon, March 27, 2023). There were forms online, and people could volunteer as little or as much as they liked.

Importantly, the people who volunteered at Wrocław's main train station were ordinary citizens without any background in humanitarian assistance who merely wanted to "do something" with their time, skills, and resources. Some volunteers organized around one of the many priests who were involved in this initiative, who became one of the first leaders in Wrocław to institutionalize and organize volunteer activities. According to Perchla-Włosik, *"[a]ctivities were carried out on many levels. From the reception of arriving people by the so-called 'platform people', giving them a word of encouragement, a warm meal, information on what and how they can use, [and] handing out the most necessary things brought by the inhabitants of Wrocław"* to finding accommodation in the halls of the station, helping to organize places to stay, providing medical aid, and helping with luggage (IBID.: 171).

As Rudnicki admits, *"[w]e didn't expect so many people,"* but hundreds, if not thousands, of Ukrainians passed through the Wrocław station every day after February 24 and for about three months during the spring of 2022. Since Wrocław had many citizens whose families came from eastern Poland (what is now Ukraine), the city became one of the main hubs and destinations for refugees coming from Ukraine. More than 100,000 refugees passed through the railway station in Wrocław during the first 4 weeks of the war, and by April 1, 2022, the Ukrainian population in Wrocław doubled, reaching over 140,000 residents, or approximately 23% of the city's total population (WOJDATA ET AL. 2022). About 6,500 new Ukrainian children were attending educational institutions in Wrocław in the fall of 2022, including 1500 in kindergartens, 4325 in primary schools, and 672 in secondary schools (BŁASZCZYK ET AL. 2024: 194).

The spontaneous volunteering, however, did not last long. After a couple of weeks, the Ukraine Foundation, a non-governmental organization based in Wrocław, stepped in to organize the volunteers and ensure that other longer-term needs of refugees were being addressed. Created in 2013 to support migrants and refugees from Ukraine living in Lower Silesia, in 2016 the Foundation started to work with migrants from other countries who were living in Poland and wanted to integrate into Polish society. In 2016, the Ukraine Foundation created the Ukrainian Center for Culture and Development, and a year later it expanded to include the Information Point for Migrants. Since the Ukrainian Foundation had resources and experience, it started to play a crucial role in the main train station's efforts. According to one of the volunteers, *"[t]he Ukraine Foundation took the volunteers under its wings after about three weeks, when it became clear that the helpdesk should be open 24 hours a day, every day"* (PERCHLA-WŁOSIK 2022: 172).

As these volunteers joined with *the Ukraine Foundation* and other groups, an action plan was created: people familiar with computers created applications to collect and recruit volunteers, lawyers created documentation and forms for volunteers to authorize their actions, and other volunteers created parental consent forms for children and young people. However, as many confirm, it was "the people" who reacted first, and *the Ukraine Foundation* and the city joined in these activities later.

By the summer's end, the activities in Wrocław's main train station slowed, with *the Ukraine Foundation* taking over the management of humanitarian assistance and formalizing its activities by obtaining a separate room at the railway station where its employees were paid to provide information to migrants and refugees from any country. The solidarity with migrants and refugees, however, led to the creation of *the Information Point*, which is managed by the *Ukraine Foundation's Institute of Migrant Rights* and provides information on employment, housing, education, cultural activities, and important matters to foreigners who are interested in settling in Wrocław. Although the large numbers of volunteers disappeared from the train station by the end of 2022, ordinary citizens in Wrocław, driven by feelings of solidarity with the refugees and the circumstances they faced in Poland, continue to provide support while creating new social institutions and initiatives to help integrate Ukrainians into Polish society. Referencing

a quintessential example of mutual aid, Rudnicki explains, *"We were providing help for refugees, but also helping ourselves because we saw support for Ukrainians as a form of progress for Polish society, which wanted to 'do something' to create a new kind of civil society. For many, this 'small activism' was a way to demonstrate a new kind of Polish society, 'one that creates something good'"* (Interview McMahon with Rudnicki, March 27, 2023).

Similar to the *Wrocław Central Train Station Initiative*, another group that emerged spontaneously to fill an important need was *Women Take the Wheel (Kobiety Za Kółko)*, which was started in early March of 2022, just after the war started. Unlike in the cases of the train station initiatives that cropped up in several cities throughout the country, Elżbieta Jarmulska organized this virtual group completely online, using Facebook to connect refugees with drivers who would pick them up at the border. This citizen aid was started by women and was designed to help women; according to Jarmulska, she *"empathized with those arriving, alone or with children, after a difficult journey to a different country where the language is foreign and men, however well-intentioned, are offering rides, sometimes late at night"* (PETRI 2022). Since approximately 90% of the refugees from Ukraine were women and their children under 18 years old, Polish women, from the beginning of the full-scale war, were thinking about the unique circumstances women and their children face.

At least initially, the border towns were littered with a lot of men standing with cardboard signs with Mexico, Turkey, Switzerland, or Germany written on them, ostensibly inviting the women to come to live with them in these countries. Although Jarmulska realizes that most of the men were probably harmless, she also imagined seeing them through the eyes of Ukrainian women who had just fled violent Russian troops (WOMEN TAKE THE WHEEL 2022). The women and children arrived in Poland from a terrible war. They didn't speak Polish or English. They didn't know what was going on, and they believed what anyone told them. The goal of the informal initiative was quite simple: to provide Ukrainian refugees with a "bubble of safety" (POLISH RADIO 2022). Within a month, members of *Women at the Wheel* safely transported around 300 women and children from the border.

Although *Women Take the Wheel* is an all-women initiative, the organizers know how important safety is, and all of their drivers are required to

follow specific instructions. For example, the volunteers register themselves at the reception point with their passport or ID, so that the officials know who they are and can track where the volunteers are taking the refugees. And for every group transported, *Women Take the Wheel* representatives provide printed materials that ask the refugees for basic information, including where they want to go, where they are coming from, and whether or not they have a place to sleep. The group also provides riders with hot spots for their cell phones in their cars, so that they can inform their relatives back home that they're safe. Their husbands often ask for a video to make sure that their families are safe. As of early 2024, the association has more than 2,500 members on Facebook from all over the world, and while almost three years have passed since the organization was created and its posts are less frequent and urgent than in 2022, the online group still exists, posts information and answers requests to transport people or things.

CZECH RESPONSES

Similarly to Poland, on March 17, 2022, the Czech Republic also signed into law a comprehensive package of three governmental bills, referred to in the media as Lex Ukraine, that provided Ukrainians fleeing the war with a temporary residential status and the right to work in the country. Ukrainian refugees were given access to free health care and public education, and provided with subsidized accommodation. However, after a year, the state funding – particularly for shelters and accommodation – was reduced, leaving many refugees facing numerous challenges and even homelessness.[7] A month after the state funding was reduced, the media reported that seven out of ten Ukrainian refugees in the Czech Republic lived below the poverty line (PROKOP ET AL. 2023). A new law – *Lex Ukraine V* – shifted the responsibilities for the refugees from the government to NGOs and civil society groups. From the beginning of the war, however, individuals provided significant support, spontaneously volunteering, buying train tickets (before Ukrainians were allowed to travel for free), providing transportation, buying groceries, and even opening their homes to the first wave of Ukrainian migrants.

While the Czech government had substantially supported Ukrainian refugees by providing them with legal status and access to social welfare benefits until the passage of Lex Ukraine V, many Czech citizens, NGOs, and

non-state affiliated groups also provided material and non-material help after the Russian invasion began. In their analysis of Czech NGO leaders' perspectives on the Ukrainian refugee crisis, Tara Kolar Bryan et al. (2023) stress the crucial role that Czech NGOs played as first-line responders for Ukrainian refugees since the Czech government did not pass the temporary protection legislation for almost a month after the Russian invasion. The authors argue that *"during the beginning days and weeks of the Ukrainian crisis, Czech NGOs were on the ground helping refugees immediately after the outbreak of the Russian invasion, while the central government was slower to respond"* (IBID.: 39). Other scholars also stressed the importance of the NGOs' rapid assistance and expertise in the initial phase of the Ukrainian resettlement while pointing out the challenges migrant-assisting NGOs in the Czech Republic experienced in their relationship with the government. Because the state wanted the NGOs to distribute assistance without politicizing the issue, it pressured the NGOs to adopt roles of simple service providers rather than serving as advocates for the migrants (IBID.; JELÍNKOVÁ ET AL. 2024).

The major NGOs, including the *Czech Red Cross* and *People in Need* (*Člověk v tísni*), took the lead in providing aid to Ukrainian refugees from the beginning of the war. These well-established NGOs, which had also been present in Ukraine since the annexation of Crimea, and a consortium of migrant-assisting NGOs, formed a cluster of initiatives called Help Ukraine (*Pomáhej Ukrajině*). The consortium included several organizations, such as *Organizace pro pomoc uprchlíkům (OPU)*, *Adra*, *Most*, *Charita ČR*, *Sdružení pro integraci a migraci*, *Inbáze*, *Meta*, *Amnesty International*, *Amiga*, *Nesehnutí*, *Diakonica*, *La Strada*, *Člověk v tísni*, and *Pomáháme lidem na útěku*, and they had a bold media presence. While many of the involved NGOs provided basic material and non-material help,8 some of the organizations were also responding to specific and immediate needs, such as morning-after pills for assaulted women or medical and therapeutic help for women who could not receive help either in Ukraine, Poland, or elsewhere. This included help and placement for those in urgent medical need, including cancer and critical-care patients.

Rather than focusing on established Czech NGOs or the cluster initiative Help Ukraine and its actors, we analyze two smaller organizations – Prague's *Main Train Station Initiative* (*Iniciativa Hlavák*) and *Grandmas*

without Borders (*Babičky bez hranic*) – and their bottom-up initiatives driven by volunteers who are part of the wave of local support. Both of these organizations focused on migration issues prior to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and both continue to deal with long-term migrants' issues, promoting women's solidarity and racial inclusion. Both have also provided support to Syrian refugees and other migrants who arrived during the major migration wave in 2015. Besides offering direct help for almost a decade, both organizations have also engaged in pro-migrant advocacy, reinforcing citizens' solidarity and inclusive integration.

As a grassroots organization, *the Main Train Station Initiative* has been supporting migrants arriving by train to Prague's main train station – known as *Hlavák* – for a decade. While the organization has provided aid to migrants from Syria, Afghanistan, and other countries since 2015, it has been focused largely on coordinating help and providing assistance to the thousands of Ukrainian refugees who have been arriving in the Czech Republic since the Russian full-scale invasion. By late summer of 2022, the organization was helping between 200 and 450 Ukrainian refugees a day (INICIATIVA HLAVÁK 2022). Along with providing food, clothing, and information, its volunteers helped Ukrainians arrange accommodations, which were often provided by individual citizens. They also assisted with information, particularly regarding *the Regional Assistance Center for Help to Ukraine* (*Krajské asistenční centrum pomoci Ukrajině, KACPU*) in Prague, where Ukrainian migrants could apply for temporary protection and thus receive a legal stay and access to social benefits. While the organization has several official positions, it relies heavily on a large pool of volunteers who have provided food, clothing, short-term accommodations and information to migrants arriving from various countries.

The Main Train Station Initiative describes itself as the only organization that, in the absence of state services, provides daily support to migrants, and is committed to providing assistance until the war in Ukraine ends (INICIATIVA HLAVÁK 2022). When the war started in February 2022, members of the *Main Train Station Initiative* worked alongside governmental and city representatives when providing help to Ukrainian refugees. In the first days of the war, the group successfully handled as many as 7,000 refugees from Ukraine daily (IBID.). Their front desk at the main train station in Prague consisted of volunteers and immigration officers checking the

refugees' documents and sending them to the regional assistance centers run by the Czech government for paperwork processing and further services sponsored by the government.

The Czech government's response to the influx of refugees, however, was not all positive. In summer 2022, with Prague's main train station serving not only as a transit hub but also as a site for months-long accommodations for Roma Ukrainian refugees, *the Main Train Station Initiative* criticized the government's neglect of the Roma refugees. Due to racial and ethnic prejudice, the Czech government failed to find suitable accommodations for about 300 Roma Ukrainians in the summer of 2022, even though it was able to provide housing for close to half a million non-Roma Ukrainian refugees. As a result, the Roma Ukrainians had to resort to sleeping at Prague's main train station in undignified conditions that were never designed for long-term stays. According to *the Main Train Station Initiative*'s statement, over 3,800 people spent at least one night at the railway station during April 2022, and at the beginning of May 2022, about 400 people were sleeping in the train station each night (IBID.). In the vast majority of cases, these were Ukrainian Roma women and children. Some slept on emergency beds or in a parked train. However, a significant number of them had to spend the night on the ground in the train station building.

The representatives of *the Main Train Station Initiative* consequently publicly and openly criticized the Czech governmental interventions regarding their role and conduct in the reception of Roma Ukrainians, especially since the government proposed building humanitarian tents to accommodate the hundreds of Roma Ukrainian refugees rather than being able to find more permanent accommodations. The organization insisted on remaining "independent" of governmental actors and their objectives, pointing to other shortcomings in the handling of Roma Ukrainians (e.g., they exposed political pressures not to help certain groups of refugees before the elections) and demanding reforms because after the idea of using humanitarian tents was rejected, the Czech government proposed housing Roma Ukrainians in detention centers. The integration of the Roma population into Czech culture is a work in progress in the whole region, where Roma still experience a great deal of prejudice and discrimination (IBID.).

Václav Walach (2023) analyzes the failure of the Czech government to find suitable accommodations for Ukrainian Roma in the context of individual, institutional, and structural anti-Roma racism in Czech society. He also discusses instances of racism involving Czech volunteers who provided help on the Slovak-Ukrainian border, but who then refused to transfer the Roma refugees past the border to other countries; drivers who refused to allow Roma refugees to board their buses at the border; and volunteers at Prague's main train station who chose to leave rather than help Ukrainian Roma refugees (TAIT 2022). In addition to individual racism, Walach argues that institutional and structural anti-Roma racism also played an important role in the failure to provide Ukrainian Roma with protective status, housing, and other social benefits.[9]

Grandmas without Borders, composed of civic activists and founding members of a variety of civic initiatives, is another group that has been helping Ukrainian refugees, as well as refugees and migrants from several other countries. Operating mainly from Prague, the collective is predominantly composed of women, and includes activists, writers, artists, journalists, doctors, and former dissidents who were opponents of the communist regime prior to 1989. The group has been offering material, practical, psychological, and legal help to refugees from Syria, Chechnya and Afghanistan, as well as Ukraine. Since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the group's activities have included a wide spectrum of assistance, including fundraising, hosting refugees in their homes, and donating food, clothing, and their time. While they organize practical help, they also engage in pro-migrant advocacy, writing open letters to politicians, organizing petitions, publishing their pro-migration views in brief statements, and engaging in public discussions on migration and integration issues. While they have been active for years, Russia's war in Ukraine has concentrated their energy on the influx of Ukrainian refugees.

Building on the wave of grassroots aid and solidarity in Czech society in 2022, *Grandmas without Borders* became more active and mobilized a large group of volunteers who understood the need to donate time and resources. One of the group's initiatives focused on creating a safe meeting space for Ukrainian women. From March to August 2022, the group ran *Café Žinka* ("Women's Cafe" in Ukrainian) in Prague as a networking point for Ukrainian women to meet and find local help and services. Two

afternoons a week, *Café Žinka* provided a safe and clean meeting space for Ukrainian women where, over free refreshments, they could reconnect with others, take Czech lessons, meet with a social worker or an art therapist, and network with other Ukrainian women or Czech visitors who brought clothing, food, and language books, and who shared information about jobs, transportation, and housing (Interview Fojtová and Waisserová with Jana Hradilková, June 2023; *Café Žinka*'s Facebook page, *Café Žinka*'s meeting participation June 2023).

Jana Hradilková, one of the founders of *Grandmas without Borders*, explained that the impetus behind the creation of *Café Žinka* came from members of the group, which exemplifies how the group operates through cooperation among the many volunteers. Like many Czechs who housed Ukrainian refugees in their homes, members of *Grandmas without Borders* provided accommodation for Ukrainian women and in the spring of 2022, members of the group identified the need for a dignified place where Ukrainian women could connect with other women. Using her personal contacts and resources, Hradilková reached out to people from other organizations to inquire about the possibility of creating a protected meeting space. Another friend, Juanita Kansil, herself an immigrant from Indonesia who owned a café called *Javanka* in Prague, responded and offered her café as a meeting space in the afternoons between lunch and dinner. Even though the *Javanka* café owner had originally intended to sell her business, she decided to keep the café open for six additional months in order to host *Café Žinka*.

Initially, *Café Žinka* was primarily an information hub, but then it became a place that provided donated clothes and a space to gather. As Hradilková emphasized, the group asked that volunteers bring only nice clothes, those they would want to *"give as a gift rather than to discard"* (Interview Fojtová and Waisserová with Jana Hradilková, June 2023). Soon, other services emerged organically based on the needs of Ukrainian women, including providing Czech and English lessons, as well as therapy sessions and administrative help. Volunteers would also bring their own homemade cakes, fruit from their gardens, and language books, and they offered rides and provided work and accommodation advice. When *Café Žinka* was established in March 2022, *Grandmas without Borders* and the Ukrainian women refugees were in a state of shock from the invasion and

living day-to-day in a very emotionally charged atmosphere, as Hradilková describes. However, even though they all had different experiences, they could come together. As Hradilková explained, *"You are in a different space, we are in a different space, but we can create a parallel space"* (Interview Fojtová and Waisserová with Jana Hradilková, June 2023). *Café Žinka* thus became a "parallel space" that provided a protected location for helping people and providing aid; it also served to inspire people to do something productive, whether it be the Ukrainian women coming to *Café Žinka* to access essential services, or the group's members volunteering. Building on individual strengths and skills, the volunteers created a wide variety of services that developed organically and spontaneously through solidarity, mutual aid, and cooperation.

However, it was challenging for *Grandmas without Borders* to secure a permanent meeting place. In September 2022, the original *Café Žinka* was closed when the owner had to sell her business. Fortunately, a new space became available. The new space offers a well-equipped kitchen, thus providing new opportunities for Ukrainian women to cook together while the Grandmas raise money for groceries or other needs. *Café Žinka* continues to run its own kitchen in its new location. As Jana Hradilková explained, *"I was cooking soup for over one year, but now the Ukrainian women have taken over and cook for themselves"* (Interview Waisserová with Hradilková, January 2024). In addition to preparing and eating meals, the women who visit *Café Žinka* share recipes and knitting needles, they talk and sing together, and they sell what they make. In this new phase of *Café Žinka*, the Ukrainian women run a space where they also provide therapy, support each other, and offer opportunities for the women to regain their dignity. They also gather with displaced women from earlier Russian invasions, women from Chechnya, Georgia, and Ingushetia. These women have taken over the leadership of the weekly Thursday sessions: they lead various workshops, exercise, engage in communal cooking, and organize cultural events that highlight their food and folk music. As Hradilková explains, this was always part of the plan because *"we wanted the [Ukrainian] women to take over and be in charge"* (Interview Fojtová and Waisserová with Hradilková, June 2023). Beyond the immediate relief that the participants of *Café Žinka* offer each other on a weekly basis, they are also engaged in strategies of future-making and initiating structural changes in migrants' lives.

While we focus only on *Grandmas without Borders* and *the Main Train Station Initiative*, it is important to highlight that these initiatives networked with existing local NGOs with different capacities and goals. Founded by women with extensive experience in working with refugees, as well as a history of dissent pre-dating the 1989 revolution, *Grandmas without Borders* has considerable social capital among Czech aid organizations and has used it to attract volunteers and secure meeting places. After it was established in 2015, *the Main Train Station Initiative* developed close relations with other Czech NGOs, and this cooperation proved to be significant during the influx of Ukrainian refugees. However, working with established NGOs did not change the nature of their work but only expanded their reach and authority.

For example, *the Main Train Station Initiative* has focused primarily on disseminating information about registration centers, and providing translation services and material help to Ukrainian refugees. Because the organization relied on hundreds of volunteers, it was important to have the assistance of another NGO to help with registering, training, and coordinating the volunteers. The NGO that fulfilled this role was *Organizace pro pomoc uprchlíkům* (OPU, *Organization for Aid to Refugees*). As the oldest and largest refugee and immigrant aid organization in the Czech Republic, OPU was founded in 1991 to provide legal and social aid to refugees and immigrants. Given OPU's large professional staff and their long-term legal expertise, members of *the Main Train Station Initiative* were able to discuss complex cases with OPU's legal and social departments.

Their beneficial cooperation has continued, as evidenced by both organizations' efforts to ensure a just distribution of aid to Ukrainian Roma refugees, and the eventual integration of the Ukrainian Roma into Czech society. The position of both organizations is that as long as the war in Ukraine is ongoing, all refugees are entitled to temporary protection and the Czech state should act accordingly. Because the Czech government has not, in fact, treated all refugees equally, members of these organizations have initiated both public protests and legal actions against the government. On the first anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, February 24, 2023, a press conference was held at Prague's main railway station during which representatives of the capital city, *the Central Bohemian Regional Authority*, and several other institutions thanked the

people who had been providing aid to those fleeing Ukraine. During the press conference, volunteers from *the Main Train Station Initiative* held a public protest to draw attention to the discrimination that Ukrainian Roma refugees faced after arriving in Prague the year prior, in 2022 (BAUDYŠOVÁ – ALBERT 2023). Beyond the public protest, OPU's lawyers have used their legal expertise to successfully address the systemic refusal by the Czech government to grant temporary protection to refugees from Ukraine if they were registered in another country, as was the case with many Ukrainian Roma refugees. According to OPU's website, the *"case is now pending before the EU Court of Justice in Luxembourg (ECJ) and now the Municipal Court in Prague confirmed our argument by rejecting the state's new approach of not deciding such individual refugee cases while waiting for the ECJ verdict and leaving them in limbo for an undefinite [sic] period of time"* (ORGANIZACE PRO POMOC UPRCHLÍKŮM 2024).

One of the reasons the grassroots initiatives discussed in this paper have been successful has been because they have been linked to and collaborated with local NGOs. The willingness of the grassroots organizations and established NGOs to cooperate has been crucial for all sides. Further comparative research can examine if this close and dynamic cooperation and networking in the context of providing assistance to Ukrainian refugees in CEE was unique to the Czech and Polish societies.

CONCLUSION: SOLIDARITY, MUTUAL AID AND COLLECTIVE CARE

The Polish and Czech organizations examined here – *Wrocław's Central Railway Station Initiative*, *Women Take the Wheel*, *Prague's Main Train Station Initiative* and *Grandmas without Borders* – have provided both material and non-material support to Ukrainian refugees, but their assistance is only a small part of what is actually a massive wave of grassroots humanitarianism across Poland, the Czech Republic, and other Central European countries. In this paper, we questioned whether there is any evidence that grassroots aid encouraged new forms of activism or even social movements in these societies. Although we found little evidence of social movements, we do maintain that these organizations are not only extending the limits of material assistance to those in need, but, in solidarity with the refugees themselves, they are developing formal and informal institutions that

promote social integration into these societies. Thus, this grassroots aid is, indeed, changing Polish and Czech society.

In their critique of grassroots humanitarianism – which they believe cannot sustain a long-term commitment – Elizabeth Cullen Dunn and Iwona Kaliszewska argue that so-called *"distributed humanitarianism handles small problems well but breaks down in the face of complex problems that require multiple steps and long-term commitment"* (DUNN – KALISZEWSKA 2023: 10). While we do not necessarily disagree with their overall assessment, our research and analysis of this spontaneous grassroots activism and mutual aid are more promising, suggesting that the groups – and the individuals within those groups – can develop a longer-term commitment to more pro-migrant advocacy.

We also questioned whether these forms of assistance reveal and replicate historical forms of mobilization, or if they represent novel and spontaneous acts of goodwill. Our research suggests both. Although some of these responses, like the train station initiatives and the virtual women's organization *Women Take the Wheel*, responded to a unique crisis and leveraged existing technology, other initiatives are rooted in these countries' recent histories and culture; for example, there is the former dissident identity of some of the activists in Grandmas without Borders or the rise of volunteering since the fall of communism. One study of volunteering in Poland, for example, indicated that although volunteering is a relatively new phenomenon in this country, there has been a significant increase in the number of Polish civil society organizations over the past 30 years since Poland transitioned to democracy (SENGUPTA – VERGHESE – RYS 2023). Moreover, levels of engagement in civil society participation have improved, with 43% of Polish youths providing unpaid time to volunteering in civil society organizations (IBID.: 4). With respect to Czech society, Eva Křížová has argued that "volunteering is deeply embedded in a civic, humanitarian paradigm instead of a religious faith and duty." Křížová adds that, in fact, *"volunteering is higher in the Czech Republic than in other former Eastern European countries and is evidence of a successful and rapid restoration of the civic sector"* (KŘÍŽOVÁ 2012: 110–115). In other words, grassroots assistance and advocacy for those in need are becoming the norm rather than the exception.

Our paper argues that the forms of activism we highlight in both countries resemble the concept of mutual aid, and that the individuals and groups engaging in them share similar objectives: to alleviate suffering and to provide resources, ranging from basic necessities to long-term support, to those in need. Because these initiatives are driven by compassion and solidarity, they represent an effort to honor the human dignity of the Ukrainian refugees. This, we contend, is different from the activities of large humanitarian organizations because it is inspired and carried out by ordinary citizens and not professionals. This kind of activism is also carried out by decentralized and community-led groups, unlike the more traditional humanitarianism that often involves larger organizations with external leadership and resources from the global North. Consequently, we contend that these examples of mutual aid are playing an important role in addressing and altering power dynamics, and issues of sustainability, reciprocity, and civic empowerment. This will have an important impact on the future of humanitarianism. Unlike large INGOs, which can, at times, unwittingly create dependency among the recipients and regularly leave them out of decision making, these local organizations and initiatives endeavor to build community resilience, create a sense of self-sufficiency among the refugees and help them to regain and sustain their dignity.

At the same time, these grassroots organizations face numerous obstacles, including limited resources, issues of sustainability, and low recognition. Although these citizen-led groups simultaneously create and facilitate new partnerships and reinforce collaboration between various mutual aid groups and humanitarian organizations, these partnerships have limitations that still must be observed and addressed. Bryan et al. (2023) found that Czech NGOs, while demonstrating flexibility and agility in the initial Ukrainian refugee response, faced significant capacity and governance challenges. These systemic barriers hindered their resilience. Similarly, Jelínková et al. highlight the frustration of migrant-assisting NGOs due to their exclusion from crucial decision-making processes involving government partnerships. Despite their unique strengths – a strong emphasis on advocacy and a capacity for collective action – Czech NGOs are marginalized in policy discussions, which leaves them grappling with the dilemma of either withdrawing from ineffective collaborations or remaining engaged in them in order to influence incremental improvements (JELÍNKOVÁ ET AL 2024: 7).

Despite these real challenges, the examined initiatives demonstrate a potential to challenge traditional humanitarian organizations and approaches. They also demonstrate the value of decentralized, flexible, and community-led approaches to humanitarian assistance that can address specific needs while empowering individuals and communities. Grounded in coordinated collective care, the mutual aid approach focuses on building new social relationships and changing institutions and social practices for receiving and integrating immigrants.

ENDNOTES

1 Like other authors, we use the term "refugee" for people fleeing the war in Ukraine (Macková et al. 2024). We also use this term *"as a broad umbrella term for people who are fleeing from conflict situations and not within the meaning of Article 1A of the Geneva Convention"* (Macková et al. 2024: 3). However, as Macková et al. (Ibid.) discuss, *"those who are provided with assistance might be more accurately described as 'holders of temporary protection'"*.

2 The Czech Republic's historical reluctance to accommodate refugees is exemplified by the limited reception of less than 9,000 during the 2015–2016 Syrian refugee crisis (Bryan et al. 2023: 37).

3 As Macková et al. (2024: 15) explain, both Poland and the Czech Republic *"were the most affected by the influx of refugees from Ukraine (one per capita, second in absolute numbers), and both introduced temporary protection institutes with similar features to create a safe haven for new arrivals. The EU Temporary Protection Directive was drafted only in the aftermath of the war in Yugoslavia, and it was first activated in 2022"*.

4 The temporary protections will end on March 31, 2025 in the Czech Republic and on September 30, 2025 in Poland.

5 The biggest sums were collected by *Člověk v tísni*, which received 2.35 billion CZK in 2022, which was five times as much as what it received in 2020 (0.435 billion). Out of this amount, the biggest sums went to supporting projects focusing on families and children. Other NGOs that collected funds for Ukrainian refugees included the *Via Foundation (Nadace Via), the Charter 77 Foundation* (*Nadace Charty 77*), and *Charita CR*.

6 Large numbers of Ukrainians started to migrate to Poland in 2014. Many of these migrants (rather than refugees) have worked with Polish civil society to provide assistance to refugees arriving in 2022.

7 The 5th amendment, referred to as "Lex Ukraine V", which came into effect on July 1, 2023, meant that a significant number of refugees no longer met the vulnerability criteria for receiving accommodation assistance. See Lex Ukrajina 5, <https://www.migrace.com/adm/_upload/docs/letak_lexu_unhcr_cz_linky_1686834485.pdf>.

8 In terms of the refugee integration field, Bryan et al. (2023: 39) argue that *"the roles of Czech NGOs are largely limited to delivering needed social services to migrants and refugees. Since its inception over twenty years ago, Czech integration policy has been carried out primarily by NGOs and then by integration centres, established in individual regions over the past decade"*.

9 While Czech officials claimed that many Ukrainian Roma did not qualify for refugee status because they were EU citizens holding a dual nationality, namely a Ukrainian-Hungarian nationality, or because they had specific housing requirements that made it difficult to accommodate large groups that did not want to be separated, the Czech anthropologist Filip Pospíšil highlighted the widespread anti-Roma prejudice and discrimination in Czech society in his focus on institutional and structural racism (Zabloudilová 2022). Specifically, he pointed out various forms of residential segregation, such as the refugee camps and detention centers that the Czech government had established. In his view, the problem of discrimination was particularly visible in the refugee tents at Prague's regional assistance center. Citing a prominent migration researcher, Nicholas De Genova, who drew attention to the fact that the so-called "migrant crisis" of 2015–2016 was actually a racial crisis (De Genova 2018), Walach (2022) analyzes how race plays an important role in contemporary societies in terms of access to resources, and he highlights how much race played a part in the Czech response to the Ukrainian refugees in 2022. For Walach, the events at Prague's main train station became the most visible symbol of a collective failure to provide quality housing to all refugees, regardless of race or ethnicity.

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How Geoeconomics Advances Geopolitical Cooperation: The Case of EU-Japan Relations

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between Japan and the EU has developed and matured over the last decades. It comprises both the complex economic relations that were recently formalized in the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), and the subsequent Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) that covers a broader set of political issues. Here, we are addressing the trade diplomacy interaction that has been associated with the long negotiation process between Japan and the EU. This article seeks to answer the following question: How has the geopolitical relationship between Japan and the EU evolved based on the context forming the EPA? The empirical section discusses the development that led to the establishment of the EPA and the SPA, as well as to the current relationship and additional agreements. Our findings suggest that the EPA has been central to the deepened political cooperation between Tokyo and Brussels, emphasizing the role of an FTA in contributing to the solidifying of a changing geopolitical order.

KEYWORDS	Japan, EU, geopolitics, geoeconomics, Economic Partnership Agreement, Strategic Partnership Agreement
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INTRODUCTION

Europe has traditionally been one of the main destinations for exports from and direct investments by Japanese firms in the process of the continuous internationalization and deeper integration in global value chains. The successful discussions about the free trade section of an Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA)[1] between Japan and the European Union that were initiated in early 2019, can be seen as a framework for carrying out a geopolitically better-balanced trade and investment policy. The main objective is securing and consolidating the position of Japanese companies on the European market and hence building a favorable geopolitical platform for the two stakeholders.

In the current global context, it has become increasingly difficult to separate economic and political aspects of external trade and investment, and there is a dynamic process over time and space shaping the geopolitical context. This development has led the globalization of the last few decades towards a more complex development path. The interconnected world has thus raised new possibilities for states to engage in geoeconomic activities to take advantage of their being in the central parts of networks such as finance systems, payment systems and the trading system (EICHENGREEN 2024). However, the world that is interconnected through complex value chains and production networks has made decoupling more difficult for actors (E.G., LEONARD 2016; FARRELL – NEWMAN 2020). Now companies need to constantly reassess their positions in the market and their industrial footprint in relation to these macro level dynamics. This also incorporates their ability to reposition the business models and long-term investments abroad based on the geopolitical context and preconditions. The new geopolitical setting has also to some degree blurred the border between companies and states using geoeconomic measures to gain advantages against adversaries (IBID.). In parallel, more striking events such as the Brexit vote in the UK as well as the Russian war against Ukraine will have a profound impact on the business environment from a geoeconomic and geopolitical perspective. Similarly, the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is an example of a case where geoeconomic actions are used to reconfigure the geopolitical landscape. These developments within geoeconomics and geopolitics have also generated a dynamic effect of bringing like-minded countries even closer together (EICHENGREEN 2024). Against the backdrop of the EPA, the subsequent

Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) between the EU and Japan is a further case of a new type of collaborative platform where issues traditionally not handled within trade negotiations are included. States need to handle the new geopolitical situation, and companies need to sustain their competitive advantage in a global market.

The knowledge about the political underpinnings for the EU-Japan EPA is elaborated to a lesser extent in the economics literature. Some exceptions, however, are recent studies related to the broader institutional context but with an empirical focus on other EU agreements (E.G., ALVSTAM ET AL. 2014: KASTENG ET AL. 2022). From the perspective of the institutional setting and political economy relationships between the EU and Japan, we aim to address the interconnected nature of the trade diplomacy that has been associated with the long negotiation process between the government of Japan and the European Commission.

The EPA between Japan and the EU has been the forerunner in shaping a new geoeconomic collaboration within a changing geopolitical context. The subsequent SPA has formed the next step in both widening and deepening the relationship. In addition, other agreements have been added, comprising areas such as connectivity and infrastructure, the green transition, digitalization and the EU-Japan defense and security collaboration (STRÖM – VADI 2023). With limited analyses of the geopolitical dimension of the formation of the EPA and the SPA, this article seeks to answer the following research question:

How has the geopolitical relationship between Japan and the EU evolved based on the context forming the EPA?

To answer this question, the article looks into the development of the EU-Japan economic relationship over time, providing an insight into the economic situation preceding the establishment of the EPA and the SPA, and the role the EPA has played in shaping the current geopolitical relationship between Japan and Europe.

METHOD

Our study and discussion build on a review of open-source documents from core institutions of our research interest such as the Japanese government and the EU Commission. Furthermore, peer-reviewed scientific articles, news articles and research from recognized sources such as the Asian Development Bank Institute (ADBI), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), UNCTAD, and the World Trade Organization (WTO) have constituted the empirical base for our research. We have compiled the sources for this research in Table 1, and further details of the sources can be found in the reference list.

TABLE 1: QUALITATIVE DATA SOURCES FOR OUR RESEARCH. SEE THE REFERENCE LIST FOR FURTHER DETAILS OF THE SOURCES THAT HAVE BEEN USED IN THE DISCUSSION

Sources	
News articles	Nikkei Shinbun (Japanese edition)
Government agencies	The Government of Japan
Research from international organizations	The European Commission (the EU Commission) The Government of the United Kingdom EU member state government agencies
Academic research sources	ADBI OECD UNCTAD WTO
Academic research sources	Peer-reviewed articles Books/anthologies Working papers

The information was analyzed thematically using a data source triangulation process (DENZIN 2009), where we used the qualitative sources specified in Table 1 to construct a scheme of themes (BRAUN – CLARKE 2006) for our analysis. Our analysis approach can be described as iterative, as we moved back and forth between the sources in our analysis process. The themes were developed first by identifying initial codes in the source material, and then by establishing the themes themselves. This work resulted in four aggregate themes: the EU free trade promotion initiatives; the Japanese free trade promotion initiatives; the joint efforts of Japan and the EU towards an EPA; and the context and process of the negotiations. These themes constituted the foundation for our analysis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on trade regimes and economic statecraft discusses at length both positive aspects of economic diplomacy (E.G., WANG 2006; KAWAI 2005; CHIA 2010) and its negative aspects (E.G., LEW – NEPHEW 2018; AGGARWAL – REDDIE 2021, 2024). In this literature, FTAs are generally recognized as a natural consequence of the post-war efforts to create economic gains through a world trade order promoting the general wealth and utility of the world population (CHIA 2010). However, it is also recognized that the large trading blocks that have emerged during the same period have gained a dominant position in world trade at the expense of the developing world (E.G., LEW – NEPHEW 2018). More recently, the mounting trade frictions between the world's largest economies, that is, the US and China, have given rise to concerns about whether the established world trade order is challenged (AGGARWAL – REDDIE 2024). It is from this vantage point that the efforts in Brussels and Tokyo towards a comprehensive and deep-level economic partnership framework should be understood. Recent research shows how the world is facing a change in globalization and that actors within the system on both the national level and the firm level are adjusting to this reconfiguration. On the one hand, it seems that countries that share similar ideas of a rules-based international order are seeking a closer collaboration, but at the same time, the deep entanglement of value chains and production networks makes it complicated to completely decouple (FARRELL – NEWMAN 2019; EICHENGREEN 2024).

INSTITUTIONAL BUILDING BLOCKS SHAPING THE GEOPOLITICAL CONTEXT

After the fall of the Soviet Bloc in 1989, it was a natural choice for Japan to stick to its traditional post-war policy under an American security and commercial umbrella, which was supported by a growing European Union. The development towards a "tri-centric" world order, however, in which the American hegemony is challenged by a rising and increasingly self-confident China, has forced a change of Japan's foreign economic strategy, both regionally and globally. These changes have naturally also given rise to an increasing focus on political aspects of economic issues among economists, and a growing interest in economic aspects of security policy among political scientists. The "geopolitics-turn" seen in international business research is reflected in a growing number of contributions that suggest

that the long-term globalization has come to an end, and that a process of "de-globalization" and "de-coupling" between the main political and economic blocs will dominate the foreseeable future (SEE E.G., CUERVO-CAZURRA ET AL. 2020; GUILLEN 2018; WITT 2019A, 2019B). These views are in many ways contested by other groups of scholars – e.g., Li (2021), who uses the term *"bifurcated governance"* to describe two contrasting sets of game rules. This can be illustrated with the contrast between "rule of law" and "rule of ruler," as represented by the U.S. and China (JANNACE – TIFFANY 2019; PETRICEVIC – TEECE 2019; BUCKLEY 2020; ALTENBERG 2021), as some see this conflict as leading toward a new Cold War (HAGSTRÖM 2016; SCHELL 2020; WITT 2019B). The geopolitical turn in international business can be seen as a result of the increasingly important discussion on how geoeconomics is an essential tool for trying to obtain a more favorable geopolitical outcome. Hence, in parallel, the geoeconomic literature analyzes the underpinnings of the international economic order and the subsequent connection (LEONARD 2016; FARRELL – NEWMAN 2020). A recent contribution by Lee (2024) points towards the system approach of geoeconomics that connects parts such as economic integration, technology and geography. However, issues of the problematic aspects of de-coupling are often put forward. At the core there are multinational firms with different geographical anchoring points that will be the main drivers of the changing geoeconomic setting and thus, in combination with government policy, can form an alternative geopolitical context (KATADA 2020). Another aspect in connection with geoeconomics and geopolitics is that activity and policy occur at different levels of the economic geography. It can be on the macroeconomic global level, but it could also be in relation to more geographically centered free trade arrangements or even regional and local considerations. It is also through this kind of configuration that the security dimension of geopolitics can be connected to the corresponding geoeconomic action (NAKAMURA ET AL. 2022). This development leads to the multi-layered negotiations of how the international rules-based order should be configurated, such as whether it should be through international organizations or bilateral agreements.

With the experienced inherent challenges for multilateral trade agreements, countries in Asia and the EU have strived to push the envelope of a rules-based world order. With this backdrop, the outcome of the economic partnership negotiations between Japan and the EU became even more important. The change in the institutional setting has also

called for a deepening collaboration regarding traditional non-economic issues, thus paving the way for the subsequent formation of the Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA). Preferential agreements have become part of a larger geopolitical, macroeconomic and security policy context where trade is a concrete element of (a lack of) political intentions and political will. Thus, there is an increasing need to view trade negotiations in the context of a multidisciplinary synthesis of economics and politics where strong stakeholders can utilize the playing field for sustaining a rules-based framework for the long-term goal of achieving a multilateral trade order.

In a situation where the multilateral trade negotiations have been stalled, and various regional and bilateral agreements have partly filled the vacuum, the need for establishing standard rules for the minimum requirements for concluding Bilateral Trade Agreements (BTA) to comply with extended regional agreements, is larger than ever. Likewise, establishing similar requirements for Regional Trade Agreements (RTA) so as to contribute to the higher quality of future multilateral agreements is also a pressing issue. There has been an ongoing debate about how the WTO could play a more active role in improving the quality level of BTAs and RTAs in a new geopolitical environment (SEE, E.G., BALDWIN – THORNTON 2008; WIGNARAJA – LAZARO 2010; WTO 2011; LINDBERG – ALVSTAM 2012). Baldwin and Thornton (2008) suggest a WTO Action Plan on Regionalism involving measures led by the WTO, and RTA and unilateral initiatives to be undertaken, both in the immediate and in the medium term. In the *immediate* term, these initiatives include deepening the Transparency Mechanism; helping developing countries with the challenges of regionalism; WTO soft-law disciplines on RTAs; a plurilateralization of rules of origin and accumulation; automatic third-party Most Favored Nation (MFN) guarantee clauses, i.e. so-called "anti-spaghetti bowl" clauses, in RTAs; development-friendly rules of origin and accumulation; and unilateral MFN tariff cutting and extension of service preferences. In the *medium* term, Baldwin and Thornton (IBID.) recommend "taming the rules of origin tangle"; new sectoral free trade agreements; encouraging open-ended accession clauses; switching to value-added rules of origin; a concise definition of the term "rules of origin"; and, finally, an initiative to encourage nations to use regional templates for new RTAs. The WTO could also consider strengthening its hard-law disciplines on FTAs – although it would be extremely difficult, or even impossible, to enforce, considering the need for consensus within the organization.

A clear definition of what the GATT is calling "substantially all trade"[2] would obviously make assessments of the agreements much easier. However, there is the mere fact that the agreements currently in force or under negotiation vary significantly in their levels of political ambition, and that there is little incentive for parties of less ambitious agreements to agree to higher requirements, as also noted by Islam and Alam (2009). Previous attempts at negotiating new multilateral disciplines on FTAs have only yielded modest and mostly hortatory results (E.G., LINDBERG – ALVSTAM 2012). With this background, the deepened and more formalized agreements between Japan and the EU should be seen as a way forward pushing for a more comprehensive geopolitical context.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE AND ITS CONNECTION TO GVCS, GPNS AND GEOPOLITICS

The theory of international trade and trade policy has for a long time been dominated by its focus on *direct* trade between countries, which is a natural effect of the traditional organization of external trade statistics. But rather, international cross-border transactions need to be viewed in the context of the emergence of complex Global Value Chains (GVCs) and Global Production Networks (GPNs) to an increasing extent (NEILSON ET AL. 2014; KANO ET AL. 2020). The design and governance of such networks are, in this respect, a clue to a new understanding of the geography of external trade in goods and services (E.G., ATHUKORALA 2011; MACKINNON 2012; YEUNG 2014; YEUNG – COE 2014). The focus in the analysis should therefore be moved from the products in themselves to the *"tasks"*, i.e., the locations of production of physical goods and invisible services that constitute the nodes between links in the global value chain. It is within this domain that the geoeconomic tools become important for hindering the international networks of economic globalization from functioning or enabling them to function. Thus, a more geopolitically centered approach within international business interacts with the more macro-oriented aspects of geoeconomics. This means that the corporate or firm level perspective becomes more vivid, as opposed to an approach only focusing on strategy or policy tools.

About half of global trade can be defined as consisting of intermediate goods (UNCTAD 2021A). If capital goods are included, the world trade share of products that have not yet reached their final form or intermediary goods

aimed at generating added value *in the production* of final consumer products, is likely to be even higher. Thus, international cross-border trade has to be understood in the context of increasingly complex GPNs, which create the foundation for firms operating in different locations. The structure of such networks reflects the contemporary geography of external trade in goods and services, and combinations in the form of "product-as-a-service" (E.G., COE ET AL. 2019; KANO ET AL. 2020; GEREFFI ET AL. 2021).

With the increasing importance of services in both mature and emerging markets, this translates into new complexities within trade negotiations. The value generation in GVCs and GPNs, the interconnected value between good and services, and the impact of non-tariff barriers and regulations are examples of areas that are probably becoming more important for future trade relations. The technological development that provides opportunities for delivery of digital services across geographies and the dematerialization of services consumption are yet another vital area of future trade complexity (UNCTAD 2021B). The issues of data transfer, cyber security, and connectivity have also been accentuated through the Covid-19 pandemic (STRÖM ET AL. 2022). Thus, these aspects have all become more important from an economic and geopolitical point of view for both Japan and the EU.

Put under the geopolitical lens, the new Japanese interest in a deep-going cooperation with not only the US but also the EU can be understood as a kind of paradigm shift. For Japan, colored by its protectionist industrial policy and bilateral relations with the US, the changing geopolitical dynamics in the Asia-Pacific have necessitated a change of the Japanese position on how regional relations and multilateralism should be shaped (ROTHMAN ET AL. 2017). In other words, the US-centric world view of Japan has changed, and can be said to have aligned with the European appreciation of creating strong links with Japan, and Japan's approach now goes beyond mere development of traditional trade relations to also upgrading its security policy ties.

EMPIRICAL CONTEXT

THE EU INITIATIVES AND ENGAGEMENT IN FREE TRADE PROMOTION

Free trade regimes between countries and regions have given mixed results during the latter half of the 20th century. The multilateral trade order within the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), launched in the aftermath of WW2, was highly successful in the creation of a common framework for liberalization of foreign trade with key concepts such as reciprocity, most-favored-nation principles and transparency. The WTO, which succeeded the GATT in 1995, today encompasses 166 members, and more than 95 per cent of the global trade in goods and services. Also, roughly 95 per cent of the average tariff level in the late 1940s had been abolished in the late 1990s after the completion of the so-called Uruguay Round (GATT MTN VIII) in 1993. However, the failure of the Doha Development Agenda (DDA) launched in 2001 – the latest multilateral trade negotiation initiative and the first one under the auspices of WTO to reach a successful conclusion – has initiated a rush to other constellations of trade agreements. These are usually categorized under the label of Preferential Trade Agreements (PTAs). Among PTAs, various types of free trade areas between two or more parties, and more comprehensive economic partnerships including trade and investment rules, as well as deeper coordination of public procurement regulations, mobility of labor, technical harmonization and standardization, and competition policy in general, have become most common (WTO 2011). In parallel, there are also efforts supported by the WTO to carry out so-called plurilateral agreements incorporating a limited number of member states3 in order to strike deals in a specific area, e.g., parts of the service sector. Among all the integration projects aiming to liberalize or completely abolish trade barriers between sovereign states, the European Union still represents one of the more successful examples, and has so far not been copied in its entire shape anywhere else. The successful deep integration within the member states has, though, reached a level where further deepening requires much more political acceptance than currently is the case, and a complementary leg of a joint policy regarding external cooperation, is severely needed. External trade is one of the few policy areas of exclusive supranational competence where individual member states cannot carry out their own initiatives with third countries,

but are subordinate to coordination at the EU level within the Council of Ministers, and the executive role of the European Commission, in which it is responsible for concrete negotiations. EU external trade as a share of world trade has declined from 15.5 per cent in 1989 to 11.5 per cent in 2013. In this context, the EU launched its "Global Europe" strategy in 2006, and in a follow up in 2010, it became part of the new strategy for growth and competitiveness titled "Europe 2020", and was included in a new communication from the Commission to the Council and Parliament titled "Trade, Growth and World Affairs" (EUROPEAN COMMISSION 2010; AHNLID ET AL. 2011). This strategy has resulted in both the revival and updating of previous trade agreements and also in a large number of new initiatives.

JAPAN'S INITIATIVES AND ENGAGEMENT IN FREE TRADE PROMOTION

Japan, for its part, besides being an active supporter of the multilateral WTO framework, has also felt the need to take parallel initiatives to various PTAs and EPAs during recent decades, usually in bilateral partnerships, and mostly with countries in the East Asian and Pacific realm, but also with countries in other parts of the world (CHIA 2010; WIGNARAJA – LAZARO 2010; KERR 2016). The by far largest initiative involving Japan is the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), which is the successor to the derailed Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which included the USA and ten other Asian-Pacific nations. With the relaunch of the cross-Pacific trade agreements through the CPTPP, the USA has been working on ways to engage with this new development. Adding to the complexity in Asia, the recent Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) was launched as a way forward for economic integration combining Southeast Asia through the ASEAN members with the so-called "plus three," meaning Japan, China and Korea in the northeast. This agreement marks the first agreement where the three larger economies of Northeast Asia are engaged simultaneously. Through the complexity of regional and global value chains and production networks, this agreement will also indirectly impact trade and investment relationships with other large economic stakeholders such as the EU. The EU has pushed for closer relations through bilateral agreements in Southeast Asia (ALVSTAM ET AL. 2017).

THE JOINT EFFORTS OF JAPAN AND THE EU

The long-term development of the global division of labor and specialization, and the shift of the basic functioning of foreign trade from "trade-in-products" to "trade-in-tasks" in highly complex GVCs in transnational networks of physical and non-physical production, point to the fact that a substantial share of physical production by European and Japanese companies now takes place along GVCs outside their respective territories. Therefore, economic transactions between companies based in the EU and Japan are increasingly occurring outside the EU and Japan, e.g., in China, Southeast Asia, or other intermediary locations. It is noteworthy that these important third-party relations, which are growing in importance, are not explicitly addressed in bilateral trade talks and skew the general picture given by trade statistics (KAWAI – WIGNARAJA 2011; GRAZZI – TOMASI 2016). These third-party relations are considered to be a side effect of the changing geoeconomic context, where trade even between adversaries to some degree continues through these channels (EICHENGREEN 2024).

In efforts to bring the economies closer, the concrete negotiations between Japan and the EU started in March 2013, after six years of intentions to commence such talks. An important starting point of the negotiations – although seldom expressed in official declarations – is that the growth of direct bilateral trade between Japan and the EU has stagnated during the past decades, and, furthermore, that both the EU and Japan's shares of world trade have decreased substantially during the same period (NAKAMURA ET AL. 2022). Therefore, the initiative to launch a bilateral EPA between the EU and Japan can be labelled as "defensive", as it aims at restoring previous levels of trade volumes in both directions by building on the changing institutional and geopolitical context. This is a sign of how geoeconomic considerations weigh in as an important aspect for pushing the envelope in a more geopolitically favorable direction.

The free trade talks between Japan and the EU were carried out in a larger global political and economic setting where virtually all major trading partners of the world are negotiating free trade treaties with each other, which creates a new geopolitical business environment as the world trade game board is shifting. In recent years there has been a process of conversion from regionalism and plurilateralism to multilateralization in

the sense that regional and plurilateral trade arrangements may fulfil the general multilateral basic rules. Regardless of which strategy contains the largest mutual economic benefit for the parties involved, various preferential agreements have become part of a larger geopolitical and security-policy context in which trade is a visible element of political priorities or even a lack of political priorities (UNCTAD 2022). Recent developments also show that trade is tilting towards countries that are less geopolitically distant (EICHENGREEN 2024).

INSTITUTIONAL DYNAMICS OF THE EU-JAPAN EPA

The EU-Japan EPA talks can be seen from the larger context of the European Union's need to take a more active role in world trade negotiations and geopolitics as a reaction to the long-term decrease in the importance of Europe in world affairs (E.G., MÉRAND 2015; FUKUYAMA 2020). This need has been particularly substantiated when it comes to meeting the growing role of Asian economies during the past decades. For the Japanese government, the ongoing macroeconomic problems have been a driving force behind its increased interest in reaching an FTA with the EU and its urgent desire to do so. Thus, it can be argued that in the absence of visible and generally acknowledged results from the previously commenced talks, the EU position has been ambiguous, but a partnership agreement with Japan can be understood in the context of the global race for regional trade agreements (CF. WIGNARAJA – LAZARO 2010; KERR 2016).

The mandate to initiate negotiations with Japan was given at the EU Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) trade meeting in November 2012, and was finally concluded after 18 rounds of negotiations between 2013 and 2017. In accordance with its negotiating mandate, the EU assessed the progress achieved during the first year of the talks and whether Japan had implemented the commitments it made prior to the launch of the negotiations. Despite some concerns, the extensive discussions held between the Commission and the Member States in May 2014 confirmed that the negotiations should continue. The EU, according to the official statement, wanted the negotiations with Japan to address a number of concerns, including non-tariff barriers and the unsatisfactory access to the Japanese public procurement market (EUROPEAN COMMISSION 2014). At the time of the start of the negotiations, it was estimated by the European Commission that

a successful EPA would increase the EU's exports to Japan by 30 per cent, creating 400,000 new jobs (EUROPEAN COMMISSION 2013). Thus, the expected impact of the EPA between Japan and the EU is significant, albeit it is still low in terms of the share of trade to GDP (BENZ – YALCIN 2014). Recent ex post evaluations of the impact and effect of the EPA suggest that there are positive gains from it in terms of increased trade volumes (NAKAMURA – STRÖM 2021; PORTO 2021; YI 2022). This is related not only to its effects on trade, but also to the increased productivity of Japanese firms stemming from the increased international competition in goods and services on the Japanese market, which will yield new employment opportunities in Japan.

During the recent decades, the government of Japan has gradually been explicit about the benefits of FTAs and EPAs in general, and has attributed its engagement in setting up treaties allowing a broader international economic cooperation to the continued globalization of the world economy (MOFA 2002; KATADA 2020). The Japanese government's focus on outward trade relationships has, in its own right, been mainly focused on the CPTPP talks and its consequences. As reflected in government reports (E.G., METI 2013, 2014), the emphasis of the information is less on the trade relations between Japan and the EU than on the free trade talks in the Pacific region. Albeit this is a fully understandable picture due to the more significant implications a plurilateral trans-Pacific FTA would bring about together with other FTAs in the Pacific region, the rather quiet existence of the EU-Japan EPA in the mainstream public debate is noteworthy.

This development can also be understood by being seen through a geopolitical lens, as the EU and Japan position themselves firmly in the changing security situation in the Asia-Pacific and Europe (BERKOFSKY ET AL. 2019). Thus, the EPA and the SPA create a foundation for both the global economic setting, in which firms need to find a viable strategic outlook, and adaptation to the geopolitical dynamics of the 2020s. Due to the liquid nature of GVCs and GPNs, decisions of multinational corporations (MNCs) on production locations as well as the choice of suppliers and first-tier customers in the value chain are crucial. On top of this shifting gravity in the international trade, with the People's Republic of China's (PRC) strengthened geopolitical position in relation to the "traditional" economic, military and political powers, the EU and Japan have suffered from relatively slow economic growth due to structural impediments in their economies. Here,

by including the effects of GVCs and GPNs on trade patterns between the EU and Japan, the EPA can create an important complement to a security cooperation (i.e., the SPA) by utilizing mutual comparative advantages and a revitalization of key domestic industries. One recent example of how this industrial economic and security cooperation has materialized is the EU Commission's initiative to create a framework for a new strategic partnership cooperation with Japan and South Korea focusing on private sector R & D in defense technology (NIKKEI SHIMBUN 2024).

The EPA negotiations also coincided with the complexity of the Brexit vote in the UK. For years, the UK has attracted a substantial share of the total Japanese investments into the European Single Market, in both the manufacturing and services industries. The long-term implications of Brexit and the subsequent free trade deal with the UK and Japan (GOV.UK 2020) will most likely be significant for Japan's economic relation to the Single Market and the trade flows between Japan and the EU. A possible consequence could be a future change in Japan's industrial footprint in both the UK and the EU that could affect the overall trade flows between Europe and Japan. Brexit is therefore an example of a rapid and rather unforeseen institutional change that relates to both international trade and geopolitics at different levels. Other issues such as technological restrictions associated with semiconductor technology, economic sanctions and the transition towards the green economy with battery technology are rapidly connecting geoeconomics and geopolitics on both the macro and micro levels of economic activity with the lens of a system of interconnected capabilities according to Lee (2024).

WIDENING AND DEEPENING THE EU-JAPAN RELATIONSHIP

The relations between Japan and the EU have been strengthening over the last 10 years (E.G., CONSILIUM 2021; STRÖM – VADI 2023). Against the backdrop of the Economic Partnership Agreement the development of the Strategic Partnership Agreement saw their collaboration in areas that had previously not been clearly elaborated upon within a specific agreement structure. Hence, the EPA could be seen as an important step at a time when the US-EU geoeconomic relationship nosedived through the pausing of the free trade talks across the Atlantic. This trust-building process eventually opened up for concluding the SPA. The EPA and SPA

are also two pieces within an additional set of ancillary agreements and partnerships that have been concluded (CONSILIUM 2021). These agreements now cover a vast area of issues that can be connected to both geoeconomic and subsequently geopolitical interests. *The Partnership on Sustainable Connectivity and Quality Infrastructure* of 2019 covers a set of aspects that technically deal with physical and digital infrastructure, but also aim at building stronger ties in geographical areas such as the Indo Pacific, where China is trying to create a stronger economic and political influence. One example of these Chinese efforts is the so-called Belt and Road Initiative. *The EU-Japan Green Alliance* from 2021 is more focused on the development of sustainability, where the EU and Japan can use various measures such as geoeconomic tools to create a wider political impact. In particular the related agreement deals with the implementation of the Paris Agreement and one important area in it is the promotion of green economic growth and jobs. In this sense, the Green Alliance has a strong connection to both the SPA and the EPA. In the rapidly developing area of digitalization, *the Digital Partnership* from 2022 can be seen as the primary platform for deepening the collaboration around geoeconomic networks and systems that are vital for the geopolitical context. Its most important topics are collaboration around resilience in semiconductor production, free flow of data and cyber security, and future telecommunication networks, but also the rapidly changing context of artificial intelligence. In the area of security policy, the recent *Japan-EU Security and Defence Partnership* (2024) aims to deepen their collaboration in areas related to maritime security, space, cyber security, and hybrid threats (MOFA 2024). The increasingly hostile geopolitical environment in Europe and the Indo Pacific has been a driving force in forming this collaboration of like-mined actors. In other areas, there is additional collaboration regarding transport, education, and research, often supported by deeper bilateral initiatives.

DISCUSSION

Affecting the geopolitical context, the most striking feature of the EU-Japan bilateral trade is the long-term declining trend in direct trade between the EU and Japan (NAKAMURA ET AL. 2022). It should also be noted that the importance of the EU for Japanese exports has historically been larger than Japan's importance for EU trade, which is quite natural given the different overall trade pattern of the two parties, where the relative strength

of the US economy has set the trade agenda (IBID.). On the other hand, there is also a sharp decline in Japan's trade with the United States, reflecting a major shift from transcontinental to regional external trade, where the PRC has taken over the role of the main trading partner. Seen from the EU perspective, Japan has thus become a marginal partner in the mutual *direct* trade in goods, while the PRC has overtaken Japan's previous role, namely that of its chief trade partner in Asia, being by far the largest country of origin for extra-EU imports. Simultaneously, the EU's trade with the US has declined, but it is still the main trade partner for the EU. This dynamic development has an important impact on the geopolitical context in both the Asia-Pacific and Europe, and ways to interpret the current pattern of world trade relations.

The gap between EU exports and imports and Japan (i.e., the trade imbalance) is about to close. The picture is more inconclusive for the EU's share of Japan's total exports and imports, but the overall trend is a declining pattern, albeit a less dramatic one than in the case of Japan's share in the EU trade (IBID.). The previously large bilateral trade surplus of Japan towards the EU, and the corresponding reported bilateral deficit in the EU's trade with Japan have both more or less vanished, and the mutual flows are coming close to balance. There is, however, a certain systematic bias between reports from the respective parties in the sense that the EU's relative deficit is constantly larger than Japan's mirrored surplus.[4] This bias is due to *indirect trade*: i.e., exports from Japan to the EU are recorded as exports by Japan to an intermediary country categorized as a "final export destination", which is normally another Asian country, while in the EU statistics, they are recorded as imports from Japan following the rules of origin principle. Such bias is important to consider when trying to understand the trade gap between the EU and Japan.

Japan and the EU moved forward in the negotiations for a new type of international agreement on the basis of the increased economic and political platform of the EPA. Originally, it was the economic relationship that formed the starting point for the EPA negotiations, as the new geopolitical context with the large export markets of the EU and Japan became the logic core of the discussions. The evolving economic relationship between the EU and Japan during the post-war period not only was formalized through the EPA and created a platform for a broad economic partnership but it

also created a framework for corporate level collaboration and competition. With the geopolitical relationship deepened through the EPA, it was no coincidence that policymakers started to consider widening the geopolitical collaboration in areas outside the traditional economic circles. The outcome was the Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA), which stresses the mutual commitment towards a rules-based world order that was set to expand the collaboration interfaces between the two parties (NAKAMURA – STRÖM 2021; STRÖM ET AL. 2022). Seen in this way, the SPA can build a new institutional setting based on the closer economic relations that would favor a broader collaboration in areas related to security, digitalization, energy and connectivity, which is a development to be expected from such an inter-state dependency relationship (BLANCHARD – RIPSMAN 2008; OKANO-HEIJMANS 2016). Moving in the direction of wider geopolitical implications can also be seen as pushing the Japanese agenda for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) (HOSOYA 2019). With the more complicated impacts on trade against the backdrop of the war in Ukraine, new ways of collaborating among trading partners have become paramount, as the EU is seen as an increasingly important strategic partner for geopolitical and security reasons.

In addition, the format of a legally binding agreement made the SPA stand out from other, more "communique" style of agreements in areas other than trade and investments. The SPA has a huge potential to gain key importance in relation to trade and business connectivity (SEKINE 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic has shown the increasing importance of connectivity and digitalization in relation to data transfer within and between corporate entities. These are spheres within the EPA that are key opportunities for future development of trade in services, and the associated foreign direct investment, which we also see in the development of similar agreements in the Pacific (KAWAI 2005; KERR 2016). With increasing data transfer possibilities and value being generated at the interface of service content and goods, the economic interconnection through the respective agreements will be vital for the future development of the political economy and business model connectivity. The two agreements can reinforce each other in enabling new institutional dynamics that are often lacking among stakeholders trying to establish deeper economic relations.

As a result of these agreements, which are concrete expressions of the bilateral initiatives discussed by, e.g., Kawai (2005) and Okano-Heijmans (2016),

a set of related agreements have been concluded over the course of the last five years. The digital agreement, the Partnership on Sustainable Connectivity and Quality Infrastructure, and the Green Alliance, have created a wider platform for the EU-Japan relationship and are all examples of the deepening geopolitical relationship and a result of a more complicated global security and economic context (E.G., KERR 2016; AGGARWAL – REDDIE 2021). Recent additions in the area of defense collaboration have furthered and both deepened and widened the areas where Japan and the EU are expanding their collaboration. Without the EPA and the SPA, it would be difficult to move ahead with the closer collaboration in other areas, such as sustainability issues and actions addressing climate change. Considering climate and sustainability challenges for the wider society and business, finding new ways for international collaboration is essential. The green economy transition will be dependent on the combination of public policy and private industry initiatives (E.G., JONES – STRÖM 2024). It also creates a regulatory environment that other countries and organizational actors trading with Japan and the EU have to adapt to. Increasing the economic and security collaboration can facilitate the joint commitment towards the challenge of sustainable energy and the wider climate crisis in the face of increased geopolitical tensions in the proximity areas of both the EU and Japan.

The empirical part of this study also suggests the complexity associated with future trade agreements, economic diplomacy, and geoeconomics. Thanks to free trade agreements, the mutual trade barriers might have been overcome, but challenges in relation to ad hoc regulations and non-tariff barriers play a bigger role for future trade and production. Furthermore, the negative expressions of economic statecraft (LEW – NEPHEW 2018; AGGARWAL – REDDIE 2021) and the mounting trade tension between China and the US, emphasize the need for the EU and Japan to create a stable economic cooperation. Despite the close collaboration that exists between Japan and the US in defense, the recent debate over the attempt by Nippon Steel to buy US Steel has run into issues of national security concerns and geoeconomic tensions. However, this might open up opportunities for further consolidation and collaboration between Japanese and EU businesses. The discussion on rapidly increasing the production of semiconductors in both Europe and Japan, together with plans for various regulatory and tariff barriers in the trade with China, can be seen as a result of the rising geopolitical complexity as GVCs and GPNs will be more entangled

in security aspects and economic resilience. Therefore, in contrast to the mainstream literature on international trade (E.G., BALDWIN – THORNTON 2008; WIGNARAJA – LAZARO 2010; ATHUKORALA 2011; YEUNG 2014), which discusses political dimensions narrowly with a focus on trade diplomacy and the political influence on GVC and GPN localizations, our findings point to the necessity to acknowledge the increasing importance of introducing security policy as an explanatory factor in understanding the changing structural logics of the contemporary international trade.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In this paper, we have addressed the development of the EPA and its role as the gateway to the EU-Japan SPA and associated agreements such as those on, e.g., digitalization and connectivity. We have argued that geopolitics and political considerations are increasingly influencing well-established trade relations such as those between Japan and the EU, where common interests in terms of seeing trade as a tool for economic development are complemented by geopolitical security issues. The emergence of the PRC as a dominant regional power in the Asia-Pacific and its rivalry with the US, accentuated by the PRC's economic policy uncertainty and the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian conflict, have put pressure on both Tokyo and Brussels to further develop their cooperation in the economic and security fields. This development is reflected by the EU-Japan EPA and SPA.

The literature review and the empirical setting suggest that the EU-Japan EPA and SPA have created a renewed framework to address not only trade and connectivity promotion, but also the increased uncertainty and possibly the shifting power balance in the world, which affects both Japan and the EU. These agreements have also acted as an umbrella for additional agreements on more specific issues that are connected to both geoeconomics and geopolitical outcomes of the Japan-EU relationship. The need to understand the current urgent need of the EU and Japan to seal closer bonds in a number of areas is an obvious reflection of the changing global geopolitical landscape. Furthermore, we understand the EU-Japan EPA and SPA as concrete products of the recognition of the mutual concerns over the prospects of maintaining economic growth, the increased political tensions between China and the US, and the perceived need for tighter protection of national interests in terms of military and cybersecurity threats.

To answer our research question, we propose that the EPA has laid the foundation for a closer political cooperation necessitated by the overall geopolitical realities. Without the two parties' mutual understanding of the need for such a close economic partnership, it would have been less likely that additional agreements shaping the geopolitical setting would be possible to achieve. In fact, this has so far created a foundation for a cooperation framework in three concrete areas. First, Japan and the EU have seen a deepening integration within security policy, forging a more coherent collaboration in the aftermath of the war in Ukraine. In other words, their mutual geopolitical concerns have resulted in the recent Japan-EU Security and Defense Partnership. This partnership includes already agreed economic security measures such as sanctions and divestment of industry, but also a deeper military collaboration, primarily within the defense industry.[5] This geopolitical development has also enabled a closer collaboration within value chains and production networks in East Asia, not least in semiconductors and related electronics. Second, the new geopolitical context has fostered a deepening of the collaboration within digitalization, connectivity and cyber security. Since digitalization is increasingly important for the global industry in relation to competitive advantages and efficiency, delivery of public services and security policy, the EU and Japan have moved ahead with developing their collaboration to strengthen resilience in these societal sectors. Third, the Green Alliance encapsulates many challenges in relation to the transition towards the green economy. It comprises issues such as energy, smart city development and the usage of digitalization. In addition, the Green Alliance seeks to capitalize on the strong position of industry in both the EU and Japan, and facilitate a collaboration with developing countries around the world.

It is still too early to verify the long-term strategic significance of the EU-Japan partnership, but there are several opportunities for forging tighter political and economic bonds between Japan and Europe based on their common belief in and commitments towards a rules-based world order, and such bonds could serve as a demonstration of the unity that can be created if geopolitical and economic interests align. With a second Trump term in the US, the current Ishiba government needs to balance its relationships with the US and the EU. Regarding issues related to the functioning of a rules-based world order, it is probable that we will see closer tie-building within the Japan-EU relationship. Further research on this

would need to explore the development of this bundle of agreements and their respective impacts on geopolitics. These future studies would benefit from a cross-disciplinary perspective within the area of political economy and international business.

ENDNOTES

1 The EU-Japan EPA consists roughly of two parts, each associated with a complicated structural regulatory framework. Under this agreement, free trade is permit-based, as individual firms are required to register with national authorities to engage in tariff-free trade. The investment agreement is still subject to further negotiations, as there are some disagreements between the European Commission and the Japanese government regarding, e.g., disputes.

2 This term is addressed in GATT Article XXIV, article 8, which treats the legal definitions of trade in and between customs unions and free trade areas at the overall level.

3 As compared to "multilateral" agreements, which include *all* the member states, following the WTO definition.

4 For example, in 2014, a contradictory situation occurred in which both sides reported deficits, illustrating clearly the effects of the differing definitions of import/export destinations between Japan and the EU.

5 The most recent example of this military collaboration is the consortium formed by Mitsubishi (Japan), Leonardo (Italy), BAE Systems and Rolls-Royce (UK) for developing next-generation fighter aircraft (Nikkei Asia 2024). Furthermore, the EU Commission aims at reaching a defense industry cooperation agreement with Japan and South Korea before the end of 2024 (Nikkei Shimbun 2024).

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More Than Skepticism: Climate Change Discourses through an Economic Perspective in Czech Newspapers

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ABSTRACT	Central and East European states are believed to endorse climate skepticism in both their public discourse and their population attitudes. In this paper we focus on the climate change discourse from an economic perspective in Czechia and show that the situation is more complex than expected. Specifically, the paper analyses Czech mainstream (*Ekonom*, *MF Dnes*) and alternative media (*Deník Referendum*) and concludes that the discursive strands of (1) adaptation and (2) climate change as an opportunity for business are prevalent in the media mainstream. In contrast, the strand of (3) mitigation appears more in the alternative media. We apply the concept of (de)politicization to analytically capture an important aspect contributing to the differentiation of these strands. The analyzed sample suggests that the Czech economic discourse on climate change is neither dominated by skepticism nor polarized along the axis of climate denial versus climate alarmism. Here lies our contribution: our findings challenge the expectation of the dominance of climate skepticism and denialism and position Czechia closer to the discursive landscape of established democracies, where media contribute to the pluralistic nature of the climate change debate.

KEYWORDS	climate change, media, discourses, Eastern Europe, Czechia
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INTRODUCTION

The increased presence of environmental issues, but mostly climate change, has recently become visible in contemporary politics around the world (GRASSO – GIUGNI 2022; FISHER ET AL. 2022). According to some diagnoses, the issue of climate change has fueled the already present conflicts between the more liberal and the more nationalist political forces (E.G. HOOGHE – MARKS 2018; OTTENI – WEISSKIRCHER 2022; ROBERTS 2022). Climate change-related issues have become important for both environmentally minded and anti-environmentally oriented actors, leading to the politicization (and potential polarization) of the issue in some West European countries. They are defined by the presence of politically differentiated discourses on climate change (STEVENSON – DRYZEK 2012; FISHER AT AL. 2022; SVOZIL ET AL. 2025).

In contrast to the West European situation, the literature on Central and East European (CEE) countries points out the skeptical position as the point of a potentially depoliticizing convergence of climate change discourses. Given the prevalence of climate skepticism in Czechia (E.G. ČERMÁK – PATOČKOVÁ 2020; OCELÍK 2022; HRUBEŠ – CÍSAŘ 2024), which is reflected also in quantitative data (E.G. CCPI 2023), we may expect a similar type of convergence here. Therefore, the country forms an ideal case for a study of a media discourse on climate change in relation to the problem of its (de)politicization. This paper is a contribution to the analyses of climate change discourses with an emphasis on (de)politicization as a useful analytical tool.

More generally, this paper extends the field of climate change discourse analysis focused on Central and Eastern Europe. Although there have been several contributions mapping the media coverage of climate change in various contexts (E.G. CARVALHO 2007; BILLETT 2010; DOULTON – BROWN 2009; DIRIKX – GELDERS 2010; KUNELIUS ET AL. 2016; PAINTER 2013; FISHER AT AL. 2022; SVOZIL ET AL. 2025), the scholarship focuses mostly on Western Europe (SCHÄFER – SCHLICHTING 2014: 149; PEARCE ET AL. 2015: 615). Very few analyses of this sort focus on CEE countries, for a similar argument (SEE ALSO OCELÍK 2022), which, however, form a particularly interesting research subject due to their heavy industry dependency and their long history of pro-industrial discourses – on Poland (SEE MARCINKIEWICZ – TOSUN 2015; KUNDZEWICZ ET AL. 2017), specifically on the coverage of coal mining in Czechia (LEHOTSKÝ ET AL. 2019), on Czech climate skepticism (OCELÍK 2022; ČERMÁK ET AL. 2023), some information on such subjects is also included (BRULLE ET AL. 2024).

An important difference between the countries of Western Europe and CEE has been detected on the level of discourse/policy preferences. While Fisher at al. (2022) find evidence of politicization of the issue of climate change in West European countries on the level of political attitudes and support for political parties, they do not find a clear pattern of this in CEE. Regarding climate change discourses in CEE, the present research has pointed out their depoliticization, specifically their convergence across different political camps *"in their rejection of a more ambitious climate policy"* (MARCINKIEWICZ – TOSUN 2015: 15), or in other words, their convergence on the position of climate skepticism variously defined (VIDOMUS 2013, 2018; KUNDZEWICZ ET AL. 2017; BRULLE ET AL. 2024).

In the present paper we focus on Czech media as a particularly important case among the states in Central and Eastern Europe, particularly paying attention to economic issues in several selected Czech newspapers (see below) due to the importance of the economic framing of climate change-related problems and arguments in the country (SEE, E.G., LEHOTSKÝ ET AL. 2019; OCELÍK 2022; HRUBEŠ – CÍSAŘ 2024). There are three commonly discussed reasons for the prevalence of economic frames in Czechia. First, it is partly because there are general differences between CEE and Western Europe due to the late capitalist transformation in CEE, which began only after 1989 (STARK – BRUSZT 1998). Second, the discursive importance of the economy in the Czech case is underscored by the fact that from the beginning of the modern era, the Czech lands have been characterized by their concentration of energy-intensive industrial production. At the end of the nineteenth century, the Czech lands accounted for more than 2% of all global CO^2 emissions (they emit less than 0.25% today). Their per capita CO^2 emissions peaked in 1978 at 18.39 tonnes, and in the twenty-first century, they have oscillated between 12.5 and 8.72 tonnes (RITCHIE – ROSER 2025; HRUBEŠ – CÍSAŘ 2024). As a result, Czechia belongs among the countries with the highest per capita pollution production in Europe. It is a country heavily dependent on and displaying preferences for fossil fuel energy, similarly to other CEE countries such as Poland (OTTO – GUGUSHVILI 2020; BRULLE ET AL. 2024). And the third reason is that the skeptical position has been articulated by the political elite in an early phase of and in direct relation to the transformation of the economy (VIDOMUS 2013, 2018; HRUBEŠ – CÍSAŘ 2024).

We intend to understand how economic issues relate to the debate on climate change in Czechia. In other words, we focus on the discourse at the intersection of the climate change articulation and the existing economic perspectives on environmental issues. Our research questions are thus: How is the entanglement of climate change and economic frames articulated in Czech media discourses? Do the Czech discourses copy the variety of discourses visible in West European countries? Or does the Czech climate change discourse converge on a common skeptical position, as suggested by previous research on some CEE countries?

In order to engage with these questions, we inductively analyze a set of selected Czech media and later discuss the connection between climate change, the economy and their interpretation. The analysis presented in this paper fits into a subfield of discourse analyses focused on the media communication of climate change, for metaanalyses (see Wang – Huan 2025; Pearce et al. 2015). When using economy-related frames, these analyses focus on the role of (not only) the neoliberal economic discourse in the climate change reporting (Carvalho 2007; Koteyko 2012; Nerlich 2012).

Our main goal is to engage in an inductive categorization of discursive strands within the Czech media's economic climate change discourse in the broadest sense. Our findings suggest that there are several discursive strands present in the media under study (we differentiate the "adaptation discourse", the "mitigation discourse", "the opportunity for business discourse", and the "skeptical discourse"), and we apply the concept of (de) politicization to analytically capture an important aspect that contributes to the differentiation of these strands. Our results show that the situation of Czechia does not follow the East-West divide but rather mirrors the situation identified in the established democracies.

The article is organized in the following way: the first section offers a conceptual framework using the issue of (de)politicization of climate change as a theoretical anchor for our subsequent analysis. The second section specifies the case selection, providing contextual information on the analyzed country case, and then distinguishes between mainstream and alternative media to subsequently present our methodology, including the specification of the newspapers covered in our analysis. Further, the paper presents the results of the analysis of the discourses at the

intersection of economic and climate change issues, and it concludes with a discussion of them in its last part, interpreting the results in the context of the extant literature.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: (DE)POLITICIZATION

The concept of depoliticization is not new to political science (see, e.g., Rancière 1999; Crouch 2004). Traditionally, it represents climate change as a consensual issue that is not based on a public conflict, but is dealt with through top-down technocratic management of the issue (Pepermans – Maeseele 2014; Swyngedouw 2011). However, the concept of (de)politicization can be used differently as its context changes. The original critique of depoliticization of environmental issues through technocratic management refers to (mostly leftist) challenges to depoliticization. These criticize the depoliticized climate change discourses which acknowledge the issue, but do not deal sufficiently with its political-economic roots. The voices of these critiques were not strong enough to bring the climate change issue higher on the agenda and for some time this issue was dealt with through state and international bureaucracy.

As bureaucracy increasingly addressed ecological issues, the populist right began to politicize the matter, integrating it into its broader strategy of challenging the post-political nature of democratic systems (Crouch 2004). This perspective on (de)politicization explores the "populist moment" in climate change politics (Marquardt – Lederer 2022), which is often associated with right-wing populism (Fiorino 2022; Boecher et al. 2022). Depoliticization – understood as an attempt to suppress conflicting issues (see Wilson – Swyngedouw 2014) – thus can lead to a ("leftist") critique that the given issue is excluded from politics and should be included in it because that would be democratic and the related policy measure would be much more substantial due to the gravity of the issue (i.e., its political-economic and systemic gravity). However, it can also lead to a ("rightist") critique that the issue is excluded from politics and should be included in it because that would be democratic, but the related policy measure should be minimized, as the problem is not serious and the proposed solutions, inter alia, harm our competitiveness.

The concept of (de)politicization is also split in terms of the position of climate denial. On the one hand, climate skepticism could be understood as an extreme manifestation of the depoliticizing approach as one side of the (potential) conflict explicitly tries to turn climate change into a non-issue. On the other hand, especially epistemic skepticism (CAPSTICK – PIDGEON 2014; MIKEŠOVÁ 2023) could be understood as a political fight in the scientific field and thereby as a politicizing strategy. As climate change becomes a political issue during the populist moment, conservative actors such as the leader of Reform UK Nigel Farage demand more moderate mitigation strategies. In this context epistemic skepticism[1] becomes a fringe position, the discourse of delay becomes the new denialism (E.G. SHUE 2023; LAMB ET AL. 2020), and response skepticism1 gains prominence (CAPSTICK – PIDGEON 2014).

A recent Czech analysis distinguishes between climate fatalism and administrative-expert rationality (ČADA 2023), both of which could be perceived as forms of climate change depoliticization. On the one hand there is a resignation about engaging the issue, which is similar to response skepticism, and the other option is a non-political technocratic engagement of it. Our analysis offers similar results in relation to the climate change discourse.

Depoliticization is here conceptualized as an attempt to suppress conflicting issues by closing down debates through technocratization and ignorance (SEE MARQUARDT – LEDERER 2022: 738; WILSON – SWYNGEDOUW 2014). On the one hand the debate can be closed off by accepting climate change as a matter of fact instead of a matter of concern (LATOUR 2004); on the other hand, the root causes may remain unaddressed despite an attempt to offer a solution, and thereby the underlying political conflict is ignored (MARQUARDT – LEDERER 2022). Still, our aim is not to apply a conceptualization of depoliticization in a strict manner. The (de)politicization duality is suitable as a background for an inductive analysis that we conduct. The aim of this paper is not to distinguish between politicizing and depoliticizing discourses of climate change, but to conduct an inductive analysis out of which particular discourse strands emerge (the "adaptation discourse", the "mitigation discourse" and "the opportunity for business discourse") and employ the concept of (de)politicization as a suitable tool to capture an important element that contributes to the differentiation of these strands. Our categorization better reflects the data than other possible forms of categorization such

as the division of the main ideological responses to climate change into "neoliberal technocentrism" and "radical ecocentrism" as two ends of the decision-making spectrum (BAILEY – WILSON 2009), while keeping the (de)politicization concept as a useful analytical tool.

CASE SELECTION, DATA CREATION, AND THE MEDIA LANDSCAPE

As specified in the introduction, the extant literature on CEE countries points out the skeptical position as the point of a potentially depoliticizing convergence of climate change discourses in the region. Based on the available findings, we consider Czechia to be a promising candidate for "the most-likely case" (GEORGE – BENNETT 2005: 121–123). "The most likely case" refers to a case that should conform to the available literature-based expectation, in our case to the climate change skeptical position of CEE countries. Given the well-documented history of the prevalence of climate skepticism in Czechia (E.G. VIDOMUS 2013, 2018; ČERMÁK – PATOČKOVÁ 2020; HRUBEŠ – CÍSAŘ 2024), which is reflected also by the available quantitative indicators (E.G. CCPI 2023), one may expect a similar type of prevalent skeptical position in the present case too.

The first Prime Minister of the independent Czech Republic (1992–1998) and its second president (2003–2013) Václav Klaus has been an active critic of environmentalism and a climate skeptic since the very beginning of the 1990s. He directly linked the issue of climate change to the economy by stressing the supposed danger of the adaptation and mitigation measures to what he understands as the virtues of the free market (Reisigl – Wodak 2009). Despite his waning fame and the general rise of the new denialism through the delay discourse (E.G. SHUE 2023), the presence of such a strong skeptical figure from the early years of the environmental debate makes Czechia a special case worth particular attention (SEE ALSO OCELÍK 2022; PRUSHANKIN 2023). In addition, during the past several years Czechia was a dissenting voice in the European environmental policy, deemphasizing the importance of climate change. The former Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babiš at first refused and only later, after some concessions, agreed to sign the agreement on carbon neutrality in the EU. Also the current center-right government and its Prime Minister Petr Fiala keep up this lukewarm position towards any more ambitious mitigation measure (SEE, E.G., HRUBEŠ – CÍSAŘ 2024).

Climate change enters the media landscape as a divisive issue and creates an expectation of a division between ideologically differentiated media. The division of the media into a mainstream and an alternative offers an analytical tool that may be useful for selecting substantially different media outlets. An alternative can be defined in various ways and at various levels, including a differentiation in terms of producers, content, organizational structures or a systemic position (RAUCH 2016: 757). The crucial elements of differentiation in our case are producers and content, and these differences lead to an expectation of different representations of climate change and economic issues in the mainstream and the alternative. We complement the two variables with that of organizational structures, but only as an auxiliary element of differentiation due to its dubious methodological value. We do not apply the mainstream/alternative dichotomy as a universal one, but as a useful one, as it is based on the selected elements for the Czech case.

Alternative media have been traditionally associated with writers and editors with an alternative, most often non-professional background (HOLT ET AL. 2019: 863). This background, especially in the case of the editors, can include a history of environmental activism. Alternative media can also function as critical media in terms of content (FUCHS 2010). The everyday reading of the selected media for our analysis revealed clear differences in terms of their general content. This created an expectation of a difference in the two media's climate-economic discourses.

Finally, media ownership offers a potential aid in differentiating between the mainstream and the alternative, specifically for Czechia (SEE HÁJEK – CARPENTIER 2015). However, given the fact that there are media that are mainstream in terms of their content but with a non-corporate organizational structure, and there are also opposite cases, this factor can only be partially helpful in estimating the mainstream/alternative difference. Media owned by politicians, oligarchs or corporations may produce substantially different content than media owned by activists or media supported predominantly by their readers rather than financed (partially) through advertisement, but need not do so. Our aim is not to use the mainstream/alternative difference as an analytical framework that would enable us to produce analytical results regarding the differentiation between a mainstream and an alternative in general, but merely to use it as a tool which

makes it easier for us to choose media outlets that we expect to produce different discourses.

Since the aim of this paper is to focus on the intersection between economic and climate change discourses in Czechia, both mainstream (right and centrist) and alternative (left) media were selected for analysis. In the sample we included as the representatives of the mainstream media the non-tabloid, common populist daily *MF Dnes (MF Today)* and the weekly specialized publication *Ekonom (The Economist)*. The alternative right is not included in the sample in order to focus the analysis on the part of the media landscape that has the potential to cast doubt on the dominant results from the existing literature and to engage in the debate with this literature (see the discussion section).

MF Dnes, established in 1990, is, since 2016, the second largest Czech newspaper (after a tabloid). During the data collection period, the paper was owned by Mafra a.s., which was part of the Agrofert Group – a company held in trust by former Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babiš. It is now owned by the Kaprain Group, which has close ties to the PPF Group, the owner of the Nova Group, a TV broadcaster with the second-largest market share. The political orientation of *MF Dnes* is centrist and its circulation in the time period under analysis was around 111 thousand copies daily (MEDIAGURU 2019).

The journal *Ekonom* specializes in economic and business issues since 1991. It is published by Economia, a publisher owned by the controversial Czech entrepreneur Zdeněk Bakala, who was accused of dubious business activities. The circulation of the weekly was almost 10 thousand copies in the period under analysis (MEDIAN AND STEM/MARK 2020).

Both *Ekonom* and *MF Dnes* match the main features of mainstream media (as opposed to alternative media) identified above. They both employ professional journalists rather than authors with a non-professional background. In terms of ownership, they are ([in]directly) owned by oligarchs, but it should be mentioned that whereas *MF Dnes* was acquired by an entrepreneur who was about to become a politician and who interfered with the running of his media, *Ekonom* is owned by an entrepreneur who does not have this kind of history. This is an important distinction within the mainstream but it need not have an impact on the economic climate

change discourse. More importantly, in terms of content, the more centrist approach of *MF Dnes* and the more neoliberal perspective of *Ekonom* could influence the climate change discourses these two media produce.

Alternative media are represented in the study by *Deník Referendum (Daily Referendum)*, which is published online since 2009. The Daily has more than 14,000 followers on Facebook (there is no better indicator available).[2] Regarding its content, this newspaper is considered to be left leaning. The access to it is free and the paper is supported by a foundation to which readers can contribute. Its editor-in-chief Jakub Patočka is a former environmental activist. Unlike *MF Dnes* and *Ekonom*, *Deník Referendum* matches the basic features of an alternative medium.

These three media are not representative of the whole media landscape in Czechia, but in themselves represent relevant ideological strands in the Czech public discourse and therefore their inclusion offers a sufficiently broad view of the Czech economic climate change discourses.

Methodologically, the case study is based on Critical Discourse Analysis (FAIRCLOUGH 2003; WODAK – MEYER 2009; REISIGL – WODAK 2009) and its application to the study of environmental politics (HAJER – VERSTEEG 2005; HAJER 2002; STEVENSON – DRYZEK 2012). Hajer and Versteeg (2005: 175) define discourse as *"an ensemble of ideas, concepts and categories through which meaning is given to social and political phenomena, and which is produced and reproduced through an identifiable set of practices."* The approach of Critical Discourse Analysis focuses on analyzing texts as elements of social processes and emphasizes their ideological effects. The analysis should go beyond the level of the text itself and study the broader social context. We therefore include in our analysis not only the selected data corpus, but also a description of the specificity of Czechia as a part of the Central and Eastern Europe region as well as the specific positions of the particular media in it.

We have qualitatively analyzed the main frames of and perspectives on climate change in three different media, the implicit assumptions and ideologies behind the texts, the actors and identities related to the analysed discourses and their discursive strategies. For the analysis, a data corpus was constructed based on a search for the key words "klim" (climate, climate change) and "glob" (global warming) in three periods of time: the second

quarter of the year 2017, the first quarter of 2018 and the third quarter of the year 2019. The corpus was selected from all the articles on the *Deník Referendum* website and from the print versions of *MF Dnes* and *Ekonom*. The periods were chosen with the intent not to include any particular climate event and at the same time to have a sufficient amount of material for the analysis. The texts were filtered by adopting an economic perspective and relatedly searching for key words such as "economy," "price," "finances," "capital," "investment," "business," "work," "subsidy," "consumption," "market," "profit," etc. The aim was to include all the possible economic issues that could be related to climate change. The resulting corpus of data consisted of 437 texts (see Table 1).

The texts were repeatedly read and coded in the initial phases of the analysis, and codes were created for specific aspects of climate change in the economic context. The analysis is a combination of deductive and inductive coding processes, and an abductive movement between theory and data (WODAK – MEYER 2009). The initial codes were deducted from theory and research questions, while new categories were created inductively when looking for patterns in the data during the coding phase (TAYLOR 2001) (see Table 2). Then the aspects and dimensions of the new categories were examined in a comparison between the alternative and mainstream media, but also with a larger social context and events outside the selected corpus.

TABLE 1: THE NUMBERS OF ANALYZED TEXTS ON CLIMATE CHANGE

	II/2017	I/2018	III/2019	Total
MF Dnes	41	56	118	215
Ekonom	4	0	11	15
Deník Referendum	52	32	123	207
Total	97	88	252	437

Source: Authors.

TABLE 2: CODEBOOK

Deductive codes (discourse analysis)	actors, attributions, arguments
Deductive codes (theory, research questions)	climate change, economy, work, costs and prices, economic growth, subsidy, taxes
Inductive codes (data)	52
	fossil industry, coal mines, nuclear power, energy investments, renewable sources of energy, low-carbon economy, adaptation, mitigation, state politics, opportunity for business, industry, climate deniers, mass media criticism, corporations

Source: Authors.

AT THE INTERSECTION OF ECONOMY AND CLIMATE CHANGE: AN ANALYSIS

We have found significant differences between the discourses of the selected mainstream and alternative media in terms of content, vocabulary, approaches to climate change, and their focus on specific issues and actors. We are aware that these are not opposite extremes and the differentiation into mainstream and alternative categories is problematic, as indicated by the academic discussion on this topic (E.G. RAUCH 2016). First, we focus on a general comparison analyzing the main themes, the actors, the normative positions and the language used by the selected media and then we analyze the main discourses that we found.

THE COMPARISON OF THE MAINSTREAM AND THE ALTERNATIVE MEDIA

There are important differences between the alternative *Deník Referendum* and the mainstream *MF Dnes* and *Ekonom* regarding the content, represented actors, vocabulary, focus and positions towards climate change. Overall, whereas *Deník Referendum* writes about climate issues in great detail, the mainstream media offered only scattered mentions of the topic, especially in the years 2017 and 2018. There is a lack of a systematic approach to the issue in the mainstream. In *Ekonom*, the issue of climate change is almost absent, especially in 2017 and 2018; the issue starts emerging in this newspaper in 2019 (11 texts), which we interpret as an instance of mainstream media taking note of climate change after the very hot summer in Central Europe in 2018, global climate protests and the beginning of a related public debate in the Czech media. In *MF Dnes*

one can read about "drought" rather than about climate change itself, as drought has become a tangible, apparent problem afflicting many Czech households, villages and companies. The discursive effect of putting the emphasis on drought is the exclusion of the term "climate change," which is connected to the need to reduce emissions.[3] The issue of the energy industry itself, which is central for the alternative press, is almost totally absent in the context of climate change in the mainstream media.

The social actors represented in *Deník Referendum* included environmental activist organizations and individual climate activists who publish their views there as well as climate scientists and other academic sources accepted as authorities. Among the other actors that appear in the alternative discourses are critically evaluated state officials. The state is represented as failing regarding the issue of coal energy in the Czech context because it supposedly sides with the coal barons and industrial interests. By contrast *MF Dnes* gives space to both the climate skeptic Václav Klaus, who labels his opponents as "alarmists," and his critics. The newspaper informs about climate protests but not from the point of view of the protesters, who are described as "radical".

Deník Referendum is critical toward the power of corporations, the growth of inequalities, economic growth, capitalism and neoliberalism in general. The main conflict in this daily is between the economy and the environment. In particular, the paper criticizes "the coal barons", the Czech coal plant owners and the industrial lobby. The main climate-related themes in *Deník Referendum* included local climate activism, which was directed mostly against coal mines and coal power plants, and global actors such as the *Fridays for Future* movement, especially during the large, transnationally organized demonstrations such as the one in 2019. The texts discuss concrete solutions to climate change. For instance, they suggest that the Czech society should transform into a low carbon economy and use renewable sources of energy. Their main focus is on mitigation measures and reducing carbon emissions.

As will be explained below in detail, *MF Dnes* focuses almost exclusively on adaptation and ignores mitigation activities. In *Ekonom*, climate change is framed only in the sense that the weather is getting warmer, which might even be positive in Czechia; a warmer climate is described as

advantageous for companies that can make money on the new situation that the climate change is bringing – for example, an Arctic without ice and new business travels. Overall, climate change is framed as an opportunity for business companies and corporations in *Ekonom*.

The vocabulary of the alternative discourse is full of strong expressions. When it deals with natural contexts of climate change, its vocabulary is more neutral, but when it comes to its social and economic consequences, the newspaper uses terms such as "a crisis", "a catastrophe", or "a way to hell". On the other hand, the mainstream media use a rather soothing, calming language assuring us that Czechia will survive the climate change. They avoid using economic terms such as "capitalism," "inequalities," "neoliberalism" and others in relation to climate change, while these notions are present in the alternative press.

While the alternative media are critical towards the corporations and the state, the mainstream media not only do not take a stand on climate change explicitly, but they do not inform about climate change consistently or thoroughly. A major difference between alternative and mainstream media lies in their focus on human action in relation to climate change; the former emphasizes and discusses mitigation strategies, while the latter focuses only on adaptation measures. The mainstream depoliticizes the issue as we cannot find conflictual positions, an open struggle or much criticism there, and both the climate skeptic and the climate alarmist voices are marginal in its reporting. Avoiding the issue of mitigation measures, this framing might be a discursive strategy for dealing with the issue by media owned indirectly by the prime minister's corporation. In the next section the main economic discourses related to climate change will be analyzed in detail.

DISCOURSES RELATED TO CLIMATE CHANGE

There are various ways in which climate change is represented and framed in the Czech media. The discourses can be distinguished in relation to the media organizations: mainstream versus alternative press, as indicated above. Furthermore, the discourses can be categorized as topic-related (REISIGL – WODAK 2009) according to the main issues represented, which in this case are the societal responses to climate change. The first

discourse found in the data is related to adapting to natural threats and disasters brought about by climate change and its economic consequences. The second discourse focuses on reducing carbon emissions and its costs. The third discourse sees climate change as an opportunity for business. There is also a fourth discourse, which is much more sparsely presented – the climate denial discourse. In the next section we will present these topic-related discourses in detail:

1. THE ADAPTATION DISCOURSE

The adaptation discourse is predominant in the mainstream *MF Dnes*, which used to be indirectly owned by the former Prime Minister Andrej Babiš. It draws a picture of climate change as a new problem to which society has to adapt. The discursive strategy of this media source is to label and present climate change in the local Czech context only as a problem of "drought", which might lead to avoiding more complex explanations of the global situation and the need for a broad systematic change.

The newspaper shows that the problem is taken seriously by ministries and regional and municipal administrations, and gives examples of how it is dealt with. Mostly, it is stories about cities' adaptations to drought, torrential rains and floods, and building more resilient infrastructure. State ministries and municipalities invest in technological solutions such as rainwater harvesting, green roofs, planting trees and drought-resilient plants in cities, building ponds and water pipelines for localities threatened by drought, mowing grass less frequently, revitalization of wetlands, building anti-erosion barriers and so on in order to "relieve the overheated cities" and keep water in the landscape. The cities and municipalities cooperate with universities that conduct practice-oriented research and open new study programs addressing the new situation. The Ministry of Agriculture and most of the cities already have their plans for adaptation measures. The newspaper frames these activities in a depoliticized (i.e., nonconflictual) way as expensive but real solutions that are already in progress, and in its view, there is no need to question them. Citizens have to accept that the changed situation demands more public spending and higher investment into adaptation measures, even though it is going to cost billions of Czech crowns. This approach is also defended by the fact that the state receives large sums of money for climate change adaptation,

for instance, in the form of subsidies from the European Union: *"Currently, the state invests roughly twice as much in the restoration and planting of new alleys from its budget as it did in 2013, although only a part of it is earmarked for alleys around roads. A considerable amount of money also comes from European funds for the restoration of alleys – at the moment, projects worth CZK 80 million have been approved. Another 143 million should follow"* (MF DNES 5/2/2018: 3).[4]

The mainstream weekly Ekonom, in its few mentions of climate change, which resemble the situation in the British media in the early 2000s (GAVIN 2009), also positively evaluates the way the problem of drought is being dealt with because there are many governmental programs for keeping water in agricultural land, and new waterworks reservoirs are being planned. Climate change is understood by global economic leaders as the biggest risk that business will face, but Czechia will try to be a leader in new technologies. This discourse thus calms the readers by stating that even though globally climate change is a problem, locally we will be able to deal with it. The depoliticization here takes the form of ignorance of climate change as a global problem that requires a global political solution and also as an issue to be dealt with through technocratic means.

Sometimes climate change is even presented positively and a warmer climate is described as advantageous for agriculture businesses, for instance in cultivating grape vines. In an interview with a successful Moravian winemaker, he says: *"Due to climate changes, the grapes ripen better, which results in higher alcohol content in the wine. When I was buying old vineyards in 2003 and 2004, I used to give a price of around CZK 120,000 per hectare. These were all old vines to be grubbed up, while the estimated price of new vines is now around a million (CZK)"* (EKONOM 25/7/2019: 18). The depoliticization here is similar to the one based on epistemic skepticism. As climate change becomes advantageous to business, it disappears as a problem just as climate change ceases to be a problem if it does not exist.

Adopting a mixed position in relation to adaptation, *Deník Referendum* argues that there are already some adaptation measures realized in cities, such as planting trees, but moves to the mitigation discourse and claims that to prevent more drastic changes, Czechia has to adopt less visible and less politically acceptable measures – such as reducing carbon emissions. The easiest way to do this is to get energy from renewables (DR 21/8/2019).

This daily also claims that to keep water in the land, it must be done not only in ponds but in area-wide landscape adaptations. Furthermore, it makes a more radical argument which is never employed in the mainstream media, namely that the industrial agriculture that massively dries the landscape must stop to keep the agricultural land porous and fertile. The alternative press's discursive strategy is to critically point out the inadequacy and superficiality of current government solutions and highlight the profound systemic changes that need to be made.

In sum, the depoliticizing adaptation discourse is employed primarily by the mainstream newspaper *MF Dnes*, which hails the ongoing adaptation measures. *Ekonom* occasionally adopts a similar position, and the alternative media goes beyond this perspective into the mitigation discourse.

2. THE MITIGATION DISCOURSE

The focus on adaptation measures overshadows the very few mentions of mitigation of climate change in the mainstream media. The debate on carbon emissions is muted to a minimal level. With only one exception, the corporate press mentions mitigation only when discussing other countries. Investing into renewable sources of energy is happening somewhere else, for instance in China. *Ekonom* judges the Green New Deal in the USA negatively since it sees it as very expensive. *MF Dnes* notes the public debates in Germany on electro mobility, a change of diet, taxing meat and a ban on interstate flights with an ironical stance on reducing personal consumption in the name of climate: *"Germans, lovers of fried bratwurst and wide-cut schnitzels, may have to get used to a more modest diet. Instead of juicy steaks they might have a vegetable pancake, instead of pork belly a vegetarian hamburger? It's what saving the climate demands"* (MF Dnes 12/8/2019: title page) Such framing is based on an implicit assumption that highlights the absurd actions resulting from the exaggerated debate. This framing includes reassuring the readership that these actions are happening elsewhere and that our country will not resort to anything so bizarre. The depoliticization here is again spatial as Czechia is excluded from the debate.

The exception is the only critical voice in the mainstream media, which is represented in the Opinion section of *MF Dnes* by a former minister of environment and university professor, Bedřich Moldan, who

supported the student climate protests in 2019: *"Global climate change is much worse than we thought. And the Czech Republic is absolutely unprepared for it. It is not enough to build pools and ponds in the landscape; we have to push to reduce carbon emissions"* (MF Dnes 1/8/2019). He wants the Czech society to focus on the fundamental causes of climate change and mitigation measures against it. According to him, the Czech public is lulled into a false sense of security by the enumeration of actions such as the ponds, but such actions are absolutely marginal. Such criticism may have been allowed in a centrist medium because he is an exceptional voice with great political and academic authority and because he does not represent a leftist viewpoint. On the contrary he is a member of the center-right political party TOP 09.

A focus on the reduction of carbon emissions and its various aspects is the principal approach of the alternative media, represented by *Deník Referendum*. Its authors urge the readers to pay attention to the root of the problem, which in the Czech Republic is coal. Coal mining and coal power plants are interpreted by them as the biggest Czech issue related to climate change as *"the Czech Republic belongs among the worst polluters of the climate in Europe"* (DR 5/9/2019). From this perspective, any prolongation of the operation of coal mines is interpreted as illegal because coal mining contradicts the Paris Agreement, which the Czech Republic signed. Overall, *Deník Referendum* sees the continued support for coal as a "state failure." In the context of the current climate crisis, its contributors consider the further expansion of coal mining as scandalous and understand the state activities as ways of protecting the profits of coal barons.

This particular framing of climate change mitigation might be related to the fact that most authors writing about climate change in *Deník Referendum* are activists of the grassroots social movement We Are the Limits, who protest against the expansion of coalmines and privatization of coal power plants. Furthermore, voices of other environmental organizations such as Greenpeace, the Rainbow Movement (the Czech chapter of Friends of the Earth), and the Green Party as well as the grassroots groups Fridays for Future and Extinction Rebellion are given space in this medium. The political, i.e., conflictual, nature of the coal issue among various social actors thus becomes accentuated in *Deník Referendum*.

The mitigation discourse in the daily includes further criticism of the former Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babiš, who, together with the representatives of Poland and Hungary, refused to sign the agreement on EU carbon neutrality in June 2019. His reasons were presented as economic (the costs of such action were considered too high), and also as related to the Czech Republic's technological unpreparedness for carbon neutrality and the low proportion of emissions from Europe on the global scale. Babiš's argument against fighting climate change is based on an anti-EU discourse in which he promises the Czech people that *"our citizens cannot lose jobs because of European actions to combat climate change that are more strict and ambitious than those for the rest of the world"* (MF Dnes 27/9/2019). Opposing this stance, the Czech environmentalists assume that *"there will be no jobs on a dead planet"* (DR 15/8/2019).

Overall, the dominance of the mitigation discourse in the alternative left media is the opposite of what one can read in the mainstream media, where Czechia is perceived as being threatened by climate change but adapting to it well at the same time. Unlike in the alternative, there is also no mention of Czechia being a cause of pollution in the mainstream media. The alternative, on the other hand, politicizes the issue of coal mining, gives space to actors critical of the government and criticizes the policies of the state as well as its rhetoric. At the same time, the two main opposing discourses of adaptation and mitigation coexist next to each other and do not directly engage with each other; therefore, they do not contribute to any dynamics of polarization.

3. THE OPPORTUNITY FOR BUSINESS DISCOURSE

The climate change as an opportunity for business discourse is most often present in the specialist magazine *Ekonom* in the year 2019. This discourse is compatible with both of the above-mentioned discourses – those of adaptation and mitigation. Following the depoliticizing win-win formula, which excludes conflict, the economic journalists present new technologies for combating drought (e.g. green roofs, vertical gardens or harvesting water) and mitigation activities, such as producing electro mobiles, rechargeable systems or solar panels, as great opportunities for business. Even though climate change is seen as a risk and will probably bring financial losses due to natural disasters and increased temperatures,

it can be easily framed as a commercial opportunity. According to *Ekonom* climate change is literally a hot trend, big changes in the energy sector are approaching and for Czechia it is important not to stay behind: *"The climate change phenomenon changes global business"* (Ekonom 12/9/2019).

Companies worldwide expect their customers to be more sensitive to the carbon footprint of products. There is also a rising pressure of investors on businesses to behave responsibly and sustainably and reduce emissions. It is especially the investment in green technologies that is interesting, but other sectors can also profit from global warming. *Ekonom* suggests, for instance, that pharmaceutical firms can make more profits from selling medicines for new illnesses caused by a warmer climate.

Sometimes the business opportunity discourse is used also in the alternative media; for instance *Deník Referendum* quotes an environmental expert who is also a right-wing politician, M. Kučera: *"The Climate Agreement is a great opportunity for business too. Investment in climate protection brings opportunities for sectors with a high added value"* (DR 5/6/2017). The interests of the business sector seem compatible with the alternative media's critical discourses because the arguments on investing into renewables and new job opportunities support their emphasis on mitigation measures.

Besides demanding the end of the subsidizing of the fossil industry from public money, the environmentalists in the alternative media source discuss various aspects of the transition to renewable sources of energy in the Czech Republic. They think that the Paris Agreement is economically favorable and that there will be new jobs created in the renewable energy sector. Still, within the framework of this discourse they consider the idea of a need to keep the coal industry going in order to sustain employment to be a myth. Furthermore, the daily criticizes the Czech government for not adopting the business opportunity discourse at least in the sphere of supporting investments into solar and wind energy.

The alternative press perceives the skepticism of the Czech public toward solar energy to be a consequence of the recent solar business affair, as the solar energy sector, in the past (2009–2010), included huge state subsidies that damaged the idea of renewables in the country. Furthermore, a minor economic argument about inequalities regarding renewables is

brought into the debate by some environmentalists from the Rainbow Movement quoted in *Deník Referendum*, who warn that renewables should not be available only for rich people and should not divide the society.

The opportunity for business discourse on climate change that is dominant in the mainstream journal *Ekonom* shows that the business sector is willing to change and redirect its investments in line with the examples of the world's leading corporations such as Ikea or Unilever, which have already incorporated climate change in their business plans and declared a transition to renewables. From the alternative media's perspective, it is the government and the coal industry which obstruct the business opportunities related to investing into renewable energy sources. There is thus an element of commonality between the mainstream and the alternative media regarding the role of business in dealing with climate change, which points to a risk of depoliticization. The promise of the market to solve the problem of climate change can unite opposing forces.

4. THE DISCOURSE OF CLIMATE DENIAL AND SKEPTICISM

While climate denial and skepticism were typical of Czech political elites in the past, they have recently become a rather marginal discourse in both alternative and mainstream media. Czechia is infamously known for its former president, the right-wing conservative economist Václav Klaus, whose climate-skepticism used to be very influential locally. In May 2017 he published a book titled *Shall We Be Destroyed by the Climate or by Our Fighting the Climate?* He argued that climate change measures contradict human freedom and the free-market economy, while the climate itself is in a good condition; and he expressed his regret that the *"doctrine of climate alarmism"* is winning considerably in the political sphere (MF Dnes 31/5/2017). Even though Klaus personally has been a rather marginal voice in the 2017–2019 period, it is still possible to find other climate-skeptic voices in the mainstream media. Even though it can be found only in its opinion section, *MF Dnes* makes it possible for the potentially most depoliticizing discourse – the denial discourse – to be presented on its pages.

To give an example of this discourse, a member of Parliament and an economic expert of the Civic Democratic Party replied as follows to a debate on climate between the Green Party and the Bank Council of the

Czech National Bank: *"Let's not fool ourselves that capitalism is the enemy of the environment. It was the centrally controlled economies that were far more environmentally hostile. We see it at every turn in our country today, that thirty years after the fall of communism, or the replacement of central planning by the market, our environment is in an infinitely better state. Development, wealth, [and] new, greener technologies have been brought about by the market and capitalism, not by planning and regulation, which is the universal response of green activists to everything"* (MF Dnes 13/7/2019: 13).

The impact of capitalism and the free market on the climate is a matter of dispute between climate skeptics and green activists. The journalists in Deník Referendum oppose the climate skeptics – both global and local. They criticize actors who deny the existence of climate change in the USA by saying they are a part of lobbyist groups defending unlimited free trade and connected to the fossil industry, for instance the Heartland Institute that is sponsored by oil companies, such as Exxon Mobil and the Koch family: *"The fossil fuel industry, which knew about the climate threat long before the general public, took over this network, linked it to free-market think tanks like the infamous Heartland Institute, and used its billions of dollars to build a vast propaganda apparatus that prevents effective greenhouse gas reductions to this day"* (DR 21/9/2019).

Also, locally, they oppose a politician in the Coal Commission whom they label as a "climate denier", who supports the breaking of the limits of coal mining, and tried to postpone the Parliament negotiations on the Paris Climate Agreement indefinitely; the environmentalists are afraid that he will block decisions about leaving fossil fuels: *"The approval of MP Zahradník, who spreads lies about climate change, denies scientific facts and promotes pollution, is a slap in the face not only to environmental organizations. It is a move against anyone who is serious about the debate"* (DR 5/9/2019).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The Czech political context offers a unique opportunity to assess the intersection of several key elements of the current climate change politics. On the one hand, Czechia is "one of the most skeptical countries in Europe" (ČERMÁK – PATOČKOVÁ 2020: 591). At the same time, Czechia seemed to be, together with the rest of Central and Eastern Europe, an aspiring

student of the West trying to catch up with and return to Europe as a liberal democracy (STARK – BRUSZT 1998). However, this image all but collapsed after its entry into the EU, as new political conflicts became much more open, resulting in the differentiation of political attitudes across various social groups in general (VACHUDOVA 2020), and towards environmental issues and climate change in particular (CVVM 2019; OTTO – GUGUSHVILI 2020; ŻUK 2022). We have decided to analyze this potentially changing situation in relation to climate change and the economy on the level of publicly articulated media discourses. The aim of this article has been to analyze the climate change discourses in the selected Czech media and see their positions within the current political context, which is largely regarded as tending towards a rather skeptical position on the level of the political elites as well as on that of the general population (see also above).

Importantly, we have found out that the sample we analyzed is neither monopolized by the skeptical discourse nor polarized on an axis of climate denial versus climate alarmism. The voices of climate deniers, even though strong in the past, are becoming marginal and slowly fading away from the mainstream. In this respect, Czechia may differ from some other countries in the region such as Poland, which are defined by *"the consistent presence of different forms of scepticism in parts of the media"* (KUNDZEWICZ ET AL. 2017: 12). However, more recent research on Poland points towards a variability similar to the Czech situation (SZULECKI ET AL. 2024).

Climate change is framed differently in different types of Czech media. Whereas the alternative leftist media offer a detailed coverage of the climate change issue together with their critical view of capitalist and neoliberal sources of climate change, and an open critique of the state energy policy, the mainstream media rather avoid any thorough discussion of "global warming". This situation somewhat echoes the one in Great Britain in the early 2000s, when the leftist mainstream there was predominantly engaged in reporting about emissions trading (GAVIN 2009), but without shaking the main capitalist structures (CARVALHO 2007).

There is a significant difference between newspapers regarding the framing of the issue. Whereas the mainstream media focus on the adaptation measures or understand the climate crisis as an opportunity for business again, thus echoing the British media (KOTEYKO 2012), the alternative

left stresses the importance of mitigation. The discourse of adaptation is also represented by the media source owned by the former Czech prime minister during the period under scrutiny. This fact is crucial in understanding the interpretation of climate change by the mainstream press. Although the global problem of climate change is not denied anymore, it is, to an extent, still depoliticized by the mainstream; in particular, the attention of the media audience is turned to government activities in the form of shallow adaptation measures without any explanation of the need to protect the climate for the future, which would mean reducing carbon emissions significantly. The results of our analysis echo Čada's (2023: 506) argument that the discursive frames in the mainstream media *"do not challenge the current political-economic regime."*

The mainstream media do not deny climate change as such, but they deny any discussion of mitigation measures and avoid discussions and arguments criticizing the state energy policy. This approach differs from the more straightforward responsive skepticism found in the work of climate scientist Jan Pretel and partly also in that of geologist Václav Cílek (Mikešová 2023: 548). However, according to the available research, this type of reporting might be one of the reasons for the demonstrated skepticism regarding effective political responses to climate change even on the individual level among parts of the population, for a general argument (see Carmichael – Brulle 2017), on Czechia (see Čermák – Patočková 2020; Ocelík 2022; Hrubeš – Císař 2024). Future research should focus on the "new denialism" discourse (Lamb et al. 2020; Shue 2023; Brulle et al. 2024) that may be currently replacing the old one. Especially the *"push of non-transformative solutions"* (Lamb et al. 2020: 2) connects the mainstream media with this particular discourse. Another type of research should engage with the politicization agenda (Marquardt – Lederer 2022), as the "populist moment" in the climate change discourse may have been more pronounced in the Czech mainstream media in more recent years.

At the same time, there are critical arguments based on mitigation and decarbonization that are presented in the alternative leftist media, which, to some extent, actively try to fight the depoliticization dynamics of the mainstream media. In line with some of the existing research, we have seen that *"politicization and depoliticization are dynamic processes, which always need to be investigated at the discursive level"* (Pepermans – Maeseele 2014:

228). As a result, we can conclude that by presenting critical views, the alternative media contribute to the pluralist nature of the ongoing debate on climate change in Czechia. Of course, their reach and possible influence are limited compared to those of the mainstream media. Still, although it was expected as the most likely outcome, we have not identified the skeptical position as the point of a depoliticizing convergence of climate discourses in the Czech media. This finding may have important implications for the future capacity of the state and/or other agencies to respond to the challenges brought about by climate change and its impact on the future economic development.

Furthermore, similarly to the case of the discourse on sustainable development (see Brand 2010; Redclift 2005), some feared that especially the climate change (adaptation) discourse could be transformed into a depoliticized notion excluding dissenting and critical voices (see Pepermans – Maeseele 2014). The result would be a transformation of the politics of climate change into a seemingly consensual management of climate change, which would create important obstacles for the formulation of alternative visions of economic development. Although we have identified such strategies in the mainstream media, several environmental perspectives which perceive the climate crisis as a serious problem, search for alternative ways of organizing economic production. At the same time, since it is not the very presence of discourses which matters for actual policymaking, but the influence they have in a particular society, the variability of discourses does not automatically secure a policy innovation (see also Brulle et al. 2024). As we have seen in our analysis, since the alternative views are concentrated in alternative leftist media, their actual influence, which is beyond the scope of the present article and remains for future research, is rather limited.

ENDNOTES

1 Response skepticism encompasses "doubts about the effectiveness of responding to climate change, and concern[s] the ability and willingness of social actors to respond to it" (Capstick – Pidgeon 2014: 393).

2 This number can be compared with those for *MF Dnes* (285,000), *Ekonom* (16,000) and the comparable alternative leftist electronic *Daily Alarm* (39,000).

3 Čada (2023: 499) argues that although drought is presented as a result of climate change in the most widely read Czech media, "climate change is problematized in relation to drought only to a minimal extent, and its causes are not discussed" (see also Zandlová – Čada 2024).

4 The quoted texts' bibliographical citations can be found in an appendix published on CJIR webpage.

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APPENDIX

CITED MEDIA ARTICLES

MF Dnes 31/5/2017	Václav Klaus: „Snad Trump odolá nátlaku“, 31. 05. 2017. *Mladá fronta Dnes*, strana: 10, rubrika: Názory.
MF Dnes 5/2/2018: 3	Radka Hrdinová: „Druhá řada stromů“, 05. 02. 2018. *Mladá fronta Dnes*, strana: 3, rubrika: Z domova.
MF Dnes 13/7/2019: 13	Jan Skopeček: „Zelený krásný zaostalý svět“, 13. 07. 2019. *Mladá fronta Dnes*, strana: 13, rubrika: Názory.
MF Dnes 1/8/2019	Bedřich Moldan: „Pomalé Česko a změna klimatu“, 01. 08. 2019, *Mladá fronta Dnes*.
MF Dnes 12/8/2019: title page	Jiří Sládek: „Pryč s masem! Němci zachraňují klima“, 12. 08. 2019: *Mladá fronta Dnes*, strana: 1, rubrika: Titulní strana.
MF Dnes 27/9/2019	František Strnad: „Babiš v OSN: Klima není vše“, 27. 09. 2019: *Mladá fronta Dnes*, strana: 1, rubrika: Titulní strana.
Ekonom 25/7/2019: 18	Jan Richter: „Miroslav VOLAŘÍK: Oteplování vínu svědčí, je silnější“, 25. 07. 2019. *Ekonom*, strana: 18.
Ekonom 12/9/2019	Lukáš Vincent: „Firmy začínají kalkulovat ztráty, které přinesou změny klimatu“, 12. 09. 2019. *Ekonom*, strana: 32, rubrika: Další témata – Klimatické změny.
DR 5/6/2017	(pd): „Čeští politici Pařížskou dohodu podporují, ve Sněmovně ale její ratifikace ještě potrvá“, 05. 06. 2017. *Deník Referendum*, Zpráva, rubrika: Domov.
DR 21/8/2019	Ondřej Rut: „Přechod na zelenou energii je v Praze 3 jen začátek“, 21. 8. 2019. *Deník Referendum*, Komentář, rubrika: Domov.
DR 15/8/2019	(josp): „Klimatické hnutí v Německu dále sílí. Zářijovou stávku podpořily i tamní odbory“, 15. 08. 2019. *Deník Referendum*, Zpráva, rubrika: Svět.
DR 5/9/2019	(jk): „Hlasy ANO vyslaly do Uhelné komise popírače změn klimatu Zahradníka z ODS“, 05. 09. 2019. *Deník Referendum*, Zpráva, rubrika: Domov.
DR 21/9/2019	Josef Patočka: „Na cestě do pekla: jak náš ekonomický systém přivedl svět do klimatické krize“, 21. 09. 2019. *Deník Referendum*, Esej, rubrika: Svět.

Book forum on Quinn Slobodian's *Hayek's Bastards: Race, Gold, IQ, and the Capitalism of the Far Right*

Book forum on Quinn Slobodian's *Hayek's Bastards: Race, Gold, IQ, and the Capitalism of the Far Right*

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ABSTRACT	In this forum, Valentina Ausserladscheider, Béla Greskovits, and Daniel Šitera discuss Quinn Slobodian's Hayek's Bastards: Race, Gold, IQ, and the Capitalism of the Far Right (Zone Books, 2025), which examines the relationship between neoliberalism and the contemporary far right. Slobodian challenges the dominant view that right-wing populism represents a bottom-up revolt of globalization's "losers" and instead argues that today's far right emerged from within neoliberal thought itself. Through an intellectual genealogy, he traces how segments of neoliberalism evolved to incorporate racism, xenophobia, and male chauvinism as natural components of the market order, producing a far-right neoliberal vision of free markets fortified by borders and hierarchy. The contributors to this forum discuss both the book's key insights and its limitations. While Ausserladscheider explores its conceptual implications for understanding the state and nationalism, Greskovits and Šitera test Slobodian's argument against the post-socialist contexts of Hungary and Czechia. Slobodian concludes the forum with a polemical response to their critiques.

KEYWORDS	capitalism, race, far right, Europe, neoliberalism
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EDITORIAL

Eva Svatoňová

Over the last decade, analyses in social and political science have increasingly focused on the growing popularity of far-right populist parties. A prevailing interpretation goes as follows: the ignored "losers" of globalisation vote for far-right parties to express their dissatisfaction with neoliberalism, rampant individualism, and the erosion of welfare states. This interpretation suggests that we are witnessing a revolt emanating from the demands of ordinary people.

Quinn Slobodian's new, provocative, and original book *Hayek's Bastards: Race, Gold, IQ, and the Capitalism of the Far Right* (Zone Books, 2025) challenges this thesis. Drawing not on social science tradition but on intellectual history, Slobodian argues that the contemporary far right – represented by figures such as Javier Milei, Donald Trump, and Viktor Orbán – has, in fact, been articulated within the realm of neoliberalism itself. His interpretation suggests that the rise of the far right is not a spontaneous, bottom-up backlash against global neoliberalism, but rather a long-standing, elite-driven frontlash originating from within the neoliberal movement. In other words, the book's main argument is that right-wing populism cannot be understood as a grassroots rejection of neoliberalism because key factions of the emerging Right were, in fact, mutant strains of neoliberalism.

To substantiate this claim, Slobodian traces an intellectual genealogy that maps the transformations through which some neoliberals began to promote xenophobia, racism, and male chauvinism as inherent aspects of the free market economy. These transformations culminated in a far-right neoliberal vision: a free-market world shielded by strong borders, nativist selectionism, and hard money. Slobodian argues that this vision was the neoliberal response to a post–Cold War dilemma: communism was dead, but "Leviathan lived on" in the form of public spending and the enduring influence of civil rights, feminism, affirmative action, and ecological consciousness – what some neoliberals perceived as poisons injected into the body politic by the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s.

In this forum, three authors – Valentina Ausserladscheider, Béla Greskovits, and Daniel Šitera – discuss the book's content, contributions, and potential shortcomings. Ausserladscheider introduces the book, highlighting some of Slobodian's key insights and reflecting on their implications for the study of nationalism and ideology. In particular, she identifies two main takeaways: first, the way in which far-right neoliberals redefine the state as a container for biologically grounded human capital; and second, the understanding of far-right nationalism not as a nostalgic yearning for belonging in the face of rapid cultural change, but as an economic project aimed at reconstructing the state around the safeguarding of capital and borders.

The other two contributors examine the applicability of Slobodian's argument beyond the core regions of global capitalism, bringing the analysis to the neoliberal far right as it has taken shape in the semi-peripheries of Hungary and Czechia. Both argue that the material conditions of market societies vary significantly across the globe, and conclude that the *capitalisms* of the far right in Europe's post-socialist semi-periphery differ from the type analysed in Slobodian's book.

In the concluding section, Slobodian contextualises the period in which he conducted his research and responds polemically to all three contributions, addressing the issues and questions they raise.

BOOK REVIEW OF SLOBODIAN HAYEK'S BASTARDS: RACE, GOLD, IQ, AND THE CAPITALISM OF THE FAR RIGHT

Valentina Ausserladscheider

A few years ago, in an underground metro station in Vienna, I noticed an advertisement from one of Austria's leading precious metals processors plastered on the wall. The poster depicted the twin-tower skyscrapers of the European Central Bank in Frankfurt in the background, its architecture seemingly crumbling. The entire scene was set amid a storm at sea – dark skies and high waves dominated the image. In the foreground, a ship carried a gold bar, which was presented as a solid anchor in turbulent waters. At the time, I was writing my PhD on economic nationalism and was immediately intrigued by the poster's implicit critique of the European Central Bank during unstable monetary times, with the storm symbolising instability and gold iconographically promising a safe haven. Such imagery is not incidental; the dramatisation of the crisis alongside the promise of gold as a safe haven is a recurring motif in far-right rhetoric, where distrust of supranational institutions like the European Central Bank is paired with appeals to national economic security.

During my doctoral research, I analysed the discourse of far-right populist actors. Yet I could never quite pinpoint why this advertisement from the precious metals industry so strongly evoked the symbolism I had encountered in my research. When I read Quinn Slobodian's brilliant new book, however, the penny dropped. Slobodian shows how certain thinkers within neoliberal circles became obsessed with gold, and how belief in gold as a long-term, stable store of value became widespread among far-right actors. Beyond its sharp analysis of "goldbugs" in neoliberal and far-right circles, the book offers a broader intellectual history of how (neo)liberal and libertarian ideas were reshaped along nationalist, nativist, and racialist lines. This perspective is invaluable for understanding how far-right populist leaders today came to adopt their particular ideological outlooks. In this review, I highlight some of Slobodian's key insights in the book and reflect on their implications for the study of nationalism and ideology.

Slobodian's book skillfully maps the intellectual branches that emerged from the core of the liberal ideas represented by Austrian economists such

as Friedrich Hayek. In his earlier work *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism* (SLOBODIAN 2018), Slobodian described Hayek and other Austrian economists as "globalists," showing how their ideas influenced postwar international institutions such as the GATT, the WTO, and the IMF. Against this backdrop, the central figures of the new book – Murray Rothbard, Hans-Hermann Hoppe, and Peter Brimelow – appear as representatives of intellectual counter-movements to this globalist agenda. While building on some of the ideas of the globalists, and self-identifiying with the liberal tradition, they expanded, distorted, and appropriated Hayek's ideas. It is this process that gives the book its title, which refers to the key protagonists of the book as *Hayek's Bastards*.

By describing how Hayek's ideas were "hijacked" (DEKKER 2025), Slobodian illustrates how these thinkers articulated the three "hards" of their racist-libertarian alliance (SLOBODIAN 2019): hardwired human difference, hard borders, and hard money. Taken together, these three "hards" function as the pillars of an alternative state project – one that redefines the liberal state not as a guarantor of rights or a shared culture, but as a racialised container of human capital to be protected, bounded, and secured. These three elements can be read as counter-movements: those against culture (through appeals to biology and IQ), against open borders (through nativism), and against international monetary technocracy (through gold). These positions set the thinkers apart from other neoliberal intellectuals and allowed them to forge a distinct faction within neoliberal circles. Through differentiation, they created a collective identity (WODAK ET AL. 2009), ultimately laying the groundwork for the "alternative right" – or the "alt right" for short.

The first counter-movement resembles the critiques made in the 1990s and early 2000s against centre-left political and intellectual actors accused of becoming "too cozy" with neoliberalism (FRASER 2015), but in the opposite direction. The far-right actors in Slobodian's book criticise other neoliberals for being too comfortable with multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism, and environmentalism. This is well exemplified through their rejection of the 'cultural Austrians.' In Chapter II, Slobodian (p. 42) explores "the Austrians who took the cultural turn" in the 1980s. Prominently institutionalised at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia, these Austrian economists view economic actors as embedded in a common social world. This "cultural turn" sought to broaden economic analysis by emphasising that markets

are embedded in shared social worlds, where economic behaviour carries cultural meaning rather than being driven solely by rational maximisation. The alt-right faction scapegoated these "cultural Austrians," denouncing their hermeneutical methods and supposed relativism. In contrast, they articulated a worldview in which the ultimate determinants of economic action were biological: IQ, race, and gender – rather than culture. Chapter IV takes this biologisation of economic worth even further when examining "neurocastes" – a new social hierarchy based on intelligence (SLOBODIAN 2025: 93). Seemingly scientific measures of IQ became the determinant of human worth and human value. It also reads as eerily prescient in light of the present. Slobodian shows how this biologised view of human capital created the intellectual scaffolding for meritocratic hierarchies embraced by sections of today's tech elite. The resonance of IQ as a metric of value – or IQ determinism – foreshadows the enthusiasm with which segments of Silicon Valley later aligned themselves with Trump-era politics.

The second counter-movement was directed against neoliberals advocating open borders. In the 1990s, neoliberal circles contained both open-borders advocates and staunch opponents of immigration. This tension allowed the alt-right faction to carve out a nativist alternative. Chapter III examines the "ethno-economy," and in this chapter, Slobodian details how nativism became embedded in free-market visions with closed borders. Grounding human capital in biology and especially race, the alt-right argued that nations should exclude immigrants on ostensibly economic grounds. These arguments were often steeped in white nationalism.

The final counter-movement, discussed in Chapter V, targeted monetary technocracy through gold. As the introductory anecdote suggests, narratives framing gold as a stable store of value are often linked to apocalyptic scenarios and the spectacularisation of a financial crisis. Slobodian documents a wide range of publications advancing this view, where gold is imagined as a way to "profit from the apocalypse" (p. 131). While distrust of central banks as managers of currencies is much older, the 2008 financial crisis created new opportunities for mobilisation. The German party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), originally founded as a Eurosceptic party opposed to the European Monetary Union, benefitted greatly from this moment, becoming a political manifestation of what Slobodian calls the "paleo philosophy" (p. 158). In this way, the widespread distrust of the

euro and the European Central Bank was reframed as a nationalist struggle, allowing AfD to position itself as the political vehicle for goldbug anxieties and to channel monetary scepticism into electoral support. This final counter-movement completed the far-right neoliberal vision: a free-market world protected by strong borders, nativist selectionism, and hard money.

TWO KEY TAKEAWAYS EMERGE FROM THESE COUNTER-MOVEMENTS

First, the alt-right's construction of a distinct identity within neoliberal circles through these counter-movements, in my view, offers important lessons for understanding how it redefines nationalism. Nationalism scholarship often distinguishes between the "nation" and the "state," separating the Kulturnation (the cultural nation) from the *Staatsnation* (the nation-state) (WODAK ET AL. 2009: 191). Building on this distinction, what Slobodian shows can be understood as the far-right neoliberals constructing a vision of the state that diverges sharply from mainstream understandings. This vision of the state departs from the mainstream thought of the *Kulturnation* as bound by a socially constructed national culture and the state as an institutionalisation of territory, laws, and authority. Instead, the far right reconceptualise the state not as a community of a shared culture and national belonging but as a container of biologically grounded human capital. In this vision, the state's sole task is to secure borders and safeguard capital - human and otherwise – while delivering "security for capital and a good return on investment" (SLOBODIAN 2025: 163). This move confirms Wodak's (2009: 191) argument that there is no real separation between state and nation; the *Kulturnation* and the *Staatsnation* become intricately linked and materially bound through racialised and economised ideals.

Such a framework may be understood as a distinct form of economic nationalism. Bringing this perspective into debates on economic nationalism – which is often mistakenly framed as opposed to liberalism (HELLEINER 2002) – sheds new light on how national economies are theorised in far-right neoliberal thought. In this sense, the far right's nationalism differs from nationalism described as nationalist sentiments of a cultural backlash (NORRIS – INGLEHART 2019). It is not a nostalgic yearning for national belonging in response to rapid cultural change, but rather an economic project aimed at reconstructing the state around the safeguarding of capital and borders.

Second, counter-movements have long been central to sociological analysis, most famously in Karl Polanyi's *The Great Transformation* (1944). Polanyi described nationalism as a protective counter-movement against the liberalisation of markets during the industrial revolution. Contemporary accounts explaining the recent rise of the far right often invoke the protective counter-movement as a response to globalisation and world market integration (HAY 2019; HOPKIN 2017; JESSOP – SUM 2020). While it may seem paradoxical that far-right neoliberal intellectuals promote protective counter-movements from within neoliberalism, this coupling may help explain the political success of far-right populist leaders today. More importantly, for the electorate, this development erodes any protective counter-movement capable of shielding constituencies from the harmful effects of free-market capitalism. It also raises deeper questions about the politics of neoliberal intellectuals and the political influence of epistemic communities.

The book concludes by connecting these far-right neoliberal streams of thought to contemporary leaders such as members of the Alternative für Deutschland, Jair Bolsonaro, Javier Milei, and Donald Trump. Political scientists often explain their political success in terms of electoral strategy, suggesting that their neoliberal policies are tactical complements to their nationalist and nativist core ideologies (MUDDE 2007; ROVNY 2013; ROVNY – POLK 2019). Indeed, neoliberal programmes have helped far-right populists achieve mainstream respectability (AUSSERLADSCHEIDER 2024), while research shows that the combination of authoritarian and neoliberal policies resonates strongly with electorates (BETZ 1993; DE LANGE 2007). These accounts, however, sometimes underestimate the depth of the politicians' ideological commitment. These actors often have close ties to think tanks and intellectual networks, which casts doubt on explanations based purely on vote-maximising behaviour (AUSSERLADSCHEIDER 2024; SLOBODIAN 2018, 2019). For instance, Javier Milei cites Murray Rothbard as "one of the most wonderful thinkers of liberty" (SLOBODIAN 2025: 166). The stakes of this debate are significant because whether far-right populists are merely instrumentalising neoliberal ideas for electoral gain or are genuinely committed to them shapes how we understand their long-term projects, alliances, and potential to reshape economic governance and states.

Turning to the side of the intellectuals, the key insight of Slobodian's work is that the alt-right neoliberals have actively sought to mobilise

populism as a political tool. Rothbard's advisory role to Patrick J. Buchanan in the early 1990s, for example, helped formulate "paleo-populism" – a libertarian project of a stateless society that sought to "use the masses to disempower the elite" (p. 58). This raises pressing questions about ideological commitments versus strategic electoral calculations. Can we apply the distinction between "thick-" and "thin-centred" ideologies (MUDDE 2007) to far-right neoliberals as we do to political parties? Is nationalism peripheral to their core programme of a stateless society as their ultimate teleology? In short, is the endpoint a world without states, or a nationalist state "freed" of migrants, international monetary governance, and coercion? Freedom for whom, one might ask – especially given that the architects of these visions are intellectual elites.

Hayek's Bastards is thus much more than an intellectual history of far-right neoliberal thought. It offers a genealogy of how ideas about markets, borders, and money were reshaped in ways that paved the ground for contemporary far-right populism. By tracing how figures such as Rothbard and Hoppe misappropriated and radicalised Hayek's liberalism, the book demonstrates that neoliberalism was never a monolithic project, but a contested terrain in which different factions forged alternative ideological trajectories. The "three hards" provide a compelling framework for understanding how the far-right intellectual currents differentiated themselves from other neoliberals, constructed a collective identity, and ultimately linked their thought to broader nationalist and nativist projects.

For scholars of nationalism, political economy, and intellectual history, Slobodian's book provides a crucial intervention into debates about the ideological underpinnings of the far right. It reminds us that the appeal of far-right populism cannot be reduced to electoral opportunism or cultural backlash alone, but must be understood in relation to longer histories of neoliberal thought and its strategic couplings with nationalism, nativism, and racialised visions of society. In an era when figures like Bolsonaro, Milei, and Trump are shaping political realities across the globe, *Hayek's Bastards* challenges us to take seriously the intellectual infrastructures that sustain them. It is a book that will not only reshape scholarly debates, but also inform broader conversations about the politics of freedom, authority, and capitalism in the twenty-first century.

CAPITALIST DIVERSITY AND THE VARIETIES OF THE FAR RIGHT

Béla Greskovits

Quinn Slobodian's *Hayek's Bastards: Race, Gold, IQ, and the Capitalism of the Far Right* (2025) a rich and exciting account of the marriage of neoliberalism and the far right, with the recent crises of capitalism functioning as matchmakers of this marriage. In my contribution, I introduce the monograph by focussing on its relevance for two major debates, one in political science and one in the history of ideas. Then I point to the ways in which the book contributes to a better understanding of the substance and rhetoric of the ideological clashes and compromises of our time. Finally, I suggest that due to differences in structural conditions and strategic choices, the capitalism(s) of the Far Right on Europe's post-socialist periphery tend(s) to differ from the type analysed in the book.

THE NEW SPIRIT OF CAPITALISM: ANTECEDENTS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

In Quinn Slobodian's words, "The arrival of more than one million refugees to Europe in the course of 2015 created the opportunity for a new winning political hybrid that combined xenophobia with free market values". Yet, as hinted by the author, the "new fix" is not entirely new as it represents only "the most recent strain of a pro-market philosophy based not on the idea that we are all the same but that we are in a fundamental and perhaps permanent way, different" (p. 23).

The notion of the compatibility or even complementarity between neoliberal and far right ideas has a long genealogy indeed. The relationship and its factors and consequences have occupied political scientists for more than three decades. Thus, in a seminal article, Hans-Georg Betz analysed the emergence of new radical right parties as a response to mass immigration from Third World countries and the structural strains of advanced West European capitalist democracies (BETZ 1993). Betz traced these parties' successes at the polls to their ideology merging xenophobia with a neoliberal economic programme, which allowed them to forge multiclass coalitions of electorates disappointed with the tired and ineffective

centre-left and centre-right and helped the far-right neoliberals in their rivalry with left-libertarian parties as well. Far beyond its significance as an economic programme, Betz argued, the reinvigorated neoliberal programme was "a political weapon against the established political institutions," particularly against "the bureaucratic, centralized state which is living off the work of the productive forces in society" (IBID.: 418). Echoing and further elaborating this concept, Herbert Kitschelt termed the combination of neoliberalism with anti-system, authoritarian, ethnicist, and racist appeals the "winning formula," as it was adopted by the most successful radical right-wing parties (KITSCHELT – MCGANN 1995).

Some readers might find it surprising that these antecedents in the scholarship remain unreflected in the book. I can think of two explanations for the omission. One is that after 2010, the earlier idea of the winning formula "went into hiding," to borrow Albert Hirschman's phrase, as it was overshadowed by a new dominant school of thought (HIRSCHMAN 1991: 30). In the New Millennium, the success of authoritarian populists was typically attributed to their attack on liberalism's emancipatory political agenda for emancipating the "wrong" social groups, namely women or sexual, racial, or ethnic minorities, and to their sometimes simultaneous rejection of economic neoliberalism as a source of grave inequalities. Against the background of this double attack, the insight of the early 1990s that neoliberals and their alleged populist archenemies might join forces against liberal democratic capitalism, sounded unconvincing, almost outlandish. However, it is precisely this Zeitgeist of forgetting which makes Slobodian's contention that right-wing populism cannot be equated with "a grassroots rejection of neoliberalism" because "important fractions of the emerging Right were, in fact, mutant strains of neoliberalism," appear as provocative and original (pp. 18–19).

I can see a second and more important reason for Slobodian's missing engagement with the ideas of his close intellectual kin. It is that while placing the neoliberal far right on the conceptual map of conflict lines in advanced capitalist democracies has been a central concern for Betz, Kitschelt, and other authors of relevant scholarship, for an overview (SEE, BERAMENDI – HÄUSERMANN – KITSCHELT – KRIESI 2015), Slobodian does not view his subject through the conceptual lens of political science. Being a historian of ideas, his main interest is in how the new mutant ideology has come

about. This allows me to highlight the relevance of Hayek's Bastards for the century-long debate on the spirit of capitalism.

Let me recall just one milestone contribution to that controversy: Albert Hirschman's critical engagement with Max Weber's *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* in his *The Passions and the Interests* (WEBER 1958; HIRSCHMAN 1997). While both Weber and Hirschman had been puzzled by the transformation of money-making activities from vices to virtues in the popular mindset, they solved the puzzle in different ways. Weber's society-centred solution traced the metamorphosis famously to the grassroots spread of the Protestant ethic that gave believers hope of earning their salvation through diligent gainful work that is liked by the Almighty. However, Hirschman contended that Weber had not answered the essential question: how could the "insurgent ideology" of initially weak and marginal Protestant sects rise to its eventual dominance? Hirschman's alternative, elite-centred account avoided this paradox. *The Passions and the Interests* demonstrates in fine detail that the process which transformed the common-sense image of money-making from a condemned passion-driven pursuit to an honourable and rational interest-governed activity was spearheaded "by a current of opinion that arose right in the center of the 'power-structure' and the 'establishment of the time' out of the problems with which the prince and particularly his advisors and other concerned notables were grappling" (IBID.: 129).

This brief reference to the classic debate helps to point out the similarity of the puzzle that motivated the analysis of *Hayek's Bastards* and assess the originality of the solution offered in the book. Like his predecessors, the author is intrigued by "how apparently fringe political ideologies," in his case racism, chauvinism, and xenophobia, "have moved to center stage", or how "dystopian visions" of degeneration of entire societies "have not stayed on the monograph page but become an active part of political arguments" (p. 118). The originality of Slobodian's answer lies in the combination of – in the terms I used above – a Weberian society-centred and a Hirschmanian elite-centred approach. To put it briefly, by embracing, albeit with cosmetic modifications, previously condemned and despised far-right visions, neoliberals hoped to restore their dominance in the New Millennial capitalism, a position that they saw as threatened despite the end of the Cold War.

ATTRACTIONS OF ILLIBERAL NEOLIBERALISM

Hayek's Bastards starts with a surprising claim which challenges Francis Fukuyama's once famous "end of history" vision of the "victory of economic and political liberalism" over its enemies and rivals: fascism, communism, religious fundamentalism, and ethnic nationalism (FUKUYAMA 1989: 3). Neoliberals, Slobodian contends, did not see themselves as the winners of the Cold War, but felt assaulted and pushed into a precarious position by their progressive adversaries. Consequently, important groups of post-Cold War neoliberals hoped to get back to the centre of the power structure as if by going through the backdoor, namely through finding new allies and ideological inspiration not among the moderate conservatives but in the hitherto quarantined far-right camp. This detour has fundamentally shaped the lens through which the neoliberals looked at the vexing problems of their time. Alas, in their view, there were many problems.

First, history was far from over but carried on as a disruptive sequence of new state formations and secessions, ethnic wars and ethnic cleansings, and climate change and famines, which launched massive flows of migrants and refugees from the affected countries and regions. Second, as the neoliberals put it, "Leviathan lived on. Public spending continued to expand even as capitalism became the only surviving economic system" (p. 9). Third, downsizing the "nanny state" that was further burdened by the costs of integrating the immigrant masses, seemed difficult amidst the surviving ideological climate of the 1960s and 1970s, when the left-libertarian social movements and parties "had injected the poison of civil rights, feminism, affirmative action, and ecological consciousness into the veins of the body politic" (Ibid.). Fourth, while apart from its emancipatory legacy, the Fordist "Golden Age" of capitalism was a thing of the past, the emergence of the "information economy" and the "knowledge economy" created intensive new demands for human capital. Finally, recurrent racial riots, financial meltdowns, and, lately, pandemics led to the erosion of popular trust in the existing systems of law enforcement, finance, and health care.

The fact that the neoliberal thinkers turned to the Far Right for inspirations and problem-solving ideas, did not mean that they embraced the far-right arguments and policies without further ado. Rather, Slobodian's new winning political hybrid was made possible by the "new fusionism"

and "scientization" leading to "the reconfirmation of discredited prejudices as scientific truths" allegedly taught by cognitive psychology, genetics, biological anthropology, and other disciplines (pp. 8, 10). The fusion helped to translate the wide-spread popular disaffection with capitalist liberal democracy into political gains for the Far Right and neoliberals alike. On the one hand, scientisation normalised the far-right narratives. On the other hand, it also offered the key to the "backdoor" through which the neoliberals turned illiberal could re-enter the establishment of their time while simultaneously rising to prominence in the ranks of anti-establishment challengers as well.

To make the adopted discriminatory claims appear compatible with their own tradition of thought, the neoliberals took some of their most important tenets as points of departure but deviated from them, allegedly in line with new scientific discoveries. Herein lies Slobodian's main contribution: in the masterful operationalisation and rich substantiation of the ideational innovations, conflicts and compromises which laid the groundwork for Hayek's bastards' triple hard policies: hard borders to combat immigration; hard budget constraints on emancipatory education and welfare spending in line with the resurfaced old-new paradigm on the hard-wired and hard-to-change differences in human intellect; and hard money, namely gold, to open up escape routes for individuals and families from the morally bankrupt, degenerated societies of the New Millennium. In addition to the fine analysis of the respective contributions by academics, pundits, and policy makers, Slobodian illustrates the aesthetic and passionate aspects of these ideological battles with ample references to influential novels, newspaper articles, newsletters, and blogs, which make the monograph an even more fascinating read.

Thus, to re-arm the state as an "ethno-state" which could combat unwanted immigration, neoliberals had to depart from their fundamental principle that unrestricted movements of capital, labour, goods, and ideas offer superior conditions for economic prosperity. Their new common sense was that labour mobility was not merely harmful (as immigrants lacked the culture and/or genes for successful integration), but even unnecessary for development because foreign trade could be a perfect substitute for the transborder movement of workers. Critical of the Hayekian legacy of elite-centred "trickle-down educationism," some neoliberals advocated

strategies to reach out to the rednecks, who, after all, had to live with the immigrants, and "use the masses to disempower the elites". Before long, another neoliberal tenet was under attack: the idea that humans are fundamentally equal at least as homines oeconomici. Even this minimalist notion of equality was at variance with the new, "partially genetic understanding of human differences" that denied the equal rationality of women and non-white "races". Consequently, "IQ racism" emerged as the ideological underpinning of the rise of the "ethno-economy" complementing the ethno-state. By ending the financing of allegedly wasteful affirmative actions for low-IQ women and home-grown or immigrant racial and ethnic minorities, the state was retooled to serve more efficiently the high-IQ "neurocastes," the rulers of the knowledge economy. Finally, "catastrophe libertarians'" activist efforts to offer something concrete, i.e. "safe areas, free trade zones, communication and transportation immune from the state", signalled that the earlier trust in public authorities as guardians of minimal but essential conditions of social order evaporated (pp. 58, 117, 132, respectively).

STILL THE AGE OF REACTIONARY RHETORIC?

With all these intellectual transformations, neoliberals could become xenophobes, racists, male chauvinists, and even doomsday prophets on their own terms. The notions of hard borders, hard IQ, and hard money have served Hayek's bastards well while designing their new illiberal persona and building the bridges to their new far-right brothers in arms. But how could the same ideas help neoliberals in their conflicts with their left-libertarian rivals? The answer is that the ground for "hard" solutions was prepared by reactionary rhetorics, which neoliberals used to debunk progressive policies related to immigration or affirmative action. To recall, Hirschman outlined three ways in which reactionaries argue that progressive action meant to improve human society is likely to fail. The "futility" argument suggests that such action would have no impact at all; according to the "perversity" logic, the impact would be the exact opposite of what was hoped for; and the "jeopardy" claim posits that although the intended impact was achieved, it undermined earlier progress made in different fields (HIRSCHMAN 1991). Without using Hirschman's terminology, Hayek's Bastards demonstrates the strong presence of this reactionary triad in the neoliberal right-wingers' attacks on the legacy of the Great Society of the 1960s.

Futility arguments were used to explain inequality and criticise efforts to combat it in diverse contexts, such as the economic success of immigrants of South Asian descent versus the fiasco of Caribbean immigrants of African descent in the U. K.; "Black/white differences in crime rates" in the U.S.A.; or the failure of affirmative action programmes to mitigate the Black/white gap in human capital-intensive professions. In all these cases, the futility was explained on the grounds that, as Peter Brimelow put it, "group differences in brainpower put any attempt at equalizing outcomes 'on a collision course with reality' [...] and 'race bureaucrats' were misguided to think that this could be remedied by 'quotas and censorship'" (pp. 77, 116; Brimelow cited on p. 96).

The perversity thesis was adopted by, among others, Charles Murray in his criticisms of local and global visions of an open society and the welfare state. Paradoxically, Murray claimed, "the more open a society becomes, the more it becomes a closed caste system". This is because "[m]ore intelligent members of society were being siphoned from their communities of origin into enclaves of elite education and high-income employment, leaving the low-intelligence populations to multiply, encouraged by the perverse incentives of a welfare system that rewarded large families" (p. 96).

Examples of the jeopardy thesis also abound. To mention but one, Andrew Shenfield' argued that "[f]reedom of movement of men and goods was a fundamental principle of classical liberalism". However, keeping borders open in the age of mass migration leads to intractable problems of assimilation. To make things worse, the welfare state functions as "a magnet for the feared hordes." Alas, "immigration by people of such different races and cultures in enormous numbers might transform the character of a host nation" (p. 78).

What does the prevalence of these rhetorical strategies tell us about the Zeitgeist of our time and the stakes involved in the most recent escalation of ideological battles? To recall, Hirschman traced such "major polemical manoeuvres" to "the stubbornly progressive temper of the modern era." Having to act in a hostile environment, reactionaries attacked their adversaries not directly but in a roundabout way, which involved at first seemingly endorsing their visions and policies but then rejecting them for their unwanted negative consequences and side-effects (HIRSCHMAN 1991: 11).

As we learn from Slobodian, neoliberals found the post-Cold War environment no less hostile – hence their preference for roundabout rather than direct anti-progressive and far-right rhetorics. Indeed, far-right arguments were for long banned from public discourse.

Do then the rhetorics of Hayek's bastards suggest that the battle between neoliberal right-wingers and their progressive adversaries – and thus the progressive era itself – is not yet over? It seems to be the case. But who knows? The relentless, massive attacks under Donald Trump's second presidency on immigrants, women, and racial, ethnic, and sexual minorities, and on the legal, institutional, and financial frameworks and schemes aiming at their emancipation, leave this vexing question wide open.

GRAMSCI'S BASTARDS

Finally, let me briefly comment on the general applicability of the neoliberal far-right capitalist model. In this respect, I sense some uncertainty in the monograph. On the one hand, the title mentions *the* capitalism of *the* Far Right, with both being in the singular. In the conclusion, we read about how the new capitalist spirit has travelled from its countries of origin to Argentina, which is currently ruled by Javier Milei, who is mentioned as "one of Hayek's bastards", and, via the Mises Institutes, to other Latin American and East-Central European countries as well. On the other hand, the conclusion stresses that "novel forms of politics…have their own intellectual lineages and material preconditions" (p. 167). However, the material conditions of market societies are not identical across the globe but exhibit large variation, which is evident when we move from the centres of the capitalist world to its semi-peripheries and peripheries. By implication, if material conditions both matter and differ, they should predict or at least allow the existence of *diverse combinations of capitalisms with varied right-wing politics* instead of a single uniform far-right pattern.

Post-socialist East-Central Europe is a case in point. There, the structural context of the post-socialist transformation created risks and opportunities which differed significantly from the material preconditions of far-right capitalism in affluent and advanced Western societies. Instead of struggling with left-libertarianism's emancipatory legacy, the tensions of multicultural and multiethnic immigrant societies, and the tasks of

the advent of the knowledge economy, the East-Central European political elites grappled with a no less vexing but quite different problem-set: building and re-building sovereign nation states; managing economic dependency – e.g. by creating a national bourgeoisie; and fighting the depopulation caused not least by the emigration of many young, skilled, and educated members of the labour force.

Without a doubt, neoliberal economic strategies were central to all the paths of nascent capitalism and shaped the new social order in all its variants. Nevertheless, the specificities of the transformation agenda made a deep impact on neoliberalism's complementary as well as conflictual coexistence with varied strains of far-right politics. Importantly, the logic of the interplay between state, nation, and the capitalist economy was often reversed. While in the West, neoliberalism could be seen "as a project of retooling the state to save capitalism" and "the nation…understood as both a racial and economic asset for the Far Right" (pp. 19, 69 – with a reference to Brimelow on the latter page), in the East, the Right viewed the neoliberal economic transformation as an instrument that provided assets for (re)building the nation and the national economy, or was critical of the massive import of foreign ideas and influences, for details and a comparison (SEE BOHLE – GRESKOVITS 2012).

Thus, the marriage of nation builders and neoliberals in the Baltic States was cemented by converging interests. Through a fast liberalisation and a re-orientation of foreign trade, privatisation of state assets, and downsizing of the welfare state, radical neoliberalism appeared as the champion of national economic sovereignty and the decreasing dependence on the former imperial power the Soviet Union and later Russia. In turn, by disenfranchising and/or forcing into emigration many members of the sizeable Russian minorities, Estonia and Latvia's radical nationalists pre-empted the political backlash against the painful reforms.

In contrast, the relationship between neoliberals and the Right has been much less harmonious in Hungary. One important reason for this has been the lasting alliance between the neoliberals and the post-communist Left that included three terms of their governing together in a coalition, which explains why these actors have been labelled "left-liberal" by their right-wing rivals. However, before 2010, far-right ideas rarely appeared in

the attacks on the left-liberal governments' timid measures to emancipate women, the Roma, or the LGBTQ minority. Rather, the Hungarian Right used conventional arch-conservative rhetoric against "a political leadership hostile to religion, nation, and family" (ORBÁN 2017).

During Premier Viktor Orbán's lasting rule that started in 2010, neoliberal policies have been implemented in tandem with economic nationalist measures such as protectionist regulations and subsidies to support the weak native bourgeoisie and friendly groups within the middle-class. Since the refugee crisis of 2015, the regime's rhetoric became radicalised and combined cultural anti-liberalism, hostility to financialised global capitalism and, time and again, coded antisemitism. Thus, in 2017, Bloomberg reported: "Hungary plans to crack down on non-governmental organizations linked to billionaire George Soros now that Donald Trump will occupy the White House, according to the deputy head of Prime Minister Viktor Orban's party. The European Union member will use 'all the tools at its disposal' to 'sweep out' NGOs funded by the Hungarian-born financier, which 'serve global capitalists and back political correctness over national governments'" (SIMON 2017). While this combination is reminiscent of the populist double-attack pattern mentioned above, its peripheral character is revealed by the fact that its targets were not truly "homegrown" ones, but foreign powers and their local mercenaries, and importers and imitators of fashions alien to the Christian faith and the national spirit. Thus, the powerholders bothered less with the "scientisation" than with the "theologisation" of xenophobic, anti-LGBTQ and racist rhetorics, or used such arguments pragmatically to justify the implied policies.

Hardly would Hungarian right-wingers qualify as Hayek's bastards then. An irony of ironies is that in a country which for long was a frontrunner of neoliberal economic reforms and then became home of one of Europe's most resilient electoral autocracies, the Hayek Institute had to close in 2005, after just four years of existence. Indeed, as late as in 2017, Hans-Hermann Hoppe and Murray Rothbard's Hungarian translator complained: "it is still the case today that the works of Mises, of Rothbard, of the great Austrian thinkers are absolutely unavailable in Hungary – literally nothing, not even a single article by these writers is available in our language, and very few people speak English" (MISES INSTITUTE 2017).[1]

Nevertheless, the Hungarian right-wing rulers found their own winning formula: it consisted in relying on a Gramscian roadmap for rebuilding the Hungarian Right – first through civil society organisation and contention and then, while they were in power, through state policies. To be sure, the adoption of Antonio Gramsci's legacy was highly selective. While his ideology was rejected, his hegemonic strategy was skilfully practised by Premier Orbán, who had studied Gramsci's work in the mid-late 1980s for his diploma thesis on the Polish Solidarity movement. It is telling that in 2017, Orbán praised the "war of position" fought in 2002–2010 by his powerful Civic Circles' Movement with the following words: "I remember that our meetings and lecture-tours all over the country laid the groundwork for the present situation when the social Hinterland, or, in socialist parlance, embeddedness, of the Christian, national and civic right is much more robust than that of our rivals" (ORBÁN 2017).

As it happens, the full recognition of the political power of ideas sometimes follows rather than precedes the first materialisation of their real-world impact. This is the case with Gramsci's discovery by the Hungarian Right, whose ideologues published more essays and manuals on the Gramscian "grand strategy" than their left-liberal rivals. One of these publications is introduced with the following words: "Going beyond investigating and describing how the grand strategy works...the political science of the new prince is a grand strategy itself: what formerly belonged to the left, now belongs to the right. Gramsci is already ours" (FODOR 2022: 13).

HAYEK'S BASTARD? VÁCLAV KLAUS' FAR-RIGHT FRONTLASH FROM CENTRAL EUROPE

Daniel Šitera

In October 2024, Zürich's Liberal Institute published its Western Civilisation Declaration. The declaration calls for a reclamation of the "potential" of the West's past achievements against its foes, who are destroying it "from within" (BAGUS – ESFELD 2024). Three people were chosen as the patrons of the declaration: Václav Klaus, Javier Milei, and Jordan Peterson. In his excellent book *Hayek's Bastards*, Quinn Slobodian (2025) mentions the current Argentinian President as one such "bastard" of Latin America and as an intellectual heir to the book's hero, Murray Rothbard. Peterson, a global superstar of far-right psychology and IQ debates, might also be a subject of the book. His intellectual allegiance to Charles Murray, another central figure, makes this connection clear. The first of the three mentioned names, however, no longer fills the pages of global media and might require an introduction; yet Klaus remains highly relevant to Slobodian's interpretation of the far-right's rise. That interpretation suggests that the rise of the far right is not a sudden bottom-up backlash against global neoliberalism from the heart of society, but rather a long-standing, elite-driven "frontlash" originating from within the ranks of the neoliberal movement (pp. 10–12).

In other words, Slobodian's approach allows us to reappraise the far right of neoliberalism and the neoliberalism of the far right. He does this by historicising their co-evolving intellectual origins and uneven march from the margins to the mainstream. Although centred on the origins and evolution of the Austrian School in the US and German-speaking Central Europe, Slobodian's storytelling and empirical research remain open for others to introduce new figures into the panopticon of *Hayek's Bastards*. I take this opportunity to showcase Klaus as an exemplary figure bridging both Central Europes: the German-speaking one of Germany or Austria, and the post-communist one of Czechia or Hungary.

Since 1990, Klaus has been a member of the Mont Pelerin Society (MPS), a core network within the neoliberal movement. Between late 1989 and 2013, he also served as the Minister of Finance of Czechoslovakia, the Czech Prime Minister, and the President of Czechia. The fact that he

supports *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) as its "real fan and follower" and his call to articulate a clear "ideology" at one of the party's defining congresses in Stuttgart in 2016 were widely interpreted as a sign of his radicalisation – a shift from a mainstream politician to a far-right intellectual in the making (KLAUS 2016). Yet Slobodian helps us to grasp Klaus (2024B) and some of his Central European peers much better, perhaps to even see them as they see themselves: as lifelong radical defenders of "normality" against the internal foes of "Western civilisation."

Indeed, Klaus has presented himself to Western audiences not only as a radical opponent of communism, but also as someone with lived experience of it. He also offered his political experience in building a free yet national capitalism in Czechia through the decommunisation and division of the Czechoslovak political federation and monetary union in the 1990s. Thanks to this, since roughly the early 2000s, he could position himself as a far-sighted critic of the post-communist "new 'isms' – cultural relativism, human rightsism, multiculturalism, NGO-ism, feminism, homosexualism, environmentalism, juristocracy, and mediocracy" (KLAUS 2014), all underpinned by the EU-centred (meta-)ideology of so-called Europeism. This longstanding critique also provided a short path for Klaus to present himself as a master interpreter of "Austrian School sages" (p. 17), who supposedly had a recipe to counter all these new isms. One might nevertheless ask to what degree this recipe complemented what Slobodian identifies as the neoliberal far right's "*three hards*: hardwired human nature, hard borders, and hard money" (p. 23). These three hards include appeals to human nature to justify racial hierarchies, borders to protect Western ethnostates from non-white migration, and money as the backbone of gold-based ethnoeconomies.

Thus, I also offer Klaus' frontlash from Central Europe to show the limits of the thesis and point to varieties in construing these three hards. Slobodian's argumentation at times emphasises the centrality of Americanised – "cultural" or "racial" (pp. 44, 63) – Austrians in the transnational merger of neoliberalism and the far right in non-US spaces of Europe and Latin America. Against this background, I return to early discussions on neoliberalism in Central and Eastern Europe, which viewed it as a global "bricolage" (EYAL 2000: 52) rather than a one-sided, West-centred transfer with transnational roots that were "forgotten" (BOCKMAN – EYAL

2002: 343) in the West. To my knowledge, this aligns with Slobodian's emphasis on "mutant strains of neoliberalism" (p. 19), but I recentre his story from the American origins of the neoliberal far right to what the book treats as their return transfer to Germany and Central Europe.

KLAUS AND THE OTHER AUSTRIANS

Klaus can be placed in a club of the book's heroes only in terms of a neoliberal "family feud" at home and internationally (p. 24). For the occasion of this essay, besides other sources, I analysed the online archive of Klaus' English and German speeches and writings between 1996 and 2025, as well as his many books published since the early 1990s.[2] All these sources suggest only a few direct connections to and mentions of Americanised Austrians such as Rothbard, Murray, or Hans-Hermann Hoppe on Klaus' part. Klaus might have deserved praise in Murray Rothbard's book for his zealotic reform rhetoric, and contributed, along with Hoppe, to a *festschrift* for Gerard Radnitzky in the 1990s (SEE ŠÍMA – ŠŤASTNÝ 2000: 161). His name also appeared prominently alongside that of Charles Murray in the Cato Institute circles (CATO INSTITUTE 2013). Yet one might rather count the many feuds. As early as 2000, Klaus' young fellow neoliberals from Prague's Liberal Institute, Josef Šíma and Dan Šťastný, delivered a merciless critique of him for hardly matching such personalities – they said that his actions were all strong rhetoric but weak practice in neoliberalising Czechia. In one of Hoppe's (2012) rants, Klaus was accused of being a *de facto* crypto-socialist due to his support for the Beneš Decrees, which sanctioned both the expulsion and expropriation of Czechoslovakia's Germans after WWII. Following his political career, Klaus also lasted just about a year as a distinguished senior fellow at Cato before being expelled in 2014 due to his views on homosexuality and Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Hence, I wonder to what degree Klaus' merger of the far right and neoliberalism is a result of borrowing from the "Americanization" of Austrian economics and the transfers between "the United States and Central Europe" (pp. 18, 43). An alternative route would be to see Klaus' frontlash as a result of the (trans)national struggle over neoliberal hegemony in the specific context of (late and post-)communist Czechia (ŠITERA 2021; CHARVÁT ET AL. 2023) and, as Slobodian and Plehwe (2020) noted, over the place of Central and Eastern Europe in the battle over "Europe." One could

go even deeper into Klaus' intellectual roots in the 1960s, when he began to blend Czech ethnonationalism and liberal political economy with the parallel discovery of the Austrian School through the socialist calculation debate (WILLIAMS 1997; KLAUS 2013B). Much of this informs Klaus' position in the fractured field of Czech neoliberals, where even his foes have sentiments reminiscent of Šíma and Šťastný (2000: 161): a mix of admiration for his leadership in the neoliberal turn in Czechia and ultimate contempt for his being "arrogant" and two-faced. Today, Klaus officially sits in Prague's "little castle" Hanspaulka, namely in the office of the Institute of Václav Klaus, which has been financed by the two richest Czech billionaires, the late Petr Kellner and Pavel Tykač (one a finance, and the other a fossil-fuel oligarch, both key beneficiaries of the post-communist privatisation).

Klaus' explicit far-right movement started sometime around the mid-2010s. This also marked the end of his appearances at Euro-Atlantic think tanks (including the Fraser Institute in Canada, the Institute of Public Affairs in Australia, and the Institute of Economic Affairs in the United Kingdom) and his shift toward more (post-communist and German-speaking) Central European and further Eastern venues, especially his beloved Danube Institute in Budapest. All this, however, tells a slightly different story from Slobodian's. Klaus (2024A, 2024B) has for decades been supplying an autobiographical reading of "Mises, Hayek, Friedman and similar scholars," which initially carried a flavour of (post-)communist "experience" and was then gradually positioned as a recipe for the renewal of the West through a return to "authentic Judeo-Christian values." This lacked the paleolibertarian obsession of "racial Austrians" such as Rothbard, Murray, or Hoppe with biological race and IQ – or science in general – as the basis of their three-hards project. Klaus instead developed his adoration for the ethnostate and ethnoeconomy. He came closer to the "cultural Austrians" by emphasising deep embedding in distinct national cultures and different civilisations (pp. 42–46). All of these were then explained as historical outcomes of contradictory tensions: tensions between the "spontaneous, evolutionary (Hayekian) process" and planned, collectivist "constructivism" (KLAUS 1996B), as well as between long-durée "human action" and the technocracy of "human design" (KLAUS 1992: 50). In other words, Klaus' pathway to supplying far-right neoliberalism went through pure and simple individualistic ethnonationalism and cultural chauvinism rather than through IQ-based scientific racism.

NEW COMMUN*ISMS* FROM AND IN THE WEST

Slobodian mentions the loosely defined spaces of German-speaking "Central Europe" and post-communist "Eastern Europe" a few times, particularly when showing how early post-communist neoliberalisation was constructed by Western neoliberals as a benchmark for lambasting reform failures in Western Europe and North America (pp. 11, 13, 18, 51). The construct or rather the project of post-communist "Central Europe" or the "East" more broadly has also come to function as a benchmark for racists in Western Europe and North America, as it is imagined as the place of the "Last White Man standing" (KALMAR 2022: 159). Such fantasies of Central Europe speak to Slobodian's appeal for historicising an elite, supply-side frontlash of the far right by neoliberal intellectuals as a strange bedfellow of what has mostly been interpreted as a demand-side popular backlash against neoliberal globalisation. For me, this is also a chance to foreground Klaus and many of his Central and Eastern European fellows to ensure that they are not "forgotten" again (BOCKMAN – EYAL 2002: 343). As Pavel Barša, Zora Hesová, and Ondřej Slačálek (2021A: 14) remind us, Klaus belongs among those radical conservatives and orthodox neoliberals who originally constructed "Central Europe" not as a "backlash" against the West, but as a contradictory ticket for re-entering it. The contradiction consisted in desiring to re-enter the *particularistic* vision of Western civilisation, a place of origin of Judeo-Christian values, enlightenment, and capitalism, while becoming sceptical of what they personally encountered as the self-destructive reality of the *universalistic* West from the very start.

This early scepticism formed the basis for a growing frontlash over time. Its roots were grounded in efforts to convince Western European elites of the unique value of Central Europe as a surviving victim of Soviet kidnapping and a traditional repository of Western civilisation, which granted the region a natural place within the borders of Western particularism (BARŠA 2024). This particularism was, however, perceived as being betrayed, especially by West European elites through their commitment to an ever more regulationist and universalist version of Western capitalism and society, as encapsulated in Klaus' repetitive mantra of "Europeism" as a meta-ideology for many new post-communist "isms" (KLAUS 2014, 2024A). What might today appear as a backlash is thus a radicalised version of this historical suspicion: the consequential response is that Central Europe

must be again liberated from the "virus" of progressivist collectivism, this time imported from Western Europe and North America (KLAUS 1998, 2012, 2024A). For Klaus, the EU's multiple crises, from the eurozone crisis to the refuge crisis up to Covid-19, served merely as a backdrop, vindicating his early suspicions and justifying the call for a new liberation.

Klaus thus provides a Central European mirror to Slobodian's US-centred story. There are similarities in their understandings that today's West is in a crisis, one that is not external but comes from the heart of the failure of "universalist" or "progressive" elites in the West. Slobodian shows how this core far-right argument stemmed from the MPS's post-Cold War search for new internal enemies, and the far right's conviction that the US "masses" should be co-opted into this agenda, as they had abandoned New Deal redistributionism long ago (pp. 7–10, 56–59). Speaking at a 2012 MPS meeting in Prague, Klaus (2012) appealed to his fellow MPS members by arguing that they were on the losing side in the fight with the "leftism of intellectuals" because they had abdicated the ambition to use Hayekian "practical knowledge" when speaking to the "working classes," who, as his lived communist experience told him, never truly believed in socialism. Nothing of this was new. In the 1990s, Klaus (1992: 57) downplayed critiques of his nationalist shock therapy in Czechia by domestic elites and even the IMF and the World Bank by pointing to the support he received from the "wisdom" of "ordinary citizens." The very same reforms in Europe's "East" were then used as examples by Klaus (1995: 90) to brandish the "failed reform in Western Europe," where neoliberalisation ended up "half-way" with the worst possible destination between the paths to capitalist spontaneity and socialist constructivism: the Third Way. It was this (post-)communist autobiography through which Klaus contributed to the MPS's meetings since the 1990s (remember Rothbard mentioning him in this way), while the perception of the nineties as a missed window of opportunity fuelled his further positioning along the far-right axis in terms of the three hards.

THE VARIETIES OF THE THREE HARDS

Indeed, Klaus' speech at Seoul in 2017, his last speech at any MPS meeting so far (as far as I know) was much more optimistic. In this speech, Klaus (2017) openly challenged former MPS President Pedro Schwartz in

defence of Donald Trump and Europe's far right, presenting them as new agents of "powerless people" about to bring a "rebellion of the masses" against the arrogant "elites." Yet, just as his path to this moment was rather specific, Klaus' frontlash along the three hards was too.

Let's start with hardwired human nature. The 2015 refugee crisis was not a point of radicalisation but rather an opportunity for Klaus to reemphasise his longstanding Hayekian views about the EU elite's multicultural constructivism versus historical ethnocultural spontaneity. Alluding to the great replacement conspiracy, Klaus (IBID.) framed the "mass migration," as ordered by the elites in their plan to construct a "new Europe," in contrast to the natural supply of a spontaneous "individual migration." Even though he praised Thilo Sarrazin, who borrowed his anti-migration arguments from Murray's IQ research (p. 123), Klaus himself was ultimately satisfied with ethnocultural arguments. The idea of seeing white Euromales at the top of a racial hierarchy and dividing civilisations accordingly never explicitly resonated with him. Since the early 2000s, he was more interested in blaming Europe's internal civilisational decline for the crisis, as, among other factors, multiculturalism (initially without the migration dimension) drove both a "quantitative demographic decline" and an acceleration of "qualitative alterations connected with changes in behavioural patterns, in working attitudes, in prevailing values, habits and beliefs" (KLAUS 2004). So if anything threatened Europe's Judeo-Christian civilisational cohesion, it was its internal cultural abandonment by European elites, a project that eventually aimed to dissolve it in mass mixing with peoples from different cultures.

All this connects with the hard borders of the ethnonational state. This particularistic civilisationism exposed the elites' deeper betrayal of the "traditional way of looking at the origin and organization of human society," namely their replacement of "nation (or a nation-state) with continental or planetary thinking," and of ethnocentric "cohesion and homogeneity" with multicultural "diversity" (KLAUS 2017). The ethnostate and ethnoeconomy were thus historical cases of the natural order (p. 23). They emerged through a Hayekian, long-durée process of spontaneous "human action" and institutional evolution, which Klaus (1992: 50) contrasted early on with the post-Maastricht EU as a constructivist case of "human design." This would define his views on the Eurozone crisis of the early 2010s and

the 2015 refugee crisis, which he saw as a direct outcome of the EU design. Such a critique cannot be disentangled from his (autobiographical) narration of the (anti-)communist and ethnonationalist history of the Habsburg Empire and Czechoslovakia. I will briefly exemplify it by looking at his view of the (post)communist history of Czechoslovakia as a lesson learned and as a justification for one of his recurring themes, namely ethnonational secessionism within and from supranational political and economic orders (pp. 17–18, 149).

Klaus' opposition to European Monetary Union (EMU) is a variation on Slobodian's story of hard money. He was neither a goldbug venerating gold hoarding as a response to the euro, as he admitted to a Swiss goldbug magazine that he did not "hold gold" (KLAUS 2015A), nor a supporter of the "knowledge economy," which he criticised with references to Hayek's *The Use of Knowledge in Society* (KLAUS 2012). This made him less susceptible to the ethnoeconomic science of *Volkscapital* and IQ hierarchies. Yet his critique of the EMU was no less vocal. Klaus' (1996A) early warnings about EMU-centred unification stressed its incompatibility with Europe's (ethno)economic heterogeneity, which is rooted in "various 'national tendencies,' traditions, [and] customs that are difficult to change due to their long-standing historical roots." Among other arguments, he offered himself as an expert on the topic, having overseen the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, which, as he often emphasised, was a monetary union of just two different national economies, but was already dysfunctional and overly redistributive. For Klaus (2013A), the Eurozone crisis of the early 2010s thus became another opportunity to present Czechoslovakia's dissolution as a model for Greece to "leave" the EMU as its first "victim."

The peaceful dissolution of Czechoslovakia also ended a two-nation federation. Klaus later applied this as a model for post-2014 Ukraine in Europe's East and the post-2016 Brexit in the continent's West. Seeing a disruption of the EU-centred European order from both its symbolic and geographical sides, Klaus' ethnonationalist secessionism crystallised around Central Europe as one of the few lasting resorts for renewing the particularistic West. It was thus easy for him to appear at a Brexit Party rally and present himself as a benevolent supporter of "the Slovak exit from the Czechoslovak federation," which he contrasted with the malevolent behaviour of the "EU nomenklatura" towards the UK (KLAUS 2019). He could

also recycle the same story in relation to the "division of Ukraine" together with other secessionist cases worldwide and divisions in Central Europe, addressing German goldbugs as early as 2015 and aligning himself with the long-standing positions of the AfD on this issue (KLAUS 2015B).

Through all this, Klaus could finally resolve his identity crisis during Brexit, Covid-19, and Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. It led him to renounce his "European" affinities and to fully reclaim his identity "as a Czech, as a Central European and as a Slav" (KLAUS 2024A). This replacement of European identity with Slavness is new, yet unsurprising, and once again it is in line with Klaus's cultural rather than biological bordering of humanity. Thus, being Slav whites, in stark contrast to the non-white migration since 2015, did not prevent Ukrainian refugees from being turned into a threat that, in Klaus's view, tied Central European Czechia to the more inferior "European East, its customs, traditions, historical conflicts and mistrust" (KLAUS – WEIGEL 2022). Such was the nature of Klaus' Central European frontlash.

THE FRONTLASH FROM CENTRAL EUROPE

Within the limited space allowed, I have tried to follow Quinn Slobodian's invitation to bring new faces into the global panopticon of Hayek's Bastards. In my view, Václav Klaus is among the exemplary cases of it, yet he also reveals another spatially embedded supply of, and another pathway to, the global farrightisation of neoliberalism and the neoliberalisation of the far right. The book also helps one to understand and critique Klaus not as a benevolent representative of a popular backlash of (post-communist Central) Europeans against the EU's (admittedly highly problematic) political and economic order (EBERLE – ŠITERA 2023; BARŠA ET AL. 2021B), but rather as part and parcel of a historically cultivated elite frontlash that has represented a mélange of ethnonationalist and neoliberal worldviews on Europe within global capitalism.

At the same time, questions remain, both academic and practical. The academic questions naturally concern how to use Slobodian's excellent, yet empirically US-centred, perspective to reassess the origins and transformation of (far-right) neoliberalism in other regions (PEHE – SOMMER 2022). The more practical question is how not to misread the book's emphasis

on supply-side frontlash as a vindication of left-wing or liberal intellectual and political innocence in co-producing the political and economic mess that defines the world we live in today.

RESPONSE TO THE CJIR FORUM

Quinn Slobodian

First of all, I want to thank the three authors for their generous and productive engagements with my book. I want to focus my responses to them on three aspects. The first is the question of the strategy of the far right. The second is about the challenges of writing global intellectual history, and the third is about the advantages and pitfalls of writing the kind of supply-side story that I did in *Hayek's Bastards*.

The first thing to remark on is the conditions under which I chose to write the book. It was largely written during the first Trump administration and, as the introduction indicates, very much in the wake of the events of 2016 – the first Trump election, the Yes vote on Brexit and the then still surprising rise of support for the Alternative for Germany party. At that time, there was a dominant narrative that we were witnessing a pendulum swing away from the dominance of neoliberal policy toward an era of protectionism, and that the related populist leaders were the standard-bearers of an opposition to the status quo that had reigned since the end of the Cold War.

As Béla Greskovits notes, this reading reflected a striking amnesia about the recent past. He draws attention to some essential articles from the discipline of political science, including those by Hans-Georg Betz and Herbert Kitschelt, that made sense of the first round of strange bedfellows when free market opponents of European integration and advocates of ethnonationalism made common cause. Veteran political scientists of the 1990s era took for granted that parties of the so-called populist and radical right (PRR) tended to move from more doctrinaire free-market policies to welfare chauvinism over time.

One could go back even further, as one of the contributors to the forum, Valentina Ausserladscheider, has shown in her excellent book—demonstrating how the combination of neoliberalism and nationalism can be found as early as the 1950s in the case of the Austrian Freedom Party (AUSSERLADSCHEIDER 2024). The party theorist Gerulf Stix's text Die Stunde des *Euroliberalismus* began with an epigraph from Friedrich Hayek and

argues that "liberals must take nationalism under their wings" (STIX 1991: 18) and disavow the political goal of equality. One could add to the early analyses the excellent co-authored book on neoliberalism and the extreme right with the memorable title *Wollt ihr den totalen Markt?* [Do they want the total market?] (SCHUI ET AL. 1997), which similarly pointed out the blending of arguments from reactionary politics with those of the free-market movement.

Some of the actors involved with those earlier projects were directly engaged with similar later ones. This included the economist Joachim Starbatty, a former assistant to Alfred Müller-Armack, who helped found the AfD in 2013 and became an MEP for the party in 2014. In the 1990s, he was a member of the Free Citizens Coalition (Bund Freier Bürger) founded by Manfred Brunner, who campaigned with Jörg Haider as the latter denounced "politicians without a Fatherland, trying to exterminate the deutschmark" (ALLEN 1994). In January 1998, Starbatty was one of four plaintiffs who filed a case in the German Constitutional Court against the Euro.

Other historians have also made clear that reactionary defences of whiteness and Western Civilization are hardly novelties within neoliberal thought (WHYTE 2019; CORNELISSEN 2025). Given this evidence, it makes sense to ask, as Greskovits does, why this recent history was so quickly forgotten – and, relatedly, why I did not explicitly build on it myself in my book. It's a fair question, and if I had been more systematic, I probably would have done so. A more interesting question is why the fact that so many parties, especially in German-speaking Europe, combined appeals to blood and soil with low tax rates and capital security, was not an available reference for pundits and observers in the 2010s.

One explanation is that the elite convergence on a single narrative about economic order – often attributed to the so-called "end of history" moment in the early part of the 1990s – may have only arrived with a delay a decade later. It was really after the major Social Democratic parties had cleansed their ranks of the last vestiges of the language of class struggle and embraced the technocratic project of the European Union that one could search in vain for an alternative, even among parties that were formally distinct (MUDGE 2018). This was true from Germany to the United States, where the idea that there was no alternative – though a slogan of

Margaret Thatcher's – was only really realized under Gerhard Schröder and Bill Clinton.

This raises the question of what was going on in the meantime – in the shadows or the less well-lit conference rooms of think tanks and intellectual gatherings. Ausserladscheider uses the word "strategy" a couple of times in her response, and I think it is an important one to bear in mind. It also raises the question of sincerity or earnestness. How serious were the intellectuals we all study about the fear of a takeover by climate activists or feminists? Was this merely a tactical framing to allow them to broaden their base and bring in potentially new constituencies? Was it as cynical as that, or did it reflect something like a different depth of psychology that it takes some effort to access if one is a more rational, non-paranoid person?

Although there were certainly times when someone like Murray Rothbard was direct in presenting what he was doing as a form of strategy, I hesitate to see it as being totally instrumental or cynical. What he called the "revolution of white Euro males," while recommending that the then Republican presidential candidate Pat Buchanan should tap into in the early 1990s, was the identification of a cohort whose sense of feeling unsettled in the world was shared by Rothbard himself. We cannot underestimate the ways that the strong language of environmentalism – let alone the challenges to the supposedly natural axis of the gender binary – can produce something akin to madness in people whose sense of well-being is bound up in their sense of automatic power.

I use my protagonists in a double way. At times they are causal agents forming new parties and assembling new pieces of a specific policy, but at other times their writings are worth looking at as more passive receptors in terms of symptoms, as they act rather like lightning rods for a particular shift in the zeitgeist. They articulate – in what can often seem like hysterical texts or speeches – what to other political actors might seem like an unspoken common sense. Here I exercise my full freedom as a historian rather than a political scientist to compile "mixtapes" of evidence that skip between media – from websites to small newsletters to records of live conversations.

That brings me, however, to the question of what has been called global intellectual history. For some time now, historians have been sceptical of a history of ideas that approaches objective study with only a model of prosopography and diffusion. A more old-fashioned history of ideas saw them as travelling along chains of influence that could be reconstructed according to lecture notes, correspondence, and citations. The global intellectual history pioneered by people like Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori, however, has sought to create a more materialist foundation for inquiry (MOYN – SARTORI 2013). The goal is to see how ideas not only move in the medium of the written word and the classroom but are outgrowths of specific forms of political economy and domestic political struggles and conundrums.

My collaborator Dieter Plehwe and I have brought this approach to the study of neoliberalism through our edited collection on the way that neoliberal thought "went local," to use the phrasing of Cornel Ban (2016), across the world, with a focus on the Global South and the post-socialist countries (SLOBODIAN – PLEHWE 2022). The effort was by necessity one of collaboration, as having sufficient expertise in each country to elaborate on the ways that ideas of liberalism were commingled with those of Islam, Japanese folk religion, or Icelandic traditions is too much for any one scholar. I am very much committed to the idea, in other words, that there is no single template for politics that is cut and pasted around the world – no matter how earnest the efforts of networks of think tanks are. Indeed, the power of any ideology is its ability to hybridise with domestic intellectual traditions under distinct material conditions.

It is in that spirit that I was so happy to read Daniel Šitera's profile of Václav Klaus. With great generosity, Šitera showed the ways that what I was saying both helps to explain and still has limited explanatory power when it comes to a figure like Klaus. Greskovits made a similar argument for Orbán in the Hungarian context. In the case of Klaus, while there is a particularly clear history of engagement with transnational networks of scholars and some repetition of themes around immigration and climate in particular – which are deeply resonant with the work of the people I write about in *Hayek's Bastards* – there is nonetheless, as Šitera notes, also a through-line that is clearly not a language of science or hardwired human nature, but a more traditional defence of Czech culture based on

Hayek's idea of long-term evolution and grown orders as opposed to the top-down made orders of what Klaus derides as "Europeism." I value this corrective, especially because defining the limits of someone's claim is often as helpful as defining what is included within its parameters.

The necessity of this corrective was made especially clear in Greskovits's exegesis on Viktor Orbán. He points out that there are few traces of the Mises-centric Austrian school in Hungary itself, with its major texts not even translated into the local language as late as 2017. Rather, there are appeals to two lodestars: God and Gramsci. The God side is especially important and certainly underplayed in my own attempt at writing the genealogy of new strains of right-wing politics. Although one could include the appeal to religion in what I had written, it hardly appears in my book. The reason for this, I think, was the relative novelty of appeals to hard science, as opposed to the long-standing place of Christianity in the "fusionism" one knows from the 1950s onward.

The reason why it's an especially problematic omission, however, is that the prominent version of conservatism that Greskovits describes in Orbán's case is effectively the house ideology of the CPAC conferences, which have considerable global influence. In the U.S. the intellectual mouthpieces of national conservatism are Patrick Deneen and Yoram Hazony and, politically, figures like J.D. Vance and Marco Rubio. By rooting their politics primarily in appeals to Christian virtue and communitarianism rather than the peculiar bell curves of IQ science, these actors can make a much broader claim to resonance with a population of potential voters. They are also able to use the more long-standing definitions of inclusion in and exclusion from the community of the West based on historical fault lines of the reach of Christian kingdoms and empires versus the reach of those of Muslims. One is forced then to ask whether what I describe as the "new fusionism" doesn't continue to play a subordinate role to the fusionism of an older vintage.

Greskovits also points out that the national conservatives in the Orbán vein draw direct lessons from the ideas of building counter-hegemony in Gramsci. Orbán, of course, is not the inventor of this appeal, and it more clearly dates back to the *Nouvelle Droite* of Alain de Benoist and the neo-fascism of the MSI, who have been discussing a "Gramscianism of

the Right" for decades (ZÚQUETE 2018, COLLINS 2020, ABRAHAMSEN ET AL. 2024). This alternative genealogy – linking identitarianism and the anti-globalist, often even anti-capitalist, critique of the European New Right to national conservatism – matters because it can credibly be seen as a more foundational opposition to neoliberal doctrine than the racist-libertarian fusionism I describe in my book.

The paleoconservatism of Vance's foreign policy, along with his willingness to run roughshod over investor expectations and multilateral trade agreements in economic policy, signals a loyalty to the Orbán-style model of national conservatism – but a heresy to any brand of neoliberalism. To return to the question of strategy, in other words, the gambit of the first term of Trump, when I wrote this book, was that the conservative think tankers could get their economic policy achieved by riding the tiger of Trump. This was the case with the first big tax cut in 2017, which followed orthodox Heritage Foundation principles. It was also true of the second tax cut, which so far has been the only real legislative accomplishment of the second Trump administration. It is also the case for the policy of deregulation that is achieving long-standing goals such as gutting the Departments of Education and Energy.

However, one could say that the new fusionist influence is on the wane rather than on the rise, and that the version of politics pioneered most effectively by Orbán in the East – and continually spouted still by Klaus in Prague – is the real wave of the future for the remainder of the Trump administration. Setting aside traditional neoliberal imperatives of economic freedom and security, the goal here is one of tearing up the opponents' institutions of civil society root and branch, and doing everything possible to shift the label of purveyors of common sense from those supposedly on the left of the spectrum to those often quite far on the right. This is the campaign that spreads from the purchase of CBS via Trump supporters to the continued warping of the X platform by Elon Musk – someone who now describes the designation of "far right" as a synonym for "normal" (MUSK 2025).

Finding the fingerprints of Hayek in the current coalition is a task that would humble even the most diligent forensic scientist. At some point, one needs to be aware that the mutations have gone far enough that a new

species has been created. In that sense, I think we could best understand the book – though published in 2025 – as a chronicle of the very recent past. It described a kind of saddle moment when the apparent exceptions or lacunae that Šitera and Greskovits point out in Central Europe become more important as origin points of a rising global political rationality.

This leaves us with the question that Šitera also pregnantly closed his review with: whether the danger of such obsessive interest in the supply side of right-wing ideology doesn't end up exculpating the left for its role in mainstreaming many of the conditions that made the rise of this accelerationist far-right politics possible. I think this is a fair criticism, and a question that the Social Democratic and socialist parties across the world would do well to continue asking themselves. Thankfully, we intellectual historians are rarely held responsible for telling the entire spectrum of a story. The best we can do is find a problem or a piece of commonly conceived wisdom and pick at it until it bleeds – in the hope it will eventually heal.

ENDNOTES

1 By now, some important texts by neoliberal thinkers have been translated into the Hungarian language.

2 The archive can be found here: <https://www.klaus.cz/>.

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Book Reviews

Jan Kovář: Debating Immigrants and Refugees in Central Europe. Politicising and Framing Newcomer

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In this ambitious, comprehensive, and meticulously researched book, Jan Kovář explores the politicization and framing of one of the last decade's most polarizing and widely debated socio-political issues: migration. He focuses on two Central European countries – Czechia and Slovakia – and their distinct arenas of media and political debates. Through this complex comparative research design, Kovář aims to tackle several shortcomings of previous studies on the politicization and framing of immigrants, such as their dominant focus on Western Europe, lack of a cross-national comparative perspective, and tendency to favor the analysis of media discourse over that of its political counterpart (pp. 11–13). His book successfully achieves these aims and also does much more: it offers a nuanced and multilayered understanding of the politicization and framing processes of migration in two countries located in a region whose hostile approach to migrants and refugees during the so-called mid-2010s European migration crisis has attracted the interest of many migration scholars. What is more, it also reopened the discussion about the construction of the European East-West divide.

The book is well-structured and easy to navigate, even if it is sometimes difficult to read due to the high density of its arguments and the author's ambition to contribute to multiple academic debates. In the introduction, Kovář gradually introduces the reader to politicization and framing in the context of migration, justifies his research design, and sets the course for his analysis. He then dedicates the entire second chapter to contextualizing his research by offering detailed insights into the migration contexts of Czechia and Slovakia, presenting an informative overview of the historical development of their migration policies and migration trends, as well as outlining the main trends in the public perception of migration. The third chapter is devoted to a theoretical and methodological exposition of the study's main conceptual tools, namely politicization and framing. Relying on the approach of de Wilde et al. (2016), the author defines politicization simply as *"making previously non-political matters political"* across three interrelated yet still independent dimensions: a) issue salience, b) expansion of actors and audiences, and c) polarization of opinions and views (p. 46). He defines framing by drawing on communication studies and particularly on Entman (1993: 52), presenting it as a process of selecting *"some aspects of a perceived reality and making them more salient in a communicating text [...] to promote a particular problem definition, causal*

interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation" (p. 49). The chapter concludes by discussing the distinct applications of both concepts in the media and political arenas.

The empirical findings are presented in four successive analytical chapters (Chapters 4–7), with separate chapters for the media and the political arenas. For each arena, Kovář first offers a descriptive analysis highlighting the main trends in the studied period. He then delves deeper into the analysis and looks for an explanation of the observed trends by introducing other variables and performing more advanced forms of analysis. All the analytical chapters are concluded with helpful summaries of the main findings that help offset the density of the argumentation and make it easier for the reader to systematize the presented findings. Kovář concludes the book by highlighting his most important findings and contextualizing them in the relevant scholarship on politicization and framing of immigrants, making an effort to extend his findings to the wider region of Central and Eastern Europe.

My reading of the book has been inevitably informed by my own long-term scholarly interest in the issue of migration in the context of Central Europe, my disciplinary background in cultural sociology and qualitative research methods, as well as my close professional and personal ties to both of the countries under study. From this specific position, I would like to praise several aspects of the book, but also raise some critical remarks.

CZECHIA AND SLOVAKIA: DIFFERENT OR ALIKE?

First of all, I would like to commend Kovář's ambitious research design, which, in my opinion, not only does justice to his research questions but also generates truly comprehensive research findings. Comparative studies on migration within the Central European region are relatively rare, and comparisons between Czechia and Slovakia are even rarer (but for some exceptions: (SEE BARTOSZEWICZ – EIBL – EL GHAMARI 2022; CSANYI – KUCHARČÍK 2023; KLUKNAVSKÁ – BERNHARD – BOOMGARTEN 2021; TABOSA 2020; WALLACE 2002)). This likely reflects the legacy of Czechoslovakia and the lingering perception of a social, political, and economic closeness between the two countries. However, as Kovář rightly points out in the introduction, there are also important differences that set Czechia and Slovakia apart when it comes

to their immigration contexts. Slovakia, for instance, has an external Schengen border, yet it is still primarily a transit country, whereas Czechia is an established immigrant destination with a notably larger population of residents with a migratory background but also more restrictive immigration policies (pp. 24–27).

Kovář managed to elucidate some of the important differences that characterize the debates on migration in Czech and Slovak media and political arenas. His findings document that, at least in the studied period, the media and political debates on migration in Czechia were not only more politicized but also more securitized and culturalized than those in Slovakia, where economic and humanitarian frames were slightly more present. The book postulates that this difference might be caused by the higher ethnic homogeneity of Czechia, its Eurosceptic orientation, as well as the fact that, unlike Slovakia, Czechia is a net immigration country (pp. 215–216; 219). While I recognize the merit of these structural explanations, I nonetheless find this finding surprising, considering the lasting presence of strong ethnonationalist sentiments in the Slovak political discourse that underlie the approach to not only migration but also national minorities and ethnic diversity as such (CHUDŽÍKOVÁ 2011; NEDELSKY 2009). Future comparative research on the topic (both quantitative and qualitative) should thus consider not only the explanatory potential of the factors outlined by Kovář but also the distinct conceptions of nationalism and national identities prevailing in the two countries and their strength.

DEBATES ON MIGRATION ACROSS THE EAST-WEST DIVIDE

Although the author's research design does not enable direct comparisons of the data collected in Czechia and Slovakia with data collected in old immigrant destinations in Western Europe, he, on several occasions, refers to existing studies from Western Europe to contextualize his findings and highlight the most notable differences and similarities pertaining to the politicization and framing of immigrants in Central and Western Europe. Such a contextualization allows him to maintain that even though the increased politicization of migration between 2015 and 2016 had not been unique to Czechia and Slovakia (or the Central European region at large), it nonetheless represented an important breaking point for both countries by turning migration into a salient socio-political issue for them

for the first time in their modern histories (p. 213). He also shows that the five dominant frames that have been found to frame migration debates in Western Europe – the security, cultural, economic, administrative, and humanitarian frames – are also widely present in the Czech and Slovak contexts. Nevertheless, the salience of the distinct frames appears to be different in Czechia and Slovakia than in Western European contexts, as in the two countries, the negative security and cultural frames are used more frequently, the positive humanitarian frame less commonly, and the economic frame less commonly and in a more negative manner (p. 217).

In the framing part of his analysis, Kovář might have nonetheless missed the opportunity to speak to the discursive construction of the East-West divide around the issue of migration more directly. In the conclusion, he briefly mentions that he inductively identified other context-specific frames, such as "migration as a responsibility of the West," none of which, however, passed his arbitrarily set threshold of relevance and were thus not included in the study (p. 216). I consider this omission a huge pity because I believe that the inclusion of context-specific frames, even if less salient, would help to further elucidate the specific features of immigrant framing and the overall migration discourse in Czechia and Slovakia without any threat to the research findings' cross-regional comparative potential. Both my own research and that of others indicate that the tendencies of Czech and Slovak political representatives and societies at large to embrace "colonial exceptionalism" (HERZA 2020), distance themselves from their contribution to the global inequalities and political instabilities leading to migration, and shift the responsibility for migration to the "West" together represent key elements of their migration discourse and sustain the geopolitical imaginary of the "East-West" divide (KAZHARSKI 2018; MOKRÁ – RAPOŠ BOŽIČ, FORTHCOMING; RAPOŠ BOŽIČ – KLVAŇOVÁ – JAWORSKY 2023). It would therefore undoubtedly be interesting to learn more about how this specific frame, and potentially also other context-specific frames, feature in Czech and Slovak media and political debates.

THE STRIKING ABSENCE OF DIVERSE VOICES IN MEDIA DEBATES

An important aspect of Kovář's analysis concerns the comparison of the politicization and framing of immigrants in the media and the political arenas. He justifies his focus on the media by emphasizing their importance as the main source of information about migration for citizens, particularly in the context of Central Europe, where first-hand experiences with immigrants are still limited. The author also highlights the capacity of media to serve as *"the main channel of communication between the political actors and the public sphere"* (p. 15). He then justifies his focus on parliamentary debates by highlighting their deliberative function, presenting them as *"a tool for position-taking for individual parliamentarians and their parties"* as well as *"a tool for communication between politicians, parties, and citizens"* (p. 17). The inclusion of both arenas, with their distinct features as well as convergencies, thus definitely adds to the robustness of the book. For each arena, the research is approached with a slightly different methodology, as is explained in detail in the third chapter (pp. 53–64). Kovář highlights the most important differences as he discusses his findings from the political arena in chapters 6 and 7, and then again, in a more concise manner, in the conclusion. It is demonstrated that although the politicization and framing of migration seem to follow roughly similar patterns in both arenas, particularly when it comes to the rapid increase in the salience of the topic between 2015 and 2016 and the relative prominence of the security frame in both arenas, there are also important differences.

What I found particularly interesting is the difference in the actor expansion dimension of politicization. While Kovář finds that the political arena saw an increase in the diversity of actors discussing migration between 2015 and 2016, the opposite was true for the media arena, where the diversity of actors decreased in this period. In other words, between 2015 and 2016, it was mostly political actors who talked about migration in the media, and the voices of other actors, such as civil society representatives, employers or employer organizations, citizens, or, importantly, the immigrants themselves, had been marginalized (pp. 69–75). Given the importance of media in the formation of public opinion on migration (BOOMGAARDEN – VLIEGENTHART, 2009; EBERL ET AL. 2018; SCHEMER 2012), this is indeed a striking finding.

Much of this complements the findings from our recent qualitative research on public attitudes toward migration that reveals the extent to which Czech residents make sense of migration by relying on the topical, often sensational, and highly securitized coverage of migration in the mainstream media that gives rise to the cultural repertoire of "migration as invasion" (JAWORSKY ET AL. 2023). More specifically, this finding helps to contextualize the striking absence of other cultural repertoires produced by the media that would allow Czech residents to associate migration with more mundane topics, such as immigrants' civic engagement, labor relations, or everyday life. Even though, in line with Kovář's theoretical approach, the decrease in the diversity of actors in the media arena de facto signals a decreased politicization of migration along this dimension, the implications of this decrease for the formation of the public attitudes toward immigrants can be considered paramount.

THE SO-CALLED CRISIS AND ITS MANY MIGRANT OTHERS

Finally, as might not be immediately obvious from the book's title, the comparative aspects of Kovář's research design do not stop with his focus on the two distinct national contexts and the two arenas but also include the dimension of time. His research covers a period of five years, spanning from October 2013 to October 2017. As he makes it explicit in the book's introduction, he was primarily interested in capturing the effects of the so-called European refugee crisis on the politicization and framing of immigrants in Central Europe, understanding the "crisis" as an *"ideal laboratory for investigating the debates about immigrants"* (p. 18). His decision to include a longer comparative timeframe has thus been informed by his analytical intention to capture the trends before and after the escalation of the "crisis" in 2015 and 2016. This strategy serves Kovář well, as it allows him to convincingly show that in both national contexts and their respective media and political arenas, migration gradually went from being practically a non-issue at the beginning of the studied period to being a highly salient issue in 2015 and 2016, only to lose salience again in 2017. While this finding might not be surprising given the attention migration received between 2015 and 2016 across the entire Europe, it clearly shows how the "crisis" represented a breaking point in both countries and largely drove the politicization of migration.

While I consider this finding valuable, it is here that I have the biggest reservations concerning Kovář's presentation of his findings. It seems to me that in several places in the book – and particularly in the conclusion – he reifies the narrative of "crisis" and fails to engage with it critically, or acknowledge its socially constructed character and its dependence on the very same debates in the media and political arena that he analyzes. Indeed, migration scholars from different fields have repeatedly warned against unreflective reproductions of the narrative of "crisis" in connection to the increased number of migrants and refugees heading to Europe in the mid-2010's by bringing attention to its inherently securitizing and racializing character (BELLO 2022; COLLYER – KING 2016; DINES – MONTANA – VACCHELLI 2018; JAWORSKY – RAPOŠ BOŽIČ 2023; JUNUZI 2019). Although Kovář makes some attempts to situate the "crisis" by elucidating the main events that led to the increased media portrayal of migration in 2015 and 2016 and the eventual discursive proliferation of the label "European migration/refugee crisis" (pp. 18–24), given the prominence the "crisis" receives in his research, I found the extent of his critical engagement with this highly-loaded term unsatisfying. For instance, in the conclusion Kovář states that *"the crisis had a measurable association with the salience of individual frames and changed the salience of individual framing perspectives of immigrants,"* concluding that the *"crisis therefore had a significant effect regarding the negative securitization and culturalization of immigrants and their presentation in governance and managerialist terms in both countries"* (p. 218). In my opinion, this and other similar formulations make the "crisis" appear as an objective condition and an independent variable rather than an inherent product of the very securitizing and culturalizing discourse Kovář describes. The book would thus greatly benefit from a more critical engagement with the narrative of "crisis" as well as from a more explicit acknowledgment of its embeddedness in the analyzed discourse.

If the book lacks reflexivity in the use of the term "refugee crisis," the opposite is true with respect to other migration labels and categories. I highly appreciate Kovář's attempt to nuance the understanding of the framing practices in relation to different categories of immigrants. As he himself observes, it is an unfortunate habit in migration research to study the portrayal and representation of immigrants as an overarching single category. To address this shortcoming, he explores the variation of framing practices in both arenas depending on the immigrants' a) legal status

(refugees/asylum seekers, irregular immigrants, or labor migrants), b) religious background (a Muslim background or other religious backgrounds), and c) region of origin (the Middle East and North Africa [MENA], [non-EU] Eastern Europe, or Southeast Asia). He finds striking differences in the framing patterns of different categories of immigrants. For instance, an explicit mention of the immigrants being from the MENA region is found to be associated with a more frequent use of the negative security, cultural, and administrative frames, whereas a mention of their being from (non-EU) Eastern Europe is associated with an increase of both the positive and negative economic frame and the positive humanitarian frame (p. 222). Similar patterns can be observed with respect to immigrants' religious backgrounds, as Muslim immigrants are more often portrayed through the negative security, cultural, administrative, or humanitarian frame, while immigrants with other religious backgrounds are more likely to be portrayed through a positive humanitarian frame (pp. 222–223). The use of the label "irregular immigrant" was found to be associated with across-the-board negative framing, whereas the label "economic migrant" was associated with both positive and negative economic framing, and the label "asylum seeker" was associated with a positive humanitarian framing in both arenas but also with negative security, cultural, and economic framing in the media arena (p. 223).

Kovář's nuanced findings thus reveal clear patterns of Othering that are present in the Czech and Slovak media and political discourse on migration and that locate irregular immigrants from the MENA region with a Muslim religious background at the bottom of the national "hierarchies of Otherness" (RAPOŠ BOŽIČ – SYNEK RÉTIOVÁ – KLVAŇOVÁ 2023). They also dovetail with our recent qualitative research on the construction of the boundaries of grievability in the Slovak political discourse on migration that reveal stark differences in the discursive portrayals of immigrants from the MENA region and Ukraine and, consequently, an unequal recognition of the grievability of their lives (MOKRÁ – RAPOŠ BOŽIČ, FORTHCOMING). I can thus only reiterate Kovář's call for a future consideration of different categorization and labeling practices in research on immigrant framing, which also speaks to a recent reflexive turn in migration research (DAHINDEN – FISCHER – MENET 2020).

To conclude, I believe that Kovář's Debating Immigrants and Refugees in Central Europe makes a valuable contribution to scholarly debates on politicization and framing of immigrants in general and in the regional context of Central Europe in particular. The book should be of interest to migration scholars from political science, sociology, and other related disciplines.

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Jan Eichler: NATO and the War in Ukraine: Geopolitical Context and Long-term Consequences

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In NATO and the War in Ukraine: Geopolitical Context and Longterm Consequences, Jan Eichler, a well-established scholar at the Institute of International Relations in Prague, contributes to the scholarly discourse surrounding NATO's expansion, its geopolitical impacts and the impact of Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine. By combining historical revisionism with theoretical insights, Eichler crafts a compelling narrative that critiques prevailing perspectives on NATO's post-Cold War role. The book offers an engaging mix of empirical rigor, theoretical depth and a revisionist spirit, which makes it a significant intervention in international relations (IR) scholarship.

Eichler's academic contributions place him squarely within the critical realist tradition of IR, which is informed by both classical realism and neorealism. His engagement with the works of Kenneth Waltz, Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer situates him in dialogue with some of the most influential theorists in the field. However, Eichler distinguishes himself through his willingness to critically assess NATO's post-Cold War trajectory, an area often dominated by uncritical endorsements. His alignment with revisionist scholars like Andrew Bacevich adds depth to his critique of triumphalist narratives that celebrate NATO expansion without grappling with its unintended consequences.

Eichler's central thesis is that while NATO's expansion is often framed as a stabilizing force, it has instead contributed to escalating tensions with Russia, which culminated in the 2022 invasion of Ukraine. By framing NATO expansion as a "zero-sum game" (p. 5) and examining its progression from "positive peace" (p. 5) to "negative peace," (p. 5) Eichler challenges the dominant discourse that portrays NATO as an unmitigated guarantor of security. The book's dual objectives are to critically evaluate NATO's role in reshaping Europe's geopolitical landscape and to analyze the longterm consequences of its policies for international security relations (ISR).

The book unfolds over seven chapters, each meticulously structured to advance Eichler's argument. The opening chapter establishes the theoretical and methodological foundations, which are rooted in neorealism and complemented by Charles Glaser's theory of "security-seeking vs. greedy states" (p. 22). Eichler's methodological clarity is commendable, as he outlines five research questions that guide the analysis.

Chapters two and three explore the history of NATO's expansion, describing this process as starting with the initial post-Cold War reflections under George H. W. Bush and culminating in the second wave of enlargement under George W. Bush. Eichler provides a nuanced examination of the contrasting arguments surrounding NATO's actions, juxtaposing the celebratory narratives of its supporters with the warnings of critics like George Kennan and John Mearsheimer. His analysis of NATO's "expansion by invitation" (p. 23) challenges simplistic interpretations, revealing the intricate dynamics between the alliance and former Soviet satellites.

Chapters four and five shift the focus to the militarization of the Baltic and Black Sea regions and the immediate consequences of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Eichler's exploration of NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence and the European Deterrence Initiative highlights the alliance's strategic recalibrations in response to Russia's actions. At the same time, he critically examines Russia's internal balancing strategies and the doctrinal shifts that have fueled its increasingly assertive posture.

The penultimate chapter introduces a rich discussion on competing narratives about the war in Ukraine. Eichler contrasts Western claims of NATO's defensive nature with Russia's portrayal of the alliance as a direct threat. His engagement with thinkers like Francis Fukuyama and Jeffrey Sachs underscores the ideological dimensions of the conflict, adding depth to the geopolitical analysis. By examining these opposing narratives, Eichler uncovers the complexity of the war's origins, providing insights into the interplay of security dilemmas and great power politics.

The final chapter broadens the scope to consider the implications of NATO's expansion into Scandinavia, with Finland and Sweden's accession serving as a case study for the evolving dynamics of European security. Eichler's exploration of their motivations, strategic importance and military capabilities enriches the book's overarching theme of NATO's transformation and its geopolitical consequences.

Eichler's critical approach is one of the book's greatest strengths. By framing NATO expansion as a "zero-sum game," (p. 47) he disrupts the celebratory narratives that dominate Western academic and political discourses. His insistence on examining the "thorns" (p. 8) of NATO's

"rose" (p. 8) – the unintended consequences of expansion – is a refreshing departure from mainstream accounts that often ignore these complexities. By emphasizing the unintended outcomes of NATO's policies, Eichler challenges readers to consider the broader implications of alliance-building in a contested international system.

However, Eichler's critique is not without its limitations. While he effectively highlights the security dilemmas exacerbated by NATO's policies, his treatment of Russia's agency occasionally leans towards determinism. The portrayal of Russia's actions as inevitable responses to NATO's expansion risks underestimating the role of domestic factors and individual decision-making in the shaping of Russian foreign policy. Additionally, Eichler's revisionist lens, while valuable, could benefit from a more balanced consideration of the benefits that NATO's presence has provided to its newer members, particularly in terms of political stability and economic integration. These dimensions, while acknowledged in the book, deserve more attention so that one would fully appreciate the multifaceted impact of NATO's policies.

Eichler's work contributes to a growing body of scholarship that examines the post-Cold War international order. By engaging with neorealist and revisionist perspectives, he situates the book within broader debates about the nature of security alliances, the dynamics of great power competition, and the ethics of intervention. His critique of NATO's "triumphalism" (p. 2) resonates with scholars who question the uncritical export of Western models of governance and security. At the same time, Eichler's analysis invites further exploration of alternative security frameworks. His call for a transition from "negative peace" to "positive peace" (p. 109) – a concept drawn from peace studies – aligns with efforts to rethink international security beyond militarized responses. This aspect of the book has the potential to inspire interdisciplinary dialogues between IR scholars, peace researchers and policymakers.

The book's emphasis on revisionism aligns with the broader academic trend of challenging mainstream narratives. Eichler's exploration of NATO's "zero-sum" (p. 47) approach offers a counter-narrative that highlights the complexities of alliance-building in a multipolar world. Eichler broadens the scope of the debate by engaging with critical perspectives,

encouraging scholars to revisit the assumptions underpinning post-Cold War security policies. The book also raises important questions about the role of historical memory in the shaping of contemporary geopolitics, as Eichler critiques the "selective memory" (p. 3) that often dominates discussions of NATO's expansion.

One of the book's most significant contributions is its analysis of the war in Ukraine as a "proxy war" (p 135) Eichler's examination of the military, political and economic dimensions of the conflict underscores the far-reaching consequences of NATO's policies. By framing the war as a culmination of longstanding tensions, he sheds light on the structural factors that have shaped the conflict, providing a nuanced understanding of its origins and trajectory. This analysis is particularly valuable for policymakers seeking to navigate the complexities of European security in a rapidly changing international environment.

Eichler's work serves as both a critique of past policies and a call to reimagine the future of NATO and international security. His insistence on acknowledging the unintended consequences of alliance-building challenges readers to think critically about the trade-offs inherent in security policymaking. As the war in Ukraine continues to reshape the global order, Eichler's book provides a critical framework for grappling with its geopolitical and ethical implications. By emphasizing the need for a balanced and inclusive approach to security, Eichler's analysis offers valuable lessons for addressing the challenges of the twenty-first century.

Jan Eichler's *NATO and the War in Ukraine* is a timely and thought-provoking contribution to the study of international relations. Its critical engagement with NATO's post-Cold War trajectory, combined with its revisionist approach, offers a valuable counterpoint to dominant narratives. While not without its shortcomings, the book's analytical rigor and theoretical depth make it essential reading for scholars, policymakers and anyone interested in understanding the complexities of European security. Eichler's work challenges us to rethink the foundations of international security, offering a nuanced and critical perspective on one of the most pressing issues of our time.

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