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CIVIC IDENTITY IN THE DISCOURSE OF SLOVAK SOCIETY: AN ANALYSIS OF MEDIA CONTRIBUTIONS IN 2025 ¹

Stela Olejárová ²

ABSTRACT

The article examines how citizenship and civic identity are constructed in the Slovak media discourse in 2025, within the context of increasing societal polarization. It assumes that civic identity cannot be reduced solely to a legal status but represents a concept encompassing value-based, socio-cultural, and psychological dimensions. The article is based on thematic analysis, which makes it possible to identify recurring patterns of meaning in textual data and interpret them within a broader socio-political context.

Keywords: Civic identity, Identity, Identity dimensions, Media, Media discourse

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INTRODUCTION

The issue of citizenship remains highly relevant in contemporary discourse. The concept of civic identity represents a key framework for examining the relationship between the individual and the political community. But what does it mean to be a citizen and to possess a civic identity?

In the Slovak context, this concept has appeared more prominently after 1989 (Lášticová, 2009), during the period of societal transformation and the formation of democratic institutions. The issue of civic identity in contemporary Slovak

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society is becoming increasingly pressing. Civic identity cannot be reduced merely to the legal status of citizenship; rather, it represents a complex phenomenon that normatively encompasses cultural and social dimensions and demonstrably connects individuals through a sense of belonging and loyalty.

In an environment characterized by societal polarization and growing social tensions, space is opening to seek answers to the question of what it means to be a citizen of the Slovak Republic today. Slovak society is currently facing significant political and social polarization, manifested in conflicts between government and opposition actors, as well as in the media environment (DEKK Institute, 2025). Polarization leads to increasing distrust in institutions and more frequent public protests aimed at protecting democracy or raising awareness about proposed legislative changes. In the media space, topics are often framed in a confrontational manner, which reinforces the “us vs. them” dynamic (Krivý, Danglová, 2006).

This situation has a direct impact on the formation of civic identity, however, instead of an inclusive understanding of citizenship, identity becomes a tool of political mobilization. Civic identity is not static but is shaped through discourse created by political elites, the media, educational institutions, as well as everyday interpersonal interactions. One of the risks of polarization is the reduction of civic identity, which weakens its democratic and integrative character.

The presented article examines how civic identity is formed within Slovak media discourse, what factors influence it, and why understanding it is crucial for the stability and development of a democratic society and for the future of democratic governance.

1 FOUNDATIONS OF CIVIC IDENTITY

Civic identity represents one of the key pillars of a democratic society. It defines the ways in which individuals perceive their belonging to the state, as well as which values and norms are considered binding for participation in public life.

According to Rogers Smith (Smith, 1997), civic identity is shaped by conflicts over access to citizenship. This constitutes a central element in defining civic identity, as it demonstrates that the identity of the citizen is historically conditioned by power inequalities. Smith emphasizes that civic identity is a product of political struggles and social hierarchies.

In her article *Psychological Model of Civic Identity Formation* (Petrovska, 2021), Inha Petrovska conceptualizes civic identity as a specific form of organizational identity, involving self-awareness within the state as a citizen and an active process of self-identification with this role.

In this context, civic identity functions as a psychological regulator of civic behavior. Its formation proceeds through several stages, each bringing about transformations that lead to an increased awareness of the individual's role within the system of interactions with the state. A strong civic identity is crucial for national security, as it enhances resilience to external threats (Petrovska, 2019).

Building on the aforementioned factors, it is necessary to develop a framework that enables a comprehensive understanding of the formation of civic identity within the Slovak social and political context. The formation of civic identity is conditioned by historical experiences, political institutions, and cultural patterns.

More specifically, civic identity formation is determined by three key, interrelated dimensions: the legal, political, and socio-cultural dimensions. The legal dimension, defined by formal citizenship status, encompasses rights and obligations. The political dimension relates to active participation and the construction of a political community (Surová, 2020). The socio-cultural dimension is characterized by the sharing of common values, linguistic and cultural traditions, and mutual recognition among individuals.

These three dimensions are mutually constitutive. Legal status alone does not guarantee a sense of civic identity, nor does civic identity necessarily lead to

active citizenship. However, the interconnection of these dimensions is essential for the development of a sustainable and cohesive civic identity.

In addition to normative and constructivist approaches, it is necessary to consider psychological factors that influence individual behaviour in the context of civic identity. Wang and Eldemerdash (2022), in their study *National Identity, Willingness to Fight and Collective Action*, argue that individuals' willingness to risk their lives for the state or a group is not determined solely by the strength of national identity, but also by their perception of collective action. Their findings indicate that individuals with weaker national identity may be more willing to engage in conflict if they believe that other group members will act in a similar manner. This suggests that loyalty and participation are conditioned not only by value-based convictions but also by a rational calculus grounded in expectations about group behaviour.

This perspective is particularly relevant for the discourse on civic identity, as it highlights the interaction between individual identity and perceived social norms. In a polarized society, the willingness to participate in civic activities or to defend democratic values may be significantly influenced by whether individuals perceive collective action as effective.

2 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The article is based on a qualitative research approach, which allows for a deeper understanding of the meanings and values associated with civic identity in Slovak society. The data are analysed through thematic analysis, which identifies recurring patterns of meaning in textual data, including political documents, media discourse, and educational materials, and enables their interpretation within a broader socio-political context. The analysed data cover the time frame of the year 2025.

The research focuses on the following questions:

1. What meanings and concepts are associated with the notion of "citizen" in Slovak discourse?

2. What values and norms emerge in the construction of “civic identity”

The main objective of this research is to map and analyze how civic identity and citizenship are discursively constructed in the Slovak mainstream media in year 2025. By identifying dominant thematic framework, this article focuses on how these media representations reflect or challenge the socio-political polarization within Slovak society.

For the purposes of the analysis, a review of media contributions in selected relevant newspapers was conducted using a specific search strategy. The selected outlets included Nový Čas, SME, Pravda, Plus jeden deň, Hospodárske noviny, and Denník N. Their relevance is based on national survey data from MML-TGI (Market & Media & Lifestyle – Target Group Index) (MedianSK, 2025), covering the second and third quarters of 2025 (up to the first half of November 2025).

The identification of articles was carried out using selected keywords: (1) civic identity and (2) civil society. These keywords were applied through specific search operators that enabled the targeting of content within particular media outlets and thematic areas.

Example of the search query: “civic identity” site:“name of the media outlet”.

This search mechanism made it possible to identify articles containing the exact target phrases while ensuring that they originated from the selected media sources. The approach thus represents a systematic mapping of media discourse across individual outlets.

The resulting corpus consisted of a dataset in which the concepts of civic identity, civil society, and related notions were present, reflecting the most frequent and salient constructions of citizenship in 2025.

2.1 Research Limitations

The present article is grounded in a qualitative research design and employs thematic analysis of textual data, enabling the identification of meanings, values, and normative frameworks associated with the concept of the “citizen” and the construct of civic identity within Slovak discourse in 2025. However, the chosen approach entails several limitations that should be explicitly acknowledged to ensure that the findings are interpreted appropriately and in accordance with the scope of the applied methodology.

The first limitation concerns the scope and nature of the analysed sources. Although the research draws on media sources, it does not encompass all communication channels through which society constructs the meaning of citizenship. The analysis excludes social media, local media, podcasts, and public speeches, which may convey alternative, less dominant, or competing interpretations of civic identity. Consequently, the discourse captured in this study reflects data characterized by higher media visibility.

The second limitation relates to the specific nature of media discourse as the primary analytical material. Media outputs are inherently framed and shaped by institutional norms, such as editorial policies and journalistic conventions. As a result, media representations tend to reproduce dominant narratives rather than offering a comprehensive spectrum of perspectives.

The third limitation concerns the selection of media outlets. While the sample is based on relevance criteria derived from readership data (MML-TGI) for the second and third quarters of 2025, it primarily focuses on mainstream, high-circulation newspapers. Such a focus may privilege certain linguistic codes and value frameworks that differ from those present in regional, minority, or alternative media. At the same time, incorporating all aspects of media communication would constitute an extensive research undertaking requiring a multidimensional analytical approach, exceeding the scope of the present study.

The fourth limitation is the temporal delimitation of the data to the year 2025. The research captures discourse within a specific time frame that reflects events and dominant themes. Therefore, the identified norms represent a

situational snapshot rather than a long-term trend. The findings thus provide insight into discursive priorities and interpretations that are bound to the analysed period.

The fifth and final limitation lies in the interpretative nature of thematic analysis and its contextual embeddedness. The analysis is conducted within the Slovak context, and its findings cannot be readily generalized to other national or cultural settings.

It is important to emphasize that these limitations do not diminish the relevance of the presented research; rather, they help to refine its interpretative framework. The findings offer an analysis of how citizenship and civic identity are constructed in dominant media texts in 2025. At the same time, these limitations point to potential directions for future research.

3 OVERVIEWS OF THE ANALYSED ARTICLES

The following chapter presents an overview of media contributions identified through a systematic search of selected daily newspapers and subsequently included in the thematic analysis. The search was conducted using the keywords “civic identity” and “civil society,” employing specific search operators to refine the results.

The resulting corpus of articles, presented in Tables 1 and 2, includes texts published in 2025. The articles are organized by the name of the newspaper and the date of publication.

Table 1: Search query: občianska identita site: “NázovMédia” / “civic identity” site: “Name of the media outlet”.

Title of the Article	Newspaper	Date of publication
Občiansky sektor v otvorenom liste Ficovej vláde kritizuje fungovanie Slovenska a jeho odklon od demokracie ENG: The civic sector, in an open letter to Fico's government, criticizes the functioning of Slovakia and its shift away from democracy.	Denník N	29.1.2025
Iveta Radičová: Prechádzame z demokracie do populistokracie ENG: Iveta Radičová: We Are Transitioning from Democracy to Populistocracy	Denník N	11.2.2025
Pellegrini podpísal zákon o mimovládach, argumenty od organizátorov protestov v ňom nevidel ENG: Pellegrini signed the law on non-governmental organizations, stating that he did not find the arguments of protest organizers convincing.	Denník N	7.5.2025
Misia europarlamentu má obavy o nezávislosť justície a občiansku spoločnosť na Slovensku. ENG: European Parliament mission expresses concerns about the independence of the judiciary and civil society in Slovakia.	Denník N	15.7.2025

Mimovládky sa ohrádzajú voči krokom vlády, takmer 500 predstaviteľov občianskej spoločnosti prišlo s výzvou ENG: NGOs oppose the government's actions, nearly 500 representatives of civil society have issued a joint appeal.	Pravda	29.1.2025
Občiansky i vodičský preukaz v telefóne. Rezort vnútra spustil mobilné aplikácie eDoklady a eIdentita. ENG: Citizen and driver's licence on a mobile phone: the Ministry of the Interior has launched the mobile applications eDocuments and eIdentity.	Pravda	15.4.2025
Petíciu proti zmene Ústavy podpísalo viac ako 4 000 ľudí vrátane známych osobností ENG: More than 4,000 people, including well-known public figures, have signed a petition against the amendment of the Constitution.	Pravda	12.6.2025
Sme pobúrení nad správou vecí verejných (výzva organizácií občianskej spoločnosti) ENG: We Are Outraged by the Governance of Public Affairs (Appeal by Civil Society Organizations)	SME	29.1.2025
Novela ústavy by porušovala práva aj medzinárodné záväzky, tvrdí tretí sektor	SME	26.5.2025

ENG: The Constitutional Amendment Would Violate Rights and International Commitments, the Third Sector Claims		
Slovensko sa zmenilo na krajinu bez vlastností (píše Michal Havran) ENG: Slovakia Has Become a Country Without Qualities (by Michal Havran)	SME	28.5.2025
Občianska spoločnosť žiada prezidenta o vetovanie novely z dielne ministra Tomáša ENG: Civil Society Calls on the President to Veto the Amendment Proposed by Minister Tomáš	SME	9.6.2025
Psychologička: Cestovanie do prepĺnených destinácií nie je len o zážitkoch, vypovedá aj o našej sociálnej identite ENG: Psychologist: Traveling to Overcrowded Destinations Is Not Only About Experiences but Also Reflects Our Social Identity	SME	1.8.2025
Ocenením Biela vrana sa opäť oslávi občianska odvaha, tentokrát s podtitulom Nebojím sa pána ENG: The White Crow Award Will Once Again Celebrate Civic Courage, This Time Under the Subtitle "I Am Not Afraid of Authority"	SME	14.11.2025
Budúcnosť sme my, odkázali z Bratislavy. Podľa Šimečku prišlo 50-tisíc ľudí (SME Minúta)	SME	16.11.2025

ENG: “The Future Is Us,” They Declared in Bratislava; According to Šimečka, 50,000 People Attended (SME Minute)		
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Source: Own elaboration, 2025.

Table 1 includes contributions that contain a direct reference to the concept of civic identity (including its semantic variants corresponding to the search prompt). The contributions primarily address the position of the civic sector, the functioning of democracy, and the technical aspects of civic representation, i.e., how citizens identify themselves in relation to the state.

Table 2: Search query: Občianska spoločnosť site:“NázovMédia” / “civil society” site:“Name of the media outlet”.

Titlle of the Article	Newspaper	Date of publication
Ficove predstavy sa rozchádzajú nielen s realitou, ale aj so zákonmi ENG: Fico’s Ideas Diverge Not Only from Reality but Also from the Law	Sme	23.1.2025
Na protest v Bratislave prišlo 60-tisíc ľudí, odhadujú organizátori (minúta po minúte) ENG: 60,000 People Attended the Protest in Bratislava, Organizers Estimate (Minute by Minute)	Sme	24.1.2025
Sme pobúrení nad správou vecí verejných (výzva organizácií občianskej spoločnosti)	Sme	29.1.2025

ENG: We Are Outraged by the Governance of Public Affairs (Appeal by Civil Society Organizations)		
Občianska spoločnosť vyzýva na moratórium na nové spaľovne odpadu v celej EÚ ENG: Civil Society Calls for a Moratorium on New Waste Incinerators Across the EU	Sme	1.10.2025
Dva dni podujatí a zatvorené inštitúcie. Ako bude vyzeráť 17. november na Slovensku? ENG: Two Days of Events and Closed Institutions: What Will 17 November Look Like in Slovakia?	Sme	14.11.2025
Spoluzakladateľ VPN Peter Tatár: November 1989 nedokáže zrušiť nikto, Fico ho naopak urobil populárnejším ENG: VPN Co-founder Peter Tatár: No One Can Undo November 1989; Fico Has, on the Contrary, Made It More Popular	Sme	15.11.2025
Nežná revolúcia nevyrástla na zelenej lúke. Občiansky vzdor kulminoval už celé mesiace pred ňou ENG: The Velvet Revolution Did Not Emerge Overnight: Civic Resistance Had Been Escalating for Months Before	Sme	16.11.2025

Ranný brífing: Plné námestia žiadali koniec vlády, Fico kontroval demagógiou v Nitre ENG: Morning Briefing: Crowded Squares Called for the Government's Resignation; Fico Responded with Demagoguery in Nitra	Sme	17.11.2025
SaS volá po predčasných voľbách. Krúpa: Táto vláda je v koncoch, správa sa podľa príručky KGB ENG: SaS Calls for Early Elections. Krúpa: This Government Is at Its End and Acts According to a KGB Manual	Pravda	27.1.2025
'Puč bez dôkazov, z prevratu sa stalo fiasco': aktivisti chcú hlavu ministra a šéfa SIS ENG: "A Coup Without Evidence, the Plot Turned into a Fiasco": Activists Demand the Resignation of the Minister and the Head of SIS	Pravda	11.08.2025
Slovensko má momentálne v zahraničí najhoršie meno v histórii, tvrdí exminister zahraničia Káčer ENG: Slovakia Currently Has the Worst Reputation Abroad in Its History, Says Former Foreign Minister Káčer	Pravda	18.09.2025
Situácia kvír ľudí sa podľa aktivistov zhoršuje, štát diskrimináciu odmieta	Pravda	10.10.2025

ENG: According to Activists, the Situation of Queer People Is Worsening, While the State Rejects Claims of Discrimination		
Žiadna krajina si v rebríčku WJP nepohoršila viac. Slovensko je menej právny štát a na chvoste EÚ ENG: No Country Has Declined More in the WJP Ranking: Slovakia Is Less Governed by the Rule of Law and Near the Bottom of the EU	Pravda	28.10.2025
Slovensko si pripomenulo Nežnú revolúciu. Zhromaždenia napriek dažďu prilákali desaťtisíce ľudí (online) ENG: Slovakia Commemorated the Velvet Revolution: Gatherings Attracted Tens of Thousands Despite the Rain (Online)	Pravda	17.11.2025
Veľvyslanec USA G. Rana ocenil obhajcov ľudských práv na Slovensku, odovzdal aj Cenu Jána Kuciaka ENG: U.S. Ambassador G. Rana Praised Human Rights Defenders in Slovakia and Presented the Ján Kuciak Award	Hospodárske noviny	15.1.2025
Robert Fico nemusí snívať o zmene systému, má najmä dobre vládnuť ENG: Robert Fico Need Not Dream of System Change; He Should Primarily Govern Effectively	Hospodárske noviny	12.6.2025

Slovensko je na ceste stať sa ďalším Maďarskom, niektoré vzorce sú nápadne zhodné, varuje misia europarlamentu ENG: Slovakia Is on the Path to Becoming Another Hungary; Some Patterns Are Strikingly Similar, Warns a European Parliament Mission	Hospodárske noviny	15.7.2025
Slovensko kleslo v indexe právneho štátu najviac zo všetkých krajín Únie ENG: Slovakia Recorded the Largest Decline in the Rule of Law Index Among EU Countries	Hospodárske noviny	28.10.2025
Vo viacerých mestách sa budú konať zhromaždenia k výročiu Nežnej revolúcie ENG: Commemorative Gatherings for the Velvet Revolution Anniversary Will Take Place in Several Cities	Hospodárske noviny	16.11.2025
Historik: Československo zostávalo posledným pevným režimom na západne sovietskeho impéria. Kedy nastal zlom? ENG: Historian: Czechoslovakia Remained the Last Rigid Regime in the Western Soviet Sphere—When Did the Turning Point Occur?	Hospodárske noviny	17.11.2025
Pellegrini: Žiadna ideológia nemôže svojvoľne zasahovať do práv a životov občanov ENG: Pellegrini: No Ideology May Arbitrarily Interfere with Citizens' Rights and Lives	Hospodárske noviny	17.11.2025

Source: Own elaboration, 2025.

Table 2 presents contributions containing the keyword “civil society.” In this context, civil society is primarily portrayed in relation to the state and in terms of citizens’ willingness to engage in civic participation.

3.1 Research Findings

The presented thematic analysis demonstrates that citizenship and civic identity in Slovak mainstream newspapers are constructed through multiple frameworks that shape the meaning of the concept of the citizen. The analysed corpus of articles was categorized into seven thematic groups.

The first category, Civic Identity and Self-Awareness, includes articles addressing individual and collective self-perception of citizens, their values, social roles, and the identity of society as a whole. The dominant themes within this category revolve around identity, social self-awareness, values, and society. The most frequent terms include identity, self-awareness, social status, and values. This category conceptualizes civic identity as a topic that can be articulated beyond explicitly political contexts.

The second category, Civil Society and Activism, encompasses articles primarily focused on non-governmental organizations, civic initiatives, and protest movements. Media coverage in this category centres on civil society appeals directed at the government, as well as campaigns aimed at protecting rights and democracy. The most frequently occurring terms include civil society, protest, activists, petition, assembly, NGOs, and courage. Within this category, citizenship is closely associated with collective action, reinforcing the interpretation of civic identity in relation to public engagement.

The third category, Political and Legislative Changes, consists of articles addressing legal regulations, legislative amendments, and political decisions related to the civic sector. The most frequent terms include civil rights, constitution, amendment, law, democracy, government, and rule of law. In this

category, civic identity is linked to political processes and issues of institutional trust and distrust regarding the legitimacy of power.

The fourth category, Digital Civic Identity and Related Technologies, examines how technological developments shape citizenship and citizens' interaction with the state. The most frequently used terms include e-Identity, e-Documents, mobile application, identity card, and digital identity.

The fifth category, History and Cultural Formation of Civic Identity, includes media contributions reflecting on historical events that have shaped civic identity and society. The most frequent terms include Velvet Revolution, VPN, the legacy of November, and civic resistance.

The sixth category, Human Rights and Inclusive Approaches, focuses on the protection of minority rights, equality, and efforts to combat discrimination. The most frequent terms include human rights, discrimination, equality, inclusion, and freedom.

The seventh and final category, Other, includes articles that could not be clearly assigned to one of the previous categories but nonetheless reflect on the state of civil society and consider its future development.

Table 3: Data Set Categorization

Civic Identity and Self-Awareness	1. Psychologička: Cestovanie do preplnených destinácií nie je len o zážitkoch, vypovedá aj o našej sociálnej identite (SME, 1.8.2025)
Civil Society and Activism	1. Ocenením Biela vrana sa opäť oslávi občianska odvaha, tentokrát s podtitulom Nebojím sa pána (SME, 14.11.2025) 2. Sme pobúrení nad správou vecí verejných (SME, 29.1.2025)

	3. Občiansky sektor v otvorenom liste Ficovej vláde kritizuje odklon od demokracie (Denník N, 29.1.2025) 4. Pellegrini podpísal zákon o mimovládach (Denník N, 7.5.2025) 5. Mimovládky sa ohrádzajú voči krokom vlády (Pravda, 29.1.2025) 6. Občianska spoločnosť žiada prezidenta o vetovanie novely (SME, 9.6.2025) 7. Občianska spoločnosť vyzýva na moratórium na nové spalovne odpadu (SME, 1.10.2025) 8. Občianska spoločnosť na výročie Nežnej revolúcie protestovala proti Ficovej vláde (SME, 17.11.2025) 9. Na protest v Bratislave prišlo 60-tisíc ľudí (SME, 24.1.2025) 10. Petíciu proti zmene Ústavy podpísalo viac ako 4 000 ľudí (Pravda, 12.6.2025)
Political and Legislative Changes	1. Misia europarlamentu má obavy o nezávislosť justície a občiansku spoločnosť (Denník N, 15.7.2025) 2. Novela ústavy by porušovala práva aj medzinárodné záväzky (SME, 26.5.2025) 3. Iveta Radičová: Prechádzame z demokracie do populistkracie (Denník N, 11.2.2025) 4. Ficove predstavy sa rozchádzajú nielen s realitou, ale aj so zákonmi (SME, 23.1.2025) 5. SaS volá po predčasných voľbách (Pravda, 27.1.2025) 6. Slovensko kleslo v indexe právneho štátu (Hospodárske noviny, 28.10.2025)

	7. Slovensko je na ceste stať sa ďalším Maďarskom (Hospodárske noviny, 15.7.2025) 8. Robert Fico nemusí snívať o zmene systému (Hospodárske noviny, 12.6.2025)
Digital Identity and Technologies	1. Občiansky i vodičský preukaz v telefóne. Rezort vnútra spustil mobilné aplikácie eDoklady a eIdentita (Pravda, 15.4.2025)
Historical and Cultural Contexts	1. Nežná revolúcia nevyrástla na zelenej lúke (SME, 16.11.2025) 2. Spoluzakladateľ VPN Peter Tatár: November 1989 nedokáže zrušiť nikto (SME, 15.11.2025) 3. Slovensko si pripomenulo Nežnú revolúciu (Pravda, 17.11.2025) 4. Historik: Československo zostávalo posledným pevným režimom (Hospodárske noviny, 17.11.2025) 5. Vo viacerých mestách sa budú konať zhromaždenia k výročiu Nežnej revolúcie (Hospodárske noviny, 16.11.2025)
Human Rights and Inclusion	1. Situácia kvír ľudí sa podľa aktivistov zhoršuje, štát diskrimináciu odmieta (Pravda, 10.10.2025) 2. Veľvyslanec USA G. Rana ocenil obhajcov ľudských práv na Slovensku (Hospodárske noviny, 15.1.2025)
Other	1. Budúcnosť sme my, odkázali z Bratislavy (SME, 16.11.2025) 2. Slovensko sa zmenilo na krajinu bez vlastností (SME, 28.5.2025) 5. Brusel dvíha štít: Eurokomisia chce bojovať proti zasahovaniu do volieb (Pravda, 12.11.2025)

	6. Slovensko má momentálne v zahraničí najhoršie meno v histórii (Pravda, 18.09.2025) 7. 'Puč bez dôkazov, z prevratu sa stalo fiasko': aktivisti chcú hlavu ministra (Pravda, 11.08.2025)
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Source: Own elaboration, 2025.

The presented table demonstrates that, in 2025, civic identity in Slovak media is constructed through two primary frameworks: (A) civic engagement and activism, and (B) political and legislative changes. From these two lines, it can be inferred that the citizen is portrayed in media discourse both as an active participant and as a subject influenced by political decision-making.

Based on the presented dataset, the media corpus confirms that civic identity is structured around seven distinct thematic frameworks (see more in Table 3). Presented data shows that the discourse is dominated by a dualism between active civic resistance and structural political-legislative changes. Nevertheless, issues of digital identity or petitions for minority rights are also found in the common discourse, which proves that the concept of citizenship in Slovak media is not purely abstract, but is related to institutional and technological developments.

CONCLUSION

In relation to the objective of the study, the presented thematic analysis mapped the Slovak media discourse and revealed that civic identity in 2025 is not constructed as a homogenous concept, but is fragmented and divided into seven thematic framework. The findings present a distinct creation of two lines represented by civic engagement and political presentation. This division shows that media do not just report on polarization but actively works on socio-political aspect of the topic. In doing so, they transform understanding of civic identity from a democratic tool of connection to a polarized tool of political mobilization.

The formation of civic identity in Slovakia and within Slovak society is a dynamic process shaped by three main components: political, socio-cultural, and psychological factors.

The analysis of the presented findings is based on a qualitative approach, specifically thematic analysis of media discourse. The results demonstrate that civic identity is constructed through political, media, and educational discourse, while its stability depends on the relationship between legal, political, socio-cultural, and psychological dimensions. Willingness to engage in the defense of democratic values and to actively participate in civic activities is conditioned by value-based convictions.

In the context of increasing polarization, civic identity emerges as a key factor in sustaining the democratic system. Understanding the mechanisms underlying its formation is therefore essential not only for the advancement of political science but also for the development of public policies, educational programs, and the activation of civil society.

Civic identity in Slovakia undoubtedly exists; however, its form is complex and dynamic. Theoretical approaches (Smith, Petrovska, Habermas) suggest that civic identity extends beyond the legal status of citizenship to include political, socio-cultural, and psychological dimensions. In the Slovak context, this concept began to develop more intensively after 1989, during the country's transition to a democratic system. Since then, civic identity has evolved within a framework shaped by historical experiences, political turbulence, and the contemporary challenges of globalization.

The analysis of media discourse confirms that civic identity is present, yet not homogeneous. In the media, it appears across seven thematic frameworks, ranging from self-awareness and values to civic activism, legislative changes, digital identity, historical contexts, and human rights. These frameworks illustrate that civic identity is constructed through political, media, and educational environments. However, the current polarization of society weakens

its inclusive character and transforms it into a tool of political mobilization, thereby undermining its democratic function.

This indicates that while civic identity in Slovakia exists, its stability is contingent upon value orientations, social interactions, and trust in institutions.

In conclusion, civic identity in Slovakia can be characterized as real but fragmented and challenged by polarization. Its strengthening requires the integration of legal, political, and socio-cultural dimensions with inclusive policies, education, and the promotion of civic participation. Without such measures, there is a risk that civic identity will be further reduced to an instrument of political conflict, which may ultimately weaken the democratic system.

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FRAMING THE ENERGY CRISIS IN CZECHIA

Filip Byrtus¹

ABSTRACT

This paper presents the concept of framing and introduces one of the methods used to study it. It is illustrated through the main aspects of political communication in Czechia regarding the “energy crisis” in the immediate aftermath of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine (2022) on the social media platform X (formerly Twitter). Observed aspects of political communication are focused on four main framing functions as Entman described them: how politicians defined the problem; how they described the cause of the problem; what their moral standpoint was; and what their proposed solution was. The author employed a mixed content analysis with multicoding on a corpus of 98 posts by seven Czech politicians. During the first peak of the energy crisis, the governing coalition maintained a unified framing of the situation, whereas the two opposition leaders framed it neither in line with the coalition nor consistently with one another. Coalition politicians primarily focused their communication on proposing solutions aimed at ending the energy crisis, or at least mitigating its economic effects on the population of Czechia. Opposition politicians most frequently expressed their moral standpoint.

Keywords: framing, political communication, X, Czechia, energy crisis

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INTRODUCTION

The. The aim of this paper is to present the often overlooked concept of "framing" through the lens of political communication by Czech politicians on the social media platform X (formerly Twitter), in the context of the energy crisis that emerged essentially in parallel with the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The monitored accounts belonged to the party leaders

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represented in the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic – in the case of the SPOLU coalition, the leaders of all three member parties were included: Petr Fiala (SPOLU/ODS), Markéta Pekarová Adamová (SPOLU/TOP 09), Marián Jurečka (SPOLU/KDU-ČSL), Vít Rakušan (STAN), Ivan Bartoš (Piráti), Andrej Babiš (ANO), Tomio Okamura (SPD).

Petr Fiala, Markéta Pekarová Adamová, Marián Jurečka, Vít Rakušan and Ivan Bartoš were, during the observed period, the leaders of the parties that formed the governing coalition, commonly referred to in everyday Czech as the "five-party coalition" (*pětikoalice*).

The paper consists of two parts. First, the theoretical background of the concept of "framing" and the methods used to study it internationally are introduced. The second part focuses on the four framing functions through which Czech politicians communicated the energy crisis - specifically, how the aforementioned politicians: 1) defined the problem; 2) identified its cause; 3) expressed their moral standpoint; and 4) proposed solutions.

While framing research in media studies is well established, political science has engaged with this concept considerably less. Research focusing specifically on framing in Czech political communication remains particularly scarce. It is precisely this gap that motivated the author to examine the framing of political communication in Czechia directly, rather than its effects on the population. With this aim in mind, two research questions were formulated:

1. Are there differences in the framing of the energy crisis within the five-party coalition and the opposition?
2. Which framing function of the energy crisis did Czech politicians focus on the most?

1 METHODOLOGY

To analyse the political communication of the selected politicians, a mixed content analysis with multicoding was chosen, with the primary emphasis placed on qualitative interpretation. The research sample was compiled as follows: 1)

the author entered the username of a given politician into the search function on the social media platform X (formerly Twitter), together with the pre-defined dates 22 February 2022 – 30 April 2022; 2) the author read all the displayed posts and included in the analysis only those relating to the energy crisis on the basis of the presence of specific keywords, or of meanings embedded in context or subtext; 3) within the selected posts, the author sought the information required to identify the framing functions as described by Robert Entman (1993); 4) the identified functions were recorded in a table, and specific posts were then selected that are used in the text as examples or, conversely, represent singular cases.

The social media platform X (formerly Twitter) was chosen precisely because of its search function, which makes it possible to display posts from specific dates (Facebook, for example, does not allow this). The dates were selected for the following reasons: 1) although the Russian invasion of Ukraine did not begin until 24 February 2022, Czech politicians had already begun to draw attention to the possible consequences of the escalating situation earlier, and so 22 February 2022 was chosen as the starting date; 2) the closing date of 30 April 2022 was chosen as the heating season in Czechia was drawing to a close, which also led to changes in the focus of political communication and simultaneously marked the end of the figurative "initial shock". The purpose of the paper was never to trace the development of the entire energy crisis, but rather to capture the framing during this period of "initial shock".

The accounts selected for analysis were those of the leaders of the political parties represented in the Chamber of Deputies during the observed period. The rationale was twofold: 1) the personalisation of politics and its effects — specifically the phenomenon whereby a country's population shifts its attention away from political parties and towards individual politicians (Macková, 2017, p. 23); and 2) the number of followers of a given social media account is dynamic, and had accounts been selected on the basis of follower count, the rationale for such a selection might no longer hold upon replication of the research; the

likelihood of a change in party leadership over a comparable period is considerably lower than the fluctuation in follower numbers.

Posts were selected on the basis of two possible (not mutually exclusive) criteria: 1) the presence of keywords related to the energy crisis: energy, energy prices, nuclear power, Rosatom, energy dependence, energy independence, energy security, energy self-sufficiency, Russian energy, the de-Russification of energy, restrictions on energy supplies, gas, electricity, inflation, price increases, fuel, heat, energy poverty, energy crisis, Green Deal; 2) the presence of the requisite information within the context or subtext. Both criteria were applied in Czech; the keywords are presented here in English translation. Language and its use represent one of the key tools in the construction of framing; the posts were therefore analysed in the original. On occasion, politicians published certain posts — including, for example, those involving politicians from other countries — in both languages (once in Czech and once in English). In such cases, the post was included in the analysis only once, and in order to maintain linguistic consistency, the Czech version was selected. All quoted posts, including those presented later as examples or singular cases, were translated by the author.

A total of 98 posts from across the entire observed period were included in the analysis, distributed as follows: Petr Fiala (33 posts), Andrej Babiš (18), Tomio Okamura (16), Markéta Pekarová Adamová (12), Marián Jurečka (11), Ivan Bartoš (6), and Vít Rakušan (2). Coding was based solely on content directly visible within the post itself — including text, images, videos, and link previews (e.g., headlines) — without accessing any content requiring further interaction, such as opening a linked article. The low frequency of posts from, for example, Vít Rakušan does not indicate an absence of political communication on his part, but rather reflects the fact that during this period he strategically oriented himself towards other primary topics, most notably the refugee crisis that followed the Russian full-scale invasion.

Each post could receive a maximum of four codes (one per function); thus, even when a single post contained multiple pieces of information warranting a

given function, that function was recorded only as +1. This procedure was adopted to protect the quantitative dimension of the research from the varying lengths of posts, since longer posts may contain considerably more functions (the difference between the shortest and longest post is more than 100 words).

The author is aware of the limitation arising from the fact that the corpus was coded by a single coder, which meant that an intercoder reliability measure could not be calculated. The author sought to compensate for this limitation through a detailed description of all four categories (functions), so as to allow the research to be replicated.

Each category had pre-defined rules determining whether a given post could receive its code. Posts bearing no connection whatsoever to the topic of the energy crisis did not reach this stage at all.

The first function (definition) was assigned only to those posts that named the situation (e.g. the energy crisis) or the problem (e.g. energy poverty or "Fiala's poverty"), or that carried information relating to the manifestations of the energy crisis (e.g. higher expenditure by households and individuals). A post describing a catastrophic scenario — one that was not a reality at the time of writing — was assigned the code for moral standpoint, not definition. This rule follows from the logic that a catastrophic scenario does not carry information describing an actual state of affairs, but rather speculates about future developments.

The second function (causes) was assigned only when a post carried information about the "culprit" responsible for the emergence of the phenomena described under definition (e.g. Russia and Putin, but also Fiala's government or the EU).

The third function (moral standpoint) was assigned only when a post contained a reference to emotion (e.g. solidarity, grief, regret) and words associated with the expression of these emotions, including strong language (one of the politicians in the sample used the word "manure"). The third function was also assigned to posts that called for change or urged action but carried no information as to what changes or actions should take place.

The fourth function (solutions) could be assigned only to those posts that described feasible and clearly defined solutions (e.g. the reduction and capping of prices, across-the-board and targeted economic assistance). Ideally, posts would also contain a description of the effects that the proposed solutions would have (e.g. by how much a given solution would reduce the price of something). Posts that referred to solutions adopted in neighbouring states without explicitly proposing their implementation in Czechia were treated as an evaluative stance rather than a concrete proposal, and were therefore coded under the third function (moral standpoint) rather than the fourth.

The quantitative dimension of the research consisted of a frequency analysis of the occurrence of these codes, which made it possible to identify structural differences in the intensity of use of individual functions between governmental and opposition actors. The qualitative content analysis then focused on an in-depth interpretation of the specific narratives, metaphors, and rhetorical strategies through which the selected political figures constructed these functional dimensions of the frame.

2 FRAMING: DEFINITION, THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

The topics for which framing can be observed are practically unlimited, which stems from the nature of the concept itself. But how exactly can framing be defined? This is precisely where we encounter the first difficulty - even scholars themselves often struggle to pin down a workable definition.

The edited volume *Winning with Words* by Schaffner and Sellers (2009) opens (Preface) by introducing two significant thinkers on framing and their reflections on the search for a definition, presenting the two authors, in a sense, as notional opposites. The editors specifically write (2009, Preface) that Entman associates the definition of framing with any effort to influence public opinion, whereas Iyengar instead seeks ways to narrow the definition. Iyengar, however, holds a considerable advantage within this edited volume, as he is himself the author of the closing text, *The Next Steps* (Iyengar, 2009, pp. 184–191). In that

text, Iyengar explains that he is indeed an advocate of a narrower form of the definition — one that allows framing effects to be distinguished from persuasion — while agreeing that to frame means to present information in a specific way (2009, p. 185). Iyengar further explains that the concept of framing is understood quite differently across psychology, sociology, political science, and communication studies (2009, p. 188); in operational terms, however, he considers research to have converged on a relatively loose definition of framing (2009, p. 188). He nonetheless maintains that the further development of framing research requires the adoption or discovery of a narrower definition (2009, p. 190). Robert Entman is afforded considerably more space in this paper, and his definition and key concepts are presented in detail below.

The aforementioned Robert Entman is the author of a definition of framing that is of crucial importance for understanding the subject: "To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating context, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation" (Entman, 1993, p. 52). Entman elaborates: "Frames, then, define problems – determine what a causal agent is doing with what costs and benefits, usually measured in terms of common cultural values; diagnose causes – identify the forces creating the problem; make moral judgements – evaluate causal agents and their effects; and suggest remedies – offer and justify treatments for the problems and predict their likely effects" (Entman, 1993, p. 52).

De Vreese (2005), in his paper *News Framing: Theory and Typology*, presents Entman's previously mentioned definition and functions of framing, before adding further insights of his own. He specifically notes that framing research tends to fall primarily into two categories: studies of 1) content; and 2) effects (2005, p. 51). De Vreese conceives of communication as a dynamic rather than static process, in which frames are located at several "points": at the moment of their construction (frame-building) and in the space between the media and the

cultural predispositions of the audience (frame-setting). He further presents Entman's framing theory as a process in which frames are located at several points within communication — at the level of the communicator, in the text, at the level of the audience, and within the cultural background or context. De Vreese then connects this opening idea with Entman's theory and describes the process of framing in terms of three stages: frame-building, frame-setting, and societal level consequences (de Vreese, 2005, pp. 51–52).

De Vreese (2005, pp. 51–52) further elaborates on the previously described concepts of frame-building and frame-setting. The former (frame-building) he describes as a process in which journalists construct a frame, and identifies two factors that influence this step: 1) internal factors, which may be shaped by the internal values of the content producers (e.g. a code of ethics); and 2) external factors, which may be associated with the relationship between media outlets and elites and social movements. The latter concept (frame-setting) relates to the interaction of the audience with the resulting frame — specifically, their social knowledge (awareness) and predispositions to understand a given frame. The outcome of the complete framing process can influence both individuals and entire societies. At the individual level, this may involve an adjustment or change of opinion regarding a specific topic presented by the frame, while at the societal level it may extend to behavioural changes within the context of political socialisation, decision-making, and collective action (de Vreese, 2005, p. 52).

The authorial duo Pan and Kosicki (1993) explain the concept of framing in their text: *Framing Analysis: An Approach to News Discourse* through two possible conceptualisations: sociological and psychological (1993, pp. 56–57). In the case of the sociological conceptualisation, the authors state that the process of framing first enables journalists to process large quantities of information and subsequently convey it effectively to an audience. In this sense, the communicator transforms a body of information so that the audience is able to classify the resulting message, sort it appropriately, and interpret it on the basis of their experiences, social values, or morality (1993, p. 56). They further explain

that a frame can be understood as a central organising idea that provides the audience with a specific meaning. In this context, they refer to the presence of five key elements that indicate the presence of framing: metaphors, exemplars, catchphrases, depictions, and visual images (1993, p. 56). In the case of the psychological conceptualisation, the authors note that although the cognitive functions of the individual are the subject of ongoing scholarly inquiry, a frame can be understood as a specific information structure that organises diverse fragments of knowledge. In the context of subsequent research, framing is defined as the placement of information within a specific context with the aim of increasing the salience of certain aspects, thereby allocating greater cognitive capacity to the given message within human perception. In this way, the perceived importance of selected elements of a communicated message is influenced, which in turn shapes the decision-making processes of an individual or an entire audience (1993, pp. 56–57).

Framing was studied under various names and approaches from as early as the interwar period, but the real breakthrough came at the turn of the 1970s and 1980s, when key studies emerged that focused on debunking the media's claim to objectivity (D'Angelo, 2017, pp. 636–637). "Objectivity" meant that journalists could contextualise a topic through framing and background information while leaving its evaluation and interpretation to the sources they cited, rather than to themselves (D'Angelo, 2017, p. 637).

The authorial duo Matthes and Kohring (2008), in their paper *The Content Analysis of Media Frames: Toward Improving Reliability and Validity*, present five methodological approaches that can be employed to study framing (2008, p. 259). Although their paper focuses on framing research within the media, the approaches they identify are equally applicable to research within political science.

The first approach they mention is the hermeneutic approach, and research grounded in this framework seeks to identify, interpret, and connect frames on the basis of broader cultural context. Studies employing this approach tend, in

their words, to focus on smaller research samples, utilise qualitative methods, and lack a quantitative component. A fundamental drawback of this approach is the inability to demonstrate that a frame has genuinely been found — as a result, researchers may identify frames in the sample because they consciously or unconsciously sought to find them (Matthes, Kohring, 2008, pp. 258–259).

The second approach they mention is the linguistic approach. This approach focuses on the selection, placement, and structure of words and sentences within a text. The key idea underlying such research is that framing begins with the choice of words, which form the figurative foundations of the frame being presented. The linguistic approach mirrors the previously described hermeneutic approach in many respects, but distinguishes itself precisely through the presentation of the words that enabled the frame to be identified. The key challenge of this approach, however, lies in the demands it places on the researcher, as achieving demonstrability requires the examination and measurement of syntax, script, theme, and rhetoric (Matthes, Kohring, 2008, p. 260).

The third possible approach is termed the manual holistic approach. This approach to research begins with a qualitative analysis of the text, proceeds to coding, and concludes with a manual content analysis. The manual holistic approach is again exposed to the same risk as the hermeneutic approach — namely that the researcher may consciously or unconsciously identify frames because they "wanted" to find them. The only solution is a clear definition of the criteria that led to the identification of a given frame. However, even this step carries certain pitfalls, as well-defined criteria may then prevent the researcher from identifying frames that may be concealed within the sample (Matthes, Kohring, 2008, pp. 260–261).

The fourth approach is associated with technological advancement — specifically, software enabling quantitative content analysis. When employing such an approach, the programme searches for specific words used across a larger body of text. This eliminates the risk of the researcher identifying frames

on the basis of a conscious or unconscious desire to find them, but simultaneously eliminates the ability to perceive context and subtext — with the result that frames are reduced to mere clusters of words (Matthes, Kohring, 2008, p. 261).

The final approach described by Matthes and Kohring (2008) is the so-called deductive approach. This approach begins with the pre-definition of the frame being sought, which requires the researcher to have a clear idea of the frames likely to be encountered. As a result, deductive studies are largely limited to already established frames. This makes the approach considerably inflexible when it comes to the identification of newly emerging frames that were not anticipated at the outset of the research (2008, p. 262).

When researching framing, it is important to bear in mind that the approaches described above work primarily with written text. Framing can, however, also be found in visual representations - that is, in images or photographs (de Vreese, 2005, p. 54).

The method of selecting posts on the basis of keywords was successfully employed, for example, in the research of Sanovich, Stukal, and Tucker (2018), who analysed posts on platform X (then Twitter) precisely through keywords associated with the topic under investigation. The same approach was therefore adopted in this study.

A methodologically similar approach was adopted by Maja Sørensen and Darrick Evensen (2023) in their paper *Framing the Covid-19 Pandemic: A Comparative Analysis of Swedish and Danish Crisis Communication*. Unlike this paper, their sample did not consist of social media posts, but of transcripts from press conferences held by the Swedish and Danish governments during the first phase of the pandemic. The authors employed content analysis to identify Entman's (1993) four framing functions in the communication of Swedish and Danish politicians, and subsequently conducted a comparative analysis (Sørensen, Evensen, 2023, pp. 961–962).

The case study (book) by Francesco Olmastroni (2014), *Framing War: Public Opinion and Decision-Making in Comparative Perspective*, draws attention to one of the fundamental methodological challenges in framing research — its interpretive nature. Framing is dependent on context and cultural-linguistic norms, which significantly complicates the achievement of objectivity. Quantitative research, while enabling the processing of larger volumes of data, does not allow for deeper segmentation of the framing identified. Qualitative research does allow for such segmentation, but at the cost of reduced objectivity. For this reason, Olmastroni recommends a mixed-methods research design combining both approaches (Olmastroni, 2014, p. 47), which was therefore adopted in this paper as well.

Framing research in Czechia is severely underdeveloped. One of the few exceptions is a 2012 paper by František Kalvas, Jan Váně, Martin Štípková, and Martin Kreidl, entitled *Rámcování a nastolování agendy: Dva paralelní procesy v interakci* (Framing and Agenda-Setting: Two Parallel Processes in Interaction). The authors examined the possible interconnection of framing theory and agenda-setting theory. The aim was to demonstrate that different framing produces different effects on an audience. They further argue that different framing may set the public agenda with varying degrees of strength, and not least, the authors sought to demonstrate that a specific manner of framing information can lead to the deliberate shaping of the perceived importance of the communicated message. Their arguments regarding the connection between the two aforementioned theories are grounded in the theory of cognitive dissonance, which they did not, however, test on their own data. Their dataset consists of panel data concerning church restitutions, which enabled them to track the development of preferences regarding the most important events within a defined time period. These data are then combined with a content analysis that tracks the number of news items and the structure of the frames employed (Kalvas, Váně, Štípková, Kreidl, 2012, p. 4). The authors successfully verified and

substantiated their hypothesis regarding the connection between framing theory and agenda-setting theory (Kalvas, Váně, Štípková, Kreidl, 2012, pp. 20–25).

3 FRAMING OF THE ENERGY CRISIS BY CZECH POLITICIANS

Framing in political communication is of considerable importance to politicians (as communicators), as it enables them to highlight certain aspects of reality while simultaneously concealing information that might lead the audience to undesirable conclusions and reactions, and consequently to unintended and unwanted actions (Entman, 1993, p. 55). In this sense, politicians are compelled to compete, figuratively speaking, with one another and with the media for the dominant framing of a given event or piece of information. Should the framing of a specific communication fail, politicians risk their decision not being positively received by society. Conversely, once a population has accepted a particular frame, any sudden change of position carries the risk of provoking an equally negative societal reaction (Entman, 1993, p. 55).

As noted in the introduction, the author employed a mixed content analysis to analyse the posts of Czech politicians on the social media platform X (formerly Twitter), with the primary emphasis placed on its qualitative dimension. The analysis proceeded as follows: 1) the author analysed all posts published on the selected accounts of Czech politicians on platform X during the period from 22 February 2022 to 30 April 2022; 2) posts relating to the energy crisis were subsequently selected on the basis of keywords used, or contextual and subtextual information; 3) the next step involved a mixed content analysis of their content, enabling the data to be interpreted both qualitatively and quantitatively on the basis of Entman's four framing functions (problem definition, cause, moral standpoint, solution) (1993); 4) the final step consisted of the synthesis and interpretation of the analysis.

The following sections of the paper will present the findings of the qualitative part of the analysis separately for government politicians and subsequently for the opposition. Government politicians are presented collectively, as their

communication was in many respects consistent; only those posts are included that represent the central idea running through the communication of all government politicians, or that distinguished a particular politician in some way. Opposition politicians differed so substantially in both style and content that they are presented individually.

All quotations from Czech are the author's translation.

3.1 The Governing Coalition

The government of Petr Fiala in 2022 was composed of five parties (ODS, TOP 09, KDU-ČSL, STAN, and the Pirates), and the communication of the selected representatives from each party clearly indicates not only a possible alignment of views among them, but also the probable presence of a pre-agreed narrative, or at least the existence of agreed-upon talking points that formed the figurative backbone of their hegemonic (political) communication. This fact does not, however, preclude the nuances that manifested themselves, for example, in the expressions used — and occasionally in a rather expressive manner.

Petr Fiala was the most prolific communicator on the energy crisis among all the politicians examined. The number of posts selected from X (formerly Twitter) for the mixed content analysis was 33; this does not mean, however, that only 33 results were produced, as many posts frequently referenced concepts falling into more than one of the four categories described earlier.

The first framing function, and simultaneously the first coding category, is problem definition. Nevertheless, the most common narrative was associated with the general rise in prices, growing inflation, and increasing energy costs. Petr Fiala addressed, for example, the financial difficulties into which people had fallen as a result of the general rise in prices, and specifically mentioned the term "energy poverty" in connection with support for people facing existential hardship (Fiala, 2022a). Vít Rakušan addressed the general anxieties surrounding the situation and emphasised that these were understandable

(Rakušan, 2022a). Ivan Bartoš was more specific about who was affected by the energy crisis, explicitly mentioning families with young children and single-parent households (Bartoš, 2022a).

The second framing function concerns the causes of the problem. Petr Fiala unequivocally linked the situation to the war in Ukraine. One example is his characterisation of the curtailment of energy supplies from Russia as part of Russia's hybrid war, aimed at undermining the unity of Czechia and the democratic structures of Czech society (Fiala, 2022b); at the same time, he sought to communicate the government's preparedness for the situation (Fiala, 2022c). Fiala also addressed the impact on other states, for example the halting of Russian gas supplies to Poland (Fiala, 2022d). Markéta Pekarová Adamová was more expressive, and many of her posts fall into the category of moral standpoint; however, in the context of the causes of the energy crisis, she noted that the war provoked by Putin (Pekarová Adamová, 2022a) would affect "each and every one of us" (Pekarová Adamová, 2022b), and that the unfavourable trajectory of the conflict for Russia could be directly linked to the blackmailing negotiation tactics employed by Russia in relation to energy (Pekarová Adamová, 2022c). Marián Jurečka further addressed the relationship between Russian conduct and energy policy, specifically articulating the idea that "Putin sends tanks to the West, and we send him billions of euros for natural gas every week" (Jurečka, 2022a).

The third function relates to the communicator's moral standpoint on the topic under examination. Petr Fiala unequivocally condemned Russian conduct and Putin's actions, and called for the most decisive possible measures against Russia, including in connection with the "de-Russification of European energy" (Fiala, 2022e). Markéta Pekarová Adamová also expressed herself very negatively regarding the situation and, in particular, Putin; however, unlike Petr Fiala, she also directed her criticism at the government of Andrej Babiš (then in opposition), which, in her words, had sought to involve Russia in the tender for the completion of the Dukovany nuclear power plant (Pekarová Adamová, 2022d). The most expressive and negative, however, was Marián Jurečka, who

employed in his communication the phrase: "Yes, cow manure is better than gas from Putin, who murders children, women, and innocent people, who has unleashed war on Ukraine" (Jurečka, 2022b). The choice of such an expressive term is remarkable in the context of Jurečka's political profile. KDU-ČSL, as a centrist conservative party, traditionally inclines towards a measured and balanced communication style. The use of a vulgar expression therefore likely does not represent an incidental stylistic choice, but rather a deliberate rhetorical strategy — an intentional disruption of the expected communicative pattern with the aim of emphasising the urgency and gravity of the message. Expressivity here serves as a framing amplifier: the more the expression surprises, the more it captures attention and underscores the force of the argument. Vít Rakušan also communicated his moral standpoint very negatively towards the situation and towards Russia, while simultaneously expressing the idea that the current situation had arisen as a result of Czechia having "...taken the right side" (Rakušan, 2022a). Ivan Bartoš contributed, for example, a remark that the Czechia was currently in a state of war economy and that the government was taking the situation very seriously (Bartoš, 2022b).

The final function concerns proposed solutions, and it was universally the case that almost all politicians — not only those from the governing coalition — addressed this function most frequently. Petr Fiala mentioned, in the long-term perspective, the necessity of energy independence and security (Fiala, 2022f). At the domestic level, he repeatedly wrote about targeted assistance for those affected by the economic consequences of the war (Fiala, 2022g). The targeted nature of this assistance was an important point emphasised by all politicians from the governing coalition, and the narrative surrounding targeted assistance fundamentally distinguished the five-party coalition from the opposition. Also frequently mentioned by politicians was raw material independence. One example is a post by Marián Jurečka (2022c): "We cannot rely on a war criminal! Together with other sovereign states in Europe, we will not be intimidated. Accelerating energy independence from Russia is the only way forward. We will

make use of alternative suppliers, thermal savings in buildings, and renewable energy sources." Nuclear energy also gained considerable prominence, with politicians from the governing coalition universally agreeing that it must not be dependent on Russia. On this point, Markéta Pekarová Adamová wrote (2022e): "The Russian state will no longer supply nuclear fuel to the Temelín power plant. It will be replaced by an American and a French company. Every step that leads to reduced dependence on the criminal Russian regime is crucial for the secure future of our country." The recurring concepts of assistance included: increases to the living and subsistence minimum (Pekarová Adamová, 2022a), increases to parental allowance (Bartoš, 2022a; Bartoš, 2022b), the abolition of the obligation to blend biofuels into diesel (Pekarová Adamová, 2022f), and not least the temporary reduction of excise duty on diesel and petrol (Fiala, 2022h). Although no significant deviations from the narrative can be identified in the context of this framing function, it is worth noting one post by Ivan Bartoš in which he slightly diverged from the general five-party coalition narrative. He linked the abolition of the biofuel blending obligation to Andrej Babiš's business interests — something the other politicians did not do. Specifically, he wrote that "Mr Babiš's rapeseed business will no longer flourish (...) because the measure harms nature and wastes precious land" (Bartoš, 2022c).

3.2 The Opposition

At the beginning of 2022, the opposition in Czechia consisted of only two parties: Andrej Babiš's ANO 2011 and Tomio Okamura's SPD. Although the two politicians share certain theses and ideas, their overall narratives differ in several key aspects, and for this reason each will be presented individually. It should be noted that both opposition leaders do not address certain substantial concepts in their posts, or their narrative leaves room for various interpretations. This makes it impossible to draw definitive conclusions on, for example, the relationship between the outbreak of the war and the onset of the energy crisis.

Andrej Babiš framed his communication on the energy crisis primarily as a critique of the pace and procedures of Petr Fiala's government. Babiš unequivocally perceives the entire situation through the lens of a general rise in prices — not only of energy, but also of housing, food, and fuel (Babiš, 2022a). He did mention the term "energy poverty" (Babiš, 2022b) during the observed period, but never specified precisely what it meant within his narrative. On the one hand, Andrej Babiš made it clear that he agreed with the governing coalition's position on the causes of the war; however, within the sample (18 posts), no information was found to indicate whether he directly linked the war to the energy crisis (which does not necessarily mean that he never shared such information elsewhere or at another time). At the same time, it should be noted that in one post he shared a link to his speech in the Chamber of Deputies, in which he addressed both the war in Ukraine and rising energy prices, but connected the latter to the need to revise the Green Deal (Babiš, 2022c). It can therefore only be assumed that Andrej Babiš perceives a connection between the war in Ukraine and rising energy prices, but this was not stated explicitly within the sample.

He does, however, unequivocally link the rising prices to the actions of Petr Fiala's government. One example is a post in which he criticises the unpreparedness of the state material reserves (gas storage facilities) and the speed of the response by the then Minister Síkela (Babiš, 2022d). This reference to the then Minister Síkela distinguished Andrej Babiš from Tomio Okamura, who also criticised the government but did not link its actions to any specific politician.

Andrej Babiš's moral standpoint is closely connected to the causes described above, as he primarily expresses himself negatively regarding the impact of the entire situation on Czech citizens and holds the government responsible. One example is an excerpt from one of his posts: "...Apparently you should limit your driving and heating. When will they tell us not to use electricity either? They will collect more VAT from inflation, but they will give you nothing back" (Babiš,

2022e). Another example is his summary of the overall situation, in which he refers to what awaits Czechs as "Fiala's poverty" (Babiš, 2022f).

The final framing function is proposed solutions. Andrej Babiš summarised his position in a post presenting "12 measures against poverty", in which he located the solution to the entire situation in across-the-board economic assistance. These measures ranged from direct contributions (a pensioners' contribution, an increased parental allowance, a higher living and subsistence minimum) through tax reductions (a cut in VAT on electricity, gas, and heating to 0% for 2022, and on basic foodstuffs) to price caps on fuel, foodstuffs, and emission allowances (Babiš, 2022g). In terms of context and subtext, however, it is indirectly apparent that the implied solution was to have a different government — one that would not include the five-party coalition. In this sense, it is also worth noting that Andrej Babiš repeatedly called for greater decisiveness and speed of action on the part of the government, but — unlike Tomio Okamura — did not call on the government to resign (see below, Okamura, 2022c).

The final politician under observation was Tomio Okamura. During the observed period, he addressed the topic in the form of posts on sixteen occasions; however, many key pieces of information are absent, which — as in the case of Andrej Babiš — leaves room for various interpretations. In terms of problem definition, he unequivocally refers to an energy shortage (Okamura, 2022a) and further to rising prices for energy, food, and housing (Okamura, 2022b).

During the observed period, he primarily located the causes of the crisis in the actions of Petr Fiala's government. He criticises, for example, the government's unwillingness to abandon the Green Deal and the absence of an alternative source of cheaper energy (Okamura, 2022a). Unlike Andrej Babiš, however, he criticises not only "what the government failed to do" but also the measures already implemented to mitigate the economic impact of the crisis — for example: "(...) The abolition of road tax will not help most people, and the removal of the biofuel blending requirement will reduce the price of one litre of fuel by approximately one crown..." (Okamura, 2022c). Tomio Okamura also

located the causes of the crisis within the EU itself, noting that on the one hand it was artificially driving up prices, while on the other the European Commission had concluded that one third of Europeans would fall into energy poverty (Okamura, 2022d).

Tomio Okamura's moral standpoint is closely connected to his negative attitude towards the parties forming the governing coalition during the observed period, and simultaneously references the poor conditions — not only economic — in which people found themselves. In his posts, he not only criticised the government but openly called on it to resign (Okamura, 2022c).

The final category comprises the solutions proposed by Okamura for the overall situation. Some of his ideas have already been touched upon, such as his call for the government to resign. Among his further proposals was the withdrawal from the Green Deal (Okamura, 2022e), and a shift in narrative also occurred when he added price capping to his calls for reductions in taxes on electricity and fuel (Okamura, 2022f). The proposed solutions framing function was considerably more complex in the case of Tomio Okamura, as in many instances he presented what other states had done, or what effects the decisions of other states had had on their citizens (Okamura, 2022h; Okamura, 2022i), but rarely specified whether the same measures should be adopted by Fiala's government.

To conclude the section on Okamura, it is worth mentioning one further post in which he differed markedly from all the other politicians examined: "If the EU disconnects from Russian energy, fuel in Czechia will cost a minimum of 60 crowns per litre, according to calculations by the German central bank, the Bundesbank. 'One of the consequences of disconnection will be that Germany and Czechia will fall into recession, while Russia will barely feel it,' says economist Lukáš Kovanda" (Okamura, 2022g). This post set Okamura apart from all the other politicians observed, as no other politician attempted to call into question the anti-Russian energy policy.

Tomio Okamura's communication style was markedly different from that of the other politicians. From a quantitative perspective, he addressed the proposed solutions framing function least frequently (out of 16 posts, this code was applied only four times), and he focused primarily on eliciting an emotional response from his audience. This type of communication was not foreign to the other politicians either, but no other politician exhibited such a disparity between the effort to provoke an emotional reaction and the presentation of proposed solutions. One example is an excerpt from one of his posts: "(...) The Poles and Hungarians have reduced taxes on energy, basic foodstuffs, and fuel, and have made mortgages more affordable. Will the government finally do something for our citizens?" (Okamura, 2022b).

CONCLUSION

The qualitative dimension of the mixed content analysis was employed primarily to answer the first research question.

The representatives of the governing coalition maintained a consistent narrative throughout the observed period, identifying the problem in terms of rising prices — not only of energy — and directly linking the cause of this situation to the conflict in Ukraine. They further emphasised two figurative pathways that had led to the price increases: 1) Russia ceasing to supply those states that stand behind Ukraine; and 2) Czechia having chosen to defend Western values and Ukraine, and consequently seeking alternative energy sources in order not to economically support Russian aggression while simultaneously increasing the country's energy security and independence. It is important not to conflate these two pieces of information, as there is a fundamental distinction between rising prices as a result of Russia's own decision and rising prices as a result of the decision not to economically support Russia. The moral standpoint of the coalition representatives was equally unified, and likewise stemmed from two directions: 1) sympathy and support for those who had found themselves in economic difficulty as a result of high prices; and 2)

condemnation of Russian and Putin's conduct, which — in their words — had led to an aggressive and unprovoked war that compelled not only Czechia to reconsider its energy security and independence. The proposed and implemented solutions were again presented in a unified manner, and in addition to specific points of assistance, all representatives also emphasised the necessity of targeted assistance only.

The answer to the first research question (1. Are there differences in the framing of the energy crisis within the five-party coalition and the opposition?) in relation to the five-party coalition is therefore: "No — with minor exceptions, the framing of the five-party coalition's communication was unified."

Andrej Babiš directly or indirectly aligned with the governing coalition in many respects in his problem definition (as described in his section) and agreed with the connection between the war and rising prices. It is, however, essential to distinguish two facts: 1) the energy crisis was caused by an external force, but 2) the impact of the energy crisis on citizens and the economy was the government's responsibility. His most significant disagreements with the governing coalition concerned the topic of proposed solutions, where — in his view — broad-based measures and across-the-board assistance would have been far more effective than targeted assistance. The moral standpoint is intentionally addressed last here, as his disagreements surrounding proposed solutions gave rise to differences in moral standpoint. Andrej Babiš, like the governing coalition, stood up for those affected by the difficult economic situation, but adopted a negative stance towards the government, perceiving its efforts as insufficient, ineffective, and harmful to citizens.

Tomio Okamura was in ideological opposition to the government to a considerably greater degree than Andrej Babiš. It is nevertheless undeniable that when the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of Czechia voted to condemn the Russian attack on Ukraine, SPD voted in favour as well. During the observed period, Tomio Okamura defined the problem in much the same way as all the other politicians under observation (prices, rising costs, etc.). He located the

primary cause of the situation in the EU and — like Andrej Babiš — identified the problem in the solutions proposed and implemented by the governing coalition. His moral standpoint rested on a similar foundation to that of Andrej Babiš, but he significantly extended his negativity to encompass the aforementioned EU. While Andrej Babiš did express criticism of emissions allowances and the Green Deal, he never directly linked the causes of the crisis to the EU. In terms of proposed solutions, he again partially agreed with Andrej Babiš, but extended them to include limiting the influence of the EU on energy policy in Czechia. Not least, he distinguished himself by the fact that he would likely not have sought a complete severance of Czech energy supply — at least with regard to fuel — from Russia. As noted in the "Opposition" section of this paper, Tomio Okamura frequently presented the situation in other countries and potential catastrophic scenarios. In the case of the aforementioned non-severance from Russian energy, he described what would happen if Czech energy were to be severed from Russia, but did not specify what decision he (or SPD) would have made had he been addressing the situation from the position of a governing politician.

In the case of the opposition, the answer to the first research question (1. Are there differences in the framing of the energy crisis within the five-party coalition and the opposition?) is less clear-cut than it was for the five-party coalition. Andrej Babiš and Tomio Okamura shared certain figurative points of intersection in their framing, but it is certainly not possible to speak of complete agreement with only minor differences, as was the case with the five-party coalition.

Tomio Okamura focused predominantly on emotions within the population and constructed most of his posts around a sense of frustration and injustice. Unlike Tomio Okamura, Andrej Babiš did not orient his international examples exclusively towards "ideologically aligned" governments of neighbouring states. In terms of the causes function, both politicians again partially converged and diverged in their views. One example is the aforementioned relationship between

the energy crisis and the EU. In this sense, it can be said that Andrej Babiš locates the origins of the energy crisis in the Russo-Ukrainian war, does not criticise the government's decision to take a geopolitical stance in support of Ukraine, but primarily attributes the economic consequences of the crisis to the actions of Fiala's government. Tomio Okamura constructed his communication differently. Okamura does not identify with the geopolitical decisions of Petr Fiala's government in his narrative (despite SPD having voted in favour of condemning the Russian invasion of Ukraine), and thus links the causes of the energy crisis to governmental decisions and to the conduct of the EU. In terms of proposed solutions, Tomio Okamura did not express himself extensively and — unlike Andrej Babiš — did not criticise the targeted approach in favour of Babiš's proposed across-the-board assistance. Tomio Okamura further presented the "darkest" or most catastrophic scenarios that could materialise, which Andrej Babiš did not do.

To answer the second research question (2. Which framing function of the energy crisis did Czech politicians focus on the most?), it was necessary to subject the individual posts of each politician to a mixed content analysis with multicoding, and the ongoing results were recorded in a table (Tab. 1 below) — this constituting the more substantial quantitative dimension of the mixed content analysis. It is important to bear in mind that a single post may contain multiple framing functions, and therefore the total number of posts does not necessarily correspond to the number of functions identified. In some posts, politicians addressed only the proposed solution to the overall situation, while in others a single post contained information that placed it within all four functions simultaneously.

The second research question (2. Which framing function of the energy crisis did Czech politicians focus on the most?) does not have a single, unequivocal answer that could be summarised in one sentence. Given the multicoding procedure, percentages are calculated relative to each politician's total number of

posts and therefore do not sum to 100%. For clarity, the percentages for individual politicians are also presented in the table below (Tab. 1).

Among the coalition politicians, Petr Fiala (81.8%) and Marián Jurečka (90.9%) focused most heavily on communicating proposed solutions. Ivan Bartoš presented his moral standpoint and proposed solutions to an equal extent (83.3%). Markéta Pekarová Adamová expressed her moral standpoint slightly more often (83.3%) than she presented solutions (75%), while Vít Rakušan addressed causes, moral standpoint, and solutions to an equal extent (100%); however, since Vít Rakušan shared only 2 posts on the topic during the observed period, his percentage results appear disproportionate, making meaningful individual-level comparison difficult.

The coalition politicians shared a total of 64 posts, with proposed solutions coded in 53 posts (82.8%), moral standpoint in 35 posts (54.7%), problem definition in 22 posts (34.4%), and causes in 19 posts (29.7%). In this sense, it can thus be said that coalition politicians primarily focused on the solutions function.

In the case of the opposition, the situation differs. For Andrej Babiš, the moral standpoint function was found in 14 posts (77.8%), proposed solutions in 11 posts (61.1%), problem definition in 10 posts (55.6%), and causes in 7 posts (38.9%). For Tomio Okamura, the definition function was found in all 16 posts (100%), the causes and moral standpoint functions in 14 posts each (87.5%), and proposed solutions in only 4 posts (25%). The opposition politicians shared a total of 34 posts, and the dominant function was moral standpoint, found in 28 posts (82.4%). Definition was found in 26 posts (76.5%), causes in 21 posts (61.8%), and solutions in 15 posts (44.1%).

In terms of comparison, the above findings offer several possible interpretations; what is unequivocal, however, is that coalition politicians focused most on proposed solutions (82.8%), while opposition politicians focused most on moral standpoint (82.4%). Worth noting, however, is the difference in the communication style of the opposition.

The aforementioned SPD leader placed the greatest emphasis on criticism of the government and simultaneously drew on expert opinions to present "catastrophic" scenarios. In the qualitative content analysis conducted to answer the first research question, a certain subtext could be perceived in Okamura's posts — namely that the government should resign, or at least make decisions contrary to those of the EU — but for the purposes of the quantitative dimension, this subtext could not be coded. Although both of these points were explicitly stated in individual posts and coded accordingly, they appeared as subtext across a broader range of posts in a manner that could not be captured by the quantitative dimension of the analysis. The absence of proposed solutions in Tomio Okamura's communication nonetheless deserves closer attention — specifically, the communicative tools he employed in order to avoid directly mentioning solutions while simultaneously retaining the favour of his audience. Okamura made use, for example, of moralising questions, or linked a supranational culprit (the EU) to the government of Petr Fiala.

In the case of Andrej Babiš, coding the fourth function (proposed solutions) was the most complicated. Like Okamura, Babiš repeatedly presented solutions adopted in other countries, but unlike Okamura, he supplemented these with appeals directed at specific government politicians. In these instances, coding followed the rule (described in the methodology) concerning references to solutions abroad without a clear implication of domestic implementation; however, the author believes that, in this sense, Babiš was indirectly presenting possible solutions to specific government politicians through subtext. For the quantitative part of the research, however, it is not possible to unambiguously code subtext that cannot be demonstrated, and these cases were therefore coded, in accordance with the rule, as moral standpoint.

Tab. 1: Distribution of Framing Functions in Selected Posts.

Politician	Total	Problem Definition	Causes	Moral Standpoint	Solutions
P. Fiala	33	9 (27,3%)	8 (24,2%)	12 (36,4%)	27 (81,8%)
M. Pekarová Adamová	12	3 (25%)	3 (25%)	10 (83,3%)	9 (75%)
M. Jurečka	11	5 (45,5%)	4 (36,4%)	6 (54,5%)	10 (90,9%)
V. Rakušan	2	1 (50%)	2 (100%)	2 (100%)	2 (100%)
I. Bartoš	6	4 (66,7%)	2 (33,3%)	5 (83,3%)	5 (83,3%)
A. Babiš	18	10 (55,6%)	7 (38,9%)	14 (77,8%)	11 (61,1%)
T. Okamura	16	16 (100%)	14 (87,5%)	14 (87,5%)	4 (25%)
Total	98	48	40	63	68

Source: Quantitative Component of the Content Analysis (author's work).

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this paper was twofold: to introduce, or remind, the reader of "what framing is and what methods are used to study it", and further to illustrate this theory and one of its methods on a smaller research sample. As may have been apparent from the introduction of framing theory, the academic knowledge surrounding this communication tool does not evolve rapidly, and prominent figures such as Robert Entman and Shanto Iyengar remain unsurpassed. Framing research moves forward through the use of more robust methodological triangulation. The aforementioned triangulation of methods may, however, be associated with the growing time demands of such research. Whether the triangulation involves discourse analysis or qualitative content analysis, the researcher will always be required to invest considerable time and mental capacity. One solution is to increase the number of researchers, which may in turn introduce further challenges.

The limitations of this paper are closely linked to its origins. The paper originally began as a conference presentation, subsequently developed into a contribution to a conference proceedings volume, and was ultimately expanded and adapted for publication as a journal article. This leads the author to reflect that the findings themselves could be developed further — specifically by conducting the same type of research on the dominant media outlets in Czechia that covered the same subject matter, and subsequently comparing the results to determine which politician or political bloc influenced the development of public discourse.

As noted much earlier in this paper, one of the difficulties of framing research is its interpretive nature, and so attempts to interpret framing in the context of long-term communication strategy can easily slip from scholarly analysis into speculation. The following reflections therefore belong to the discussion rather than the conclusion, as they cannot be substantiated without further research.

While the communication styles of the seven politicians are too varied to be reduced to a single axis of comparison, a difference in underlying purpose is nonetheless discernible. In its form and style, the government's communication was oriented towards reassuring the public – through unified messaging and the presentation of solutions, which it presented as the correct ones.

Andrej Babiš (ANO), in both his style and the content of his posts, was oriented towards correcting the government through the presentation of alternative solutions (across-the-board measures) that reflected the public's possible dissatisfaction. It is possible to assume that his across-the-board solutions are not merely a policy stance but also a framing strategy: unlike targeted measures, they require no explanation of eligibility criteria and positions every citizen as a potential beneficiary. Such measures are therefore easier and faster to communicate.

Tomio Okamura (SPD) communicated primarily through public dissatisfaction and was oriented towards mobilising negative emotions directed at calling the legitimacy of the government into question. He also used

catastrophic scenarios as possible amplifiers of dissatisfaction and anxieties already present.

The fact remains that the topic of energy has by no means disappeared from political communication. A natural next step would be a second study applying the same method to the campaign period before the 2025 elections. This second study would offer a natural point of comparison across quantitative and qualitative components. The initial shock of February 2022 set a precedent that the parties reflected in their election campaigns, making it possible to compare not only the overall conclusions but also the communication of each individual politician.

The author would also like to address the use of strong language in Czech political communication. The post by Marián Jurečka containing the word “manure”, mentioned in the paper, is certainly not an isolated case, and further examples can be found both within the five-party coalition and in previous governments. It appears that such expressions are not perceived as negatively in Czech political culture as might be expected elsewhere — a phenomenon that would merit dedicated research. This may be connected to Entman's concept of the cultural predispositions of the audience: strong language could serve to “humanise” politicians and bring them closer to the public.

As already outlined in the theoretical section of this paper, framing research in Czechia is not widespread, and the specific case of political communication fares somewhat worse still. The author sincerely hopes that by writing this paper and answering both research questions, he has at least partially filled this gap.

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DISCOURSE ON RUSSIAN GAS IN THE FACEBOOK COMMUNICATION OF SELECTED SLOVAK POLITICAL ACTORS: THE ENDURANCE OF NARRATIVES FOLLOWING THE ABORTED REFERENDUM INITIATIVE IN 2025¹

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ABSTRACT

The issue of Russian gas imports is among the most contentious topics in contemporary Slovak political communication. Our previous primary research on Slovak online discourse focused on identifying the dominant actors and the overall structure of narratives related to Russian gas imports during the broader period of 2024–2025, and it showed that narratives supporting imports were more frequent and more successful in generating online interactions than positions rejecting the continuation of imports. This article examines the post-referendum discourse on Russian gas in the Facebook communication of selected Slovak political actors between June and November 2025, following the Slovak president's decision not to call a referendum on the non-application of anti-Russian sanctions. Drawing on 64 posts from the Gerulata Juno monitoring system, it asks which narratives remained stable and which were transformed. The findings suggest that the failure of the referendum did not lead to a weakening of the discourse supporting Russian gas imports. On the contrary, established economic narratives based on price advantages, energy stability, and national interest persisted, while new or reinforced frames linked this issue to questions of democratic legitimacy, sovereignty, European Union intervention, and dependence on the United States.

Keywords: elections, electoral integrity, democratic legitimacy, public trust, EIVI

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INTRODUCTION

The issue of Russian gas imports has become one of the most visible and polarizing topics in Slovak public discourse in recent years. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, it ceased to be solely a matter of energy prices or the technical security of supplies and gradually became intertwined with a broader geopolitical and values-based conflict involving sanctions, solidarity with Ukraine, relations with the European Union, and the importance of national sovereignty. (Funtíková, Grečko 2023)

In the Slovak context, this debate was particularly pronounced because, even after 2022, Slovakia remained among the EU member states with a relatively high degree of dependence on Russian energy sources, although the share of Russian gas in total imports gradually declined and transport routes changed. (Oravcová 2023)

In 2025, the discussion intensified as a result of two significant events. The first was the termination of Russian gas transit through Ukraine as of January 1, 2025, which altered both the practical and symbolic framework of the debate on gas imports and shifted attention to alternative routes and the issue of future security of supply. The second was a petition initiative by the Slovak Revival Movement calling for a referendum on the non-application of anti-Russian sanctions. The proposed question read: *“Do you agree that the Slovak Republic should not apply sanctions against the Russian Federation that harm Slovak citizens, small business owners, and entrepreneurs?”* The petition organizers collected approximately 400,000 signatures, which was sufficient to call a referendum; however, on June 4, 2025, Slovak President Peter Pellegrini did not call the referendum, arguing that the question did not meet the requirements of legal certainty, was not enforceable, and could conflict with European Union law. The Constitutional Court subsequently confirmed that the president had acted within the limits of his powers. (TASR, 2025)

More specifically, this study examines the post-referendum discourse on Russian gas in the Facebook communication of selected political actors from June to November 2025, focusing on the continuation and transformation of dominant narratives following the rejection of the referendum.

We pose two research questions:

- RQ1: *How did the dominant narratives about Russian gas change after the President of the Slovak Republic refused to call the referendum?*
- RQ2: *Which narratives remained stable, and which transformed between June and November 2025?*

These research questions reflect the assumption that the rejection of the referendum represents an important turning point in the discourse on Russian gas, which may rearrange the hierarchy of arguments and the framing of topics. At the same time, they allow us to distinguish between narratives that persist in a stable form despite political failure and narratives that adapt to the new political and institutional context.

Several approaches address the issue of energy security and relations with Russia: for example, Tichý and Kratochvíl emphasize the securitization dimension, in which dependence on Russian gas is framed as a security risk and a source of strategic vulnerability; Falkner emphasizes the geopolitical and economical dimension, where energy functions both as a commodity and a tool of coercion; and finally, authors such as Roe demonstrate how political actors translate these dilemmas into established narratives about sovereignty, justice, or the social costs of sanctions, which are disseminated and reproduced primarily through social media.

The article is structured into five sections. The first section presents the state of research on energy security, narratives, political communication including the longer-standing Slovak debates on sovereignty, EU integration, and relations with Russia; the second section describes the methodological framework and the dataset; the third section analyzes the post-referendum narratives; the fourth section discusses the results within the broader context of

political communication on energy; and the final section presents the conclusions.

1 STATE OF RESEARCH

The role of social media in political communication has been explored in detail in the current literature. Jungherr has shown that digital traces are useful not only for mapping political behavior, but also for examining the ways in which political messages spread, gain visibility, and become part of broader communication dynamics. (Jungherr, 2015) The publication *The Routledge Companion to Social Media and Politics* also demonstrates that online platforms are not neutral communication spaces, but arenas in which political actors compete for attention, agenda-setting, and interpretive dominance. (Bruns et al., 2016)

In the Slovak context, our primary research has shown that Facebook serves political actors to stabilize ideological positions, mobilize supporters, and reinforce conflict frames, particularly in highly polarized environments. The article “*An Informational Narrative on Slovakia’s Energy Dependence on Russian Gas*” also confirmed that Facebook provides an exceptionally suitable environment for observing how narratives are repeated, combined, and disseminated among political actors. (Sinicyn, Denciová, and Eštok)

1.1 Energy Security and Narratives on Russian Gas

Energy security has long been a central topic in European political and academic discourse, particularly following the gas crises of 2006 and 2009 and, above all, after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. Tichý identified three basic subdiscourses shaping energy relations between the EU and Russia: the subdiscourse of securitization, the subdiscourse of diversification, and the geopolitical subdiscourse. (Tichý, 2017) These approaches are also relevant to the Slovak case, as debates on Russian gas are rarely limited to technical or

economic issues and are typically intertwined with themes of dependence, power, and strategic vulnerability.

The concept of securitization according to Buzan, Wæver, and de Wild is particularly useful because it captures the process in which an originally economic or administrative issue begins to be articulated as a security threat requiring special attention. (Buzan et al., 1998). In debates over Russian gas, both sides of the dispute employ securitization strategies. Critics of imports frame dependence on Russia as a geopolitical risk, while supporters of continued imports present sanctions, diversification, and EU pressure as a threat to Slovakia's economic stability, sovereignty, and energy security. (Kratochvíl, Tichý, 2013) Falkner's understanding of the use of energy dependence as a weapon further expands this framework by emphasizing that energy can simultaneously be infrastructure, a commodity, and an instrument of geopolitical pressure. (Falkner, 2023.)

1.2 Narrative Resilience and Political Communication

This article builds upon the definition of narrative used in a previous study, where we understand the concept of narrative in accordance with Roe's concept of narrative policy analysis. A narrative refers to a consistent line of argument or "story" that political actors repeatedly use to consolidate and legitimize their positions in situations of uncertainty or polarization. It is therefore not a single statement, but a structured framework that links claims about causes, value judgments, and implicit or explicit recommendations for further action. (Roe, 1994) In accordance with Roe's concept of narrative analysis, narratives can persist even when their empirical basis is questioned or when political developments seemingly weaken their persuasiveness.

This text therefore uses the term "narrative resilience" to denote the ability of political narratives to survive institutional or political defeat. However, resilience in this context does not mean immutability. On the contrary, resilient narratives often persist precisely because they adapt: they retain the core of their

interpretive logic but shift emphases, absorb new events, and reinterpret the conflict in a slightly altered form. (Sinicyn, Denciová, Eštok, 2025, Gerulata Juno internal dataset)

Significant political events can function as critical moments that alter the structure of public discourse. They can redirect attention, disrupt established rhetorical routines, or create new possibilities for framing the conflict. In the case under examination, the rejection of the referendum can be understood as such a critical discursive moment. The referendum ceased to be the immediate goal of political mobilization, but the very failure of the initiative became a new interpretive source for narratives about the blocked will of citizens, external pressure, and Slovakia's limited autonomy within the EU. (Sinicyn, Denciová, and Eštok)

1.3 Post-referendum narratives in the longer-standing Slovak debates

The frames of sovereignty, EU interference, and geopolitical orientation that we observe after June 2025 did not emerge with the referendum initiative. Debates about Slovakia's position between East and West, about the limits of national autonomy within the EU, and about relations with Russia have shaped Slovak political communication long before 2022 (Marušiak, 2013; Čanji, 2024). The war in Ukraine and the sanctions regime sharpened these debates, and energy policy became one of the areas in which they were expressed most concretely. The referendum initiative therefore offered an opportunity for the reactivation, updating, and strategic application of existing frames to a specific issue, rather than creating new ones. This is consistent with the regional perspective in which Slovakia's positioning in the Central European space is a long-term context of political debate. (Eštok, 2020)

2 METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

This paper employs a qualitative-interpretive research design that combines content analysis, discourse analysis, and frame analysis. It builds on an internal

dataset compiled for a primary study on Slovakia's energy dependence on Russian gas, which is based on a database of posts by political actors on the social network Facebook from November 30, 2024, to November 30, 2025. Facebook was chosen due to its central role in political communication in Slovakia and its ability to reach a wide audience directly. The posts were collected using the Gerulata Juno monitoring system based on thematically defined keywords (*Russian gas, gas from Russia, Russian gas imports, Gazprom, sanctions against Russia, anti-Russian sanctions, gas transit, energy security, TurkStream, REPowerEU*). After filtering a larger set of 736 posts and applying a threshold of more than 500 interactions, we identified 147 relevant Facebook posts published between November 30, 2024, and November 30, 2025. The threshold of 500 interactions (reactions, comments and shares) was applied as an indicator of visibility, in order to focus on posts that reached a wide audience and therefore played a significant role in shaping the debate. The threshold of 500 interactions was inherited from the primary study, where it served as a visibility filter to focus on posts with substantial reach. As visibility is not identical to importance, we discuss this choice as a limitation. The list of actors was not predefined; actors were identified based on linguistic analysis of the content and subsequently manually categorized by type and relevance to the discourse under examination. Of the total set of 147 posts, which was formed after removing duplicates and applying a threshold of 500 interactions, 64 posts were published after June 4, 2025, and it is precisely this post-referendum subset that forms the analytical basis of the present study. For the purposes of this study, only those posts published between June 4, 2025, and November 30, 2025 - that is, after Slovak President Peter Pellegrini refused to call a referendum - were analyzed. (Sinicyn, Denciová, Eštok, 2025, Gerulata Juno internal dataset) The primary study focuses on the entire online discourse on Russian gas during the period November 2024–November 2025, mapping the main actors, dominant narratives, and their frequency within a broader timeframe. This paper focuses exclusively on the post-referendum period (June–November 2025), specifically

on how narratives persisted, transformed, and were reframed within the frameworks of sovereignty, democratic legitimacy, and dependence on the U.S. following the failure to call a referendum.

Table 1: Study approaches.

Approach	Role in the study	Procedure	Output
Content analysis	Identifying and classifying narratives	Each post coded against the narrative classification from the primary study (positive and negative narratives)	Narrative per post, actor type, period (phase I–III)
Frame analysis (Entman, 1993)	Determining how the problem is defined	For each narrative, identification of problem definition, causal attribution, moral evaluation, and proposed remedy	Stable vs. transformed frames (sovereignty, democratic legitimacy, EU interference, US dependence)
Discourse analysis	Interpreting the context and function of the statements	Qualitative reading of selected posts as illustrations of how actors link gas to the referendum, the EU and the US	Interpretive examples in Sections 3.1–3.3

Source: Author's work.

The three approaches were applied sequentially. Content analysis provided the coding of all 64 posts and the distribution of narratives across phases; frame analysis then specified how the issue was defined within each narrative; discourse analysis was used for the interpretation of the illustrative posts quoted in the results.

The methodological aim of the article is not to verify the truthfulness of individual claims contained in the posts, but to identify dominant narratives. The analysis is based on the narrative classification created in the original article. This includes positive narratives such as *“Russian gas is cheap,” “Russian gas ensures energy stability,” “Russian gas is in the national interest,” “diversification means buying repackaged Russian gas,”* or *“cutting ties with Russian gas means dependence on other states,”* as well as negative narratives such as *“Russian gas creates strategic dependence,” “Russian gas undermines Slovakia’s credibility with its allies,” “Russian gas finances the war against Ukraine,”* and *“Russian gas is not actually cheap.”* (Sinicyn, Denciová, Eštok, 2025, Gerulata Juno internal dataset) The findings therefore describe how selected political actors communicate on Facebook and cannot be generalised to the Slovak information space, which also includes traditional media, other platforms, and non-elite communication.

Table 2: Main narratives about Russian gas and energy policy in Slovakia following the failed referendum initiative.

Narrative	Main idea (after the referendum)	Main actors
Russian gas as an economic necessity	Russian gas is presented as key to protecting jobs and keeping energy prices low.	Smer-SD, Hlas-SD, SNS, government representatives
Sanctions as self-harm	EU sanctions are portrayed as measures that harm Slovakia and the European Union more than	Smer-SD, the far right, pro-Russian actors

	Russia and are labeled as “ideological.”	
Brussels and limited sovereignty	The European Union is portrayed as an entity imposing energy decisions contrary to Slovakia’s national interests.	Government elites, nationalist actors
The will of the people blocked (referendum)	The failure to call a referendum is interpreted as a betrayal of citizens and a suppression of the will of the people.	Petition organizers and their allies

Source: Author's work.

Table 2 provides an overview of the prevailing narratives about Russian gas in the Slovak debate following the cancellation of the referendum (June–November 2025), focusing on their basic framing and main political proponents.

In addition to these pre-identified categories, the text also examines post-referendum interpretive frameworks that proved significant in the June–November 2025 subset, particularly those concerning sovereignty, democratic legitimacy, EU interference, and dependence on the United States. (Sinicyn, Denciová, Eštok, 2025, Gerulata Juno internal dataset)

To better structure the analysis, the period is divided into three phases. Phase I covers June and July 2025 and captures the immediate aftermath of the failed referendum, reactions to the debates on sanctions, and disputes over the significance of a “sovereign” energy policy. Phase II covers August and September 2025 and represents a period of stabilization in the discourse, during which established economic narratives persist while the referendum itself recedes into the background. Phase III covers October and November 2025 and reflects a renewed intensification of the discussion in connection with debates in the European Parliament on ending imports of Russian gas, oil, and other energy

inputs, with frameworks of sovereignty and anti-dependence being promoted more strongly.

3 RESULTS

3.1 The persistence of narratives

The first key finding is that the failure of the referendum initiative did not lead to the demise of the discourse supporting the continuation of Russian gas imports. On the contrary, the subsequent period shows a visible persistence of the main pro-import narratives that had already been identified in the primary study based on an internal dataset from the Gerulata Juno platform, particularly narratives based on price advantages, energy stability, and national interest.

A prominent narrative among these was the claim that Russian gas remains an economically rational choice because it is cheaper than alternatives, or because alternative solutions impose additional costs on Slovak consumers and industry. In the primary dataset, cost-effectiveness had previously emerged as the most frequent positive narrative, present across nearly all major actors supporting imports. In the post-referendum subset, this pattern persists. Branislav Ondruš (Hlas-SD), for example, argued in October 2025 that an accelerated end to Russian gas imports would increase transit costs and cause a roughly 20-percent price hike for households and businesses, framing the proposed measures not as strategic diversification but as an ideologically motivated price shock. (Ondruš, 2025)

Similarly, Milan Uhrík (Republika) argued that, in times of high prices, responsible politicians should seek out the cheapest energy inputs rather than deliberately erecting barriers against Eastern trading partners. Although this type of argumentation is often not based on detailed empirical calculations, its persistence suggests that affordability remained an important interpretive framework for pro-import discourse even after the failure of the referendum initiative in June. (Sinicyn, Denciová, and Eštok)

The second persistent narrative was the claim that Russian gas is a source of energy stability and supply continuity. In the primary study, this framework appeared less frequently than the cheap gas argument, yet it nonetheless constituted an important part of the pro-import discourse. After June 2025, it remains visible primarily through criticism of alternative supply solutions and warnings that the measures promoted by the EU will create uncertainty rather than true system resilience. Robert Fico (Smer-SD), for example, in October 2025 described REPowerEU as a “senseless ideological move” and emphasized that Europe must consider not only environmental sustainability but also the sufficiency, availability, and stability of energy supplies. (Fico, 2025)

The third consistent narrative was the national interest. This narrative presents the continuation of Russian gas imports not as ideological alignment with Russia, but as a legitimate defense of the economic and social interests of the Slovak Republic. It remained strongly present in the post-referendum period. Marián Kéry (Smer-SD), for example, presented opposition to further sanctions and the effort to maintain flexibility in energy imports as part of a “sovereign policy,” emphasizing that such a position does not imply approval of Russian aggression, but rather prioritization of domestic energy needs. Branislav Ondruš, in turn, framed Slovak MEPs supporting an accelerated restriction on Russian energy as actors acting against their own state, Slovak families, and jobs. (Sinicyn, Denciová, Eštok, 2025, Gerulata Juno internal dataset)

3.2 The transformation of narratives

Although the main economic narratives (cheap gas, energy stability, national interest) persisted, the discourse also showed a visible transformation. Communication gradually shifted from the actual mobilization of citizens for the referendum toward broader claims regarding sovereignty, democratic legitimacy, and power asymmetries within the European Union. Actors increasingly presented decisions at the EU and domestic policy levels as proof

that Slovak concerns are being ignored or overruled. In this sense, the referendum functions as a latent symbol of blocked political will.

A further transformed framework is the narrative of sovereignty. The debate over Russian gas is no longer confined to the level of price and availability but is framed as a test of whether Slovakia still retains control over key economic decisions. This framework intensified in the fall of 2025 during discussions on the European Parliament's proposals to accelerate the end of Russian energy imports. Branislav Ondruš labeled these proposals "political treason against the state" and a threat to the Slovak economy and energy security, accusing Slovak opposition representatives in Brussels of acting against their own country. (Ondruš, 2025)

The third transformed narrative is the growing emphasis on double standards and dependence on the United States. This narrative is driven by the argument that diversification is merely superficial or formal. A narrative had already emerged in the dataset that diversification means purchasing "repackaged" Russian gas through intermediaries. (Sinicyn, Denciová, and Eštok) In the post-referendum period, however, this argument has become more visible. Katarína Roth Neveďalová (Smer-SD), for example, claimed that cutting ties with Russian gas does not create true independence, because "everyone is buying repackaged Russian gas" and Europe is simultaneously becoming dependent on the United States. She described this direction as ideological, not rational. (Neveďalová, 2025) This anti-dependence framework was subsequently developed even more visibly by Branislav Ondruš, who in October 2025 described the European Union as a "humiliated vassal" of the U.S. and suggested that tariffs, bans, and regulatory measures are in fact a mechanism by which Europe is being pressured to purchase American fossil fuels. (Ondruš, 2025) In this narrative, the issue of Russian gas becomes just one element of a broader story about strategic subordination to Washington. It is here that the transformation of post-referendum discourse is most clearly visible: while it remains pro-import, it

simultaneously takes on a broader anti-hegemonic and anti-American dimension.

Another clear shift is the growing importance of arguments concerning routes, infrastructure, and the feasibility of alternative solutions. Those advocating for continued imports repeatedly argue that the problem lies not only in whether Europe wants to end imports of Russian energy, but primarily in whether it has credible, affordable, and technically viable alternatives at its disposal. Before the failed referendum, the pro-import discourse could rely primarily on sanctions, prices, and the principle of continuing trade relations with Russia. After June 2025, particularly in the fall, the discussion is increasingly shifting toward what is technically and economically feasible in the new transport and regulatory reality. (Sinicyn, Denciová, Eštok, 2025, Gerulata Juno internal dataset)

3.3 Continuity of Polarization

Despite the transformation of several frameworks, the overall structure of the discourse remained visibly polarized. The post-referendum period did not bring about a rapprochement between the two camps but rather confirmed the coexistence of two clearly distinguishable interpretive frameworks. On one side stood figures such as Robert Fico (Smer-SD), Branislav Ondruš (Hlas-SD), Marián Kéry (Smer-SD), Milan Uhrík (Republika), and Katarína Roth Neveďalová (Smer-SD), who continued to frame sanctions, REPowerEU, and restrictions on Russian energy imports as ideologically motivated, economically harmful, and politically coerced measures directed against Slovak interests. On the other hand, were figures such as Ľubica Karvašová (PS) and Ivan Korčok (PS), who continued to present Russian gas as a source of strategic dependence, reputational damage, and geopolitical risk. (Sinicyn, Denciová, and Eštok)

Ľubica Karvašová's October posts particularly clearly illustrate this anti-import stance. She argued that Russia is neither a reliable partner nor an energy supplier, and rejected claims about allegedly cheap Russian gas, arguing that if

Russian gas were truly cheap, households would not need hundreds of millions in gas price subsidies. At the same time, she framed the end of Russian gas imports as part of a responsible energy policy that other EU member states have already managed to implement, thereby rejecting the pro-import argument that Slovakia has no realistic alternatives. (Karvašová, 2025) The dataset contains considerably fewer anti-import posts than pro-import posts, which itself reflects the interaction pattern identified in the primary study. The analysis of the anti-import camp is therefore less detailed, and the notion of two interpretive worlds should be read as a description of the most visible positions rather than of the whole debate.

4 DISCUSSIONS

The results suggest that the aborted referendum on not applying anti-Russian sanctions did not mark the end of the discourse on Russian gas, but rather a moment of its reorganization. This finding confirms the analytical utility of the concept of narrative resilience. Political narratives do not necessarily disappear when the political campaign with which they were most visibly associated fails. On the contrary, they may persist precisely by abandoning one immediate form of mobilization and reformulating themselves into a broader interpretive framework.

In the case under study, the persistence of narratives regarding cost-effectiveness, energy security, and the national interest indicates that the core argumentative structure of the pro-import discourse remained intact after June 2025. These narratives were also primary in the overall dataset for the entire period from November 2024 to November 2025, during which cost-effectiveness was the most dominant positive narrative and pro-import actors also predominated in terms of interactions. Their continuation in the post-referendum period shows that support for continuing Russian gas imports was not dependent on the referendum itself. While the referendum campaign intensified and focused the discourse, it did not create its deeper narrative

foundations, which draw on the longer-standing Slovak debates on sovereignty, EU integration, and relations with Russia outlined in Section 1.3. The referendum can thus be understood as an opportunity for the reactivation, updating, and strategic application of existing frames to energy policy.

The referendum issue became part of a broader framework concerning blocked sovereignty, ignored national interests, and Slovakia's limited ability to make autonomous decisions within the EU. This shift corresponds to the logic of framing as defined by Entman: the original arguments were not abandoned but reassembled into a new definition of the problem. (Entman, 1993) What had previously been articulated primarily as an issue of sanctions and gas prices increasingly began to be communicated as a dispute over who decides, whose interests prevail, and where national political autonomy ends.

Another important consequence is the way in which the significance of political events is applied in online political communication. The rejection of the referendum can be interpreted as a critical moment, not in the sense that it concluded the discussion, but in that it changed the conditions under which the discussion continued. Its failure itself appears to have been used by some actors as an element of the narrative of grievance, which linked domestic institutions, EU policy, and foreign pressure into a single interpretive whole.

Several limitations should be noted. First, the interaction threshold may systematically favour conflictual, emotional, or populist messages, and exclude less viral but substantively relevant contributions, including more technical or moderate positions. Second, the dataset is limited to public Facebook posts by political actors collected through keyword search in a single monitoring system; posts using other terminology may have been missed. Third, the final sample of 64 posts supports a qualitative-interpretive analysis, not statistical generalisation. The analysis is qualitative and does not report the frequency of individual narratives across the three phases; statements about the prominence or persistence of narratives therefore reflect the interpretive reading of the sample rather than quantified dominance. Fourth, the actor list was not predefined, so

the sample reflects the actors that were most visible under the given keywords. Finally, interactions measure the visibility of a message rather than its persuasive effect, so the study can describe how narratives were formulated, but not how they were received by the public.

CONCLUSION

This article examined the evolution of the discourse on Russian gas in the Facebook communication of selected political actors after President Peter Pellegrini refused to call a referendum on the non-application of anti-Russian sanctions in June 2025. Based on a post-referendum subset of Facebook posts from the broader Gerulata Juno dataset, the article analyzed how narratives evolved between June and November 2025.

In this article, we identified two research questions and derived the following answers from them.

RQ1: How did the dominant narratives about Russian gas change after the President of the Slovak Republic rejected the referendum? The dominant economic narratives (cheap gas, energy stability, national interest) neither diminished nor disappeared, but expanded to include frameworks of sovereignty, the blocked will of citizens, criticism of the EU, and warnings against replacing dependence on Russia with dependence on the US.

RQ2: Which narratives remained stable, and which transformed between June and November 2025? Narratives regarding the cost-effectiveness of Russian gas, its contribution to energy stability, and imports as a national interest remained stable; the frameworks of sovereignty, democratic legitimacy, and dependence transformed; following the cancellation of the referendum, these reframed the issue from one of sanctions and prices into a dispute over Slovakia's position in the EU and its relationship with the US.

The analysis showed that the failure of the referendum did not lead to a weakening of the discourse supporting the continuation of Russian gas imports. The most important economic narratives, particularly those emphasizing cost-

effectiveness, energy stability, and the national interest, remained clearly present in the post-referendum period. At the same time, however, the discourse underwent a transformation as it expanded to include political frameworks focused on sovereignty, democratic obstruction, European Union interference, and the danger of replacing dependence on Russia with dependence on the U.S.

At the same time, it became apparent that the post-referendum discourse was not maintained solely by marginal or explicitly pro-Russian actors but also permeated the communication of established government officials and the broader political spectrum, which may have increased its perceived legitimacy and visibility, although the present data cannot confirm this. During the period under review, frames linking the issue of Russian gas to Slovakia's economic survival, the risk of sharp price increases, the threat to industry, and the notion that the European Union is forcing the country into decisions contrary to its specific conditions were particularly prominent in the analysed posts. In this sense, the discourse on gas after June 2025 was not limited solely to energy policy but was expanded to include interpretations of sovereignty, solidarity, and Slovakia's position within the European Union, with the question of the state's positioning in the Central European space between Eastern and Western influences remaining a key context of this debate. (Eštok, 2020)

The findings also suggest that political failure does not necessarily mean a decline in discourse. On the contrary, in highly polarized conditions, a failed initiative may serve as a resource for reframing, a hypothesis that would require audience-level data to test. The key conclusion is that the failure to call a referendum did not lead to a decline in narratives, but rather to their adaptation. These findings should be read considering the study's limitations: a sample of 64 highly visible Facebook posts by selected political actors allows an interpretation of how narratives were formulated, but not conclusions about their reception by the public or their representativeness for the wider Slovak information space.

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