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Unveiling Hidden Russophilia or Paradoxical Pragmatism? Slovak–Soviet Relations Under the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact

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This article examines the short-lived episode of Slovak–Soviet relations between 1939 and 1941, framed by the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact and terminated by the German invasion of the USSR. Using archival and published sources, it analyses how the Hlinka Slovak People's Party (HSĽS) reconciled its identity as a Christian, anti-Bolshevik movement with diplomatic accommodation of Moscow. The study demonstrates the structural dependency of Slovak foreign policy on the German Reich, showing that the establishment, development and collapse of relations with the Soviet Union were contingent on German strategic choices rather than Slovak initiative. It also highlights Slovak elites' attempts to exploit the geopolitical window to expand autonomy, nurturing illusory hopes of a Bratislava–Moscow axis to counterbalance Berlin. Ultimately, pragmatic calculation outweighed Russophile or Slavophile rhetoric. The Slovak case thus illustrates the constrained agency of small Axis states, the malleability of ideology under hegemonic domination and the volatility of fascist diplomacy.

In October 1941, officers of the Slovak Army's Rapid Division (*Rýchla divízia*) were photographed by war correspondent Jozef Cincík as they strolled, smiling and conversing, along the embankment in Mariupol.¹ This photograph is emblematic of Slovakia's involvement in the German-led campaign on the Eastern Front. The city, with its Illich Metallurgical Works and the Azovstal steel complex, represented a strategically significant industrial and transport hub and its capture facilitated Army Group South's advance towards Rostov-on-Don and the Caucasus. The swift progression of the German Blitzkrieg, supported by allied contingents, reinforced the fascist Axis governments' expectation that the Soviet Union would fall within weeks. The irony, however, lay in the fact that the Slovak State – established on 14 March 1939 as a dependent satellite of the Third Reich – had maintained formal diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union until just three and a half months prior to the episode on the shores of Mariupol. As the leadership of one of Europe's youngest states had already discovered, however, strategic calculations in Bratislava were ultimately subordinate to Adolf Hitler's decisions.

The Slovak State was a direct product of Nazi aggression and the partition of Czechoslovakia in March 1939. Its subordinate status was codified in the Treaty on the Protective Relationship (*Schutzvertrag*) of 18/23 March 1939, which obligated Bratislava to conduct both domestic and foreign policy 'in close harmony with the interests of the Reich' and, in effect, under conditions of

¹ Photo no. 14,402, Slovak National Archive (*Slovenský národný archív*; SNA) Bratislava, fond Slovak Press Office (*Slovenská tlačová kancelária*).

virtually total dependency.² Less than six months later, the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact fundamentally reshaped the international environment. The Catholic–nationalist Hlinka Slovak People's Party (*Hlinkova slovenská ľudová strana*; HSLS), which still monopolised power in autumn 1938, were now faced with a series of dilemmas. Not only did they have to navigate this altered geopolitical constellation, but they also had to engage with a partner that they had recently condemned as the mortal enemy of Christian civilisation, justify this abrupt reorientation to domestic audiences and, ideally, derive tangible benefits from these new circumstances.

This article re-examines the brief alignment between the 'double cross' and the 'hammer and sickle'. In focusing on this episode, it contributes to broader comparative debates on fascist–Axis Slovakia and Axis regimes by paying particular attention to their paradoxical alliances and pragmatic accommodations.³ As the article demonstrates, Slovak foreign policy was categorically non-sovereign and the Slovak State's external orientation was entirely subordinated to the interests of the German Reich. The trajectory of Slovak–Soviet relations confirms that their very emergence was contingent upon the conjunctural 'thaw' in Soviet–German ties following the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact. Despite this structural dependency, Slovak elites used numerous mechanisms to exploit international conditions with their goal of expanding their own political power. Leaders of the HSLS, I argue, notwithstanding their ideological hostility to the Soviet Union, invested genuine hope in cultivating a Bratislava–Moscow axis that could partially offset Germany's constraining grip on Slovak sovereignty.

In addition, the article refines understandings of Slovak–Soviet relations by interrogating the regime's own claim that rapprochement with the Soviet Union was motivated by a tradition of Slavophilism, in particular a Russophilia. I critically examine whether lofty references to the 'brotherly Russian nation', portrayals of the Soviet Union as an exclusively Slavic state and broader ideas of Slavic reciprocity that were rooted in nineteenth-century intellectual currents had any substantive influence on strategic decision-making.⁴ Rather than driven by Russophilia, the HSLS's overtures to Moscow primarily reflected their quest to overcome international isolation by opening channels to a second emerging global power centre. While 'Russophilia' has often been employed in Slovak historiography as a catch-all label for cultural or political affinities with Russia, this article treats it more narrowly as a discursive resource that was mobilised by political elites, as opposed to a stable ideological position.⁵ In this sense, Russophilia functioned less as a genuine conviction and more as a rhetorical strategy that was mobilised under shifting geopolitical circumstances. By disentangling Russophilia as ideology from Russophilia as pragmatic discourse, the Slovak case illuminates how elites in small states used identity markers to legitimise otherwise paradoxical diplomatic alignments.

² Martin Pekár, *Komentované pramene k dejinám Slovenska 1939–1945* (Košice: Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, 2015), 81–4.

³ The emerging and increasingly diverse body of Anglophone scholarship on Slovak fascism and the fascist–Axis Slovak State focuses on its regime and its international alliances. See, for example, Miloslav Szabó, 'Hitler Gave the Slovaks a State: On the Fascistization of Christian Nationalism and Social Catholicism in Tiso's Slovakia, 1939–1942', in *Building Dictatorships Under Axis Rule: War, Military Occupation and Political Regimes*, ed. António Costa Pinto and Goffredo Adinolfi (New York: Routledge, 2025), 64–87; Hana Kubátová and Michal Kubát, 'The Priest and the State: Clerical Fascism in Slovakia and Theory', *Nations and Nationalism* 27, no. 3 (2021): 734–49; Anton Hruboň, 'Pioneers of Clerical Fascism? Mythical Language of Revolutionary Political Catholicism in Slovakia and Visions of a New Nation', *Konštantínove listy/Constantine's Letters* 14, no. 1 (2021): 131–45. For earlier (and still relevant) discussions, see James M. Ward, *Priest, Politician, Collaborator: Jozef Tiso and the Making of Fascist Slovakia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013); Yeshayahu A. Jelinek, *The Parish Republic: Hlinka's Slovak People's Party, 1939–1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976).

⁴ For examples of when these positions have been articulated by Slovak government officials, see Dagmar Čierna-Lantayová, *Pohľady na východ (Postoje k Rusku v slovenskej politike 1934–1944)* (Bratislava: VEDA, 2002), 91, 116; Pavol Petruš, *Zahraničná politika Slovenskej republiky 1939–1945* (Bratislava: Historický ústav SAV – Prodama, 2011), 198. For their mobilisation in historical works, see Pavel Mičianik, 'Slovenská samostatnosť v strategických plánoch Sovietskeho zväzu (1939–1945)', *Moderné dejiny Slovenska* 2 (2009): 16–46.

⁵ A short historical evolution of the trajectory of Russophilia in Slovakia and of its variations across successive regimes is provided by Daniel Šmihula, 'Historické korene slovenskej rusofílie a jej dôsledky', Daniel Šmihula, *Medzinárodná bezpečnosť v kríze* (Bratislava: Premedia, 2023), 11–26.

Although the article focuses on Slovakia, it offers a new perspective to scholarship on Soviet diplomacy, German foreign policy and techniques of dominance over satellites in this period. Following Gabriel Gorodetsky's classic account, I suggest that Stalin's foreign policy was a form of Realpolitik and oriented towards well-defined geopolitical interests.⁶ This rational calculus made space for ideological compromises and accommodation with the Slovak State, which Soviet leadership regarded as largely insignificant. Contrary to Slovak expectations, Moscow regarded Slovakia as only peripherally important from a strategic point of view and never intended to cultivate a substantive partnership. Regarding Slovakia as a German dominion, the Soviet Union pursued no coherent policy towards the country and instead adopted a wait-and-see approach, a pattern Geoffrey Roberts has demonstrated in other arenas where the Soviets lacked pressing strategic interests.⁷ Even the absence of Soviet enthusiasm for this 'paper friendship' does not exclude its short-term utility. On the contrary, the seemingly incongruous alignment underscores Ingeborg Fleischhauer's observation that Soviet decision-making on the eve of war was 'highly complex and full of contradictions', shaped not so much by ideological determinism as by pragmatic flexibility.⁸

The article situates the Slovak case within broader debates on the international politics of fascist–Axis regimes and the agency of small states under hegemonic control. Recent scholarship has emphasised that local fascisms were not only domestic ideological projects, but also co-producers of a broader international network that was animated by diverse motivations and ideological compromises.⁹ In this regard, Slovakia offers a revealing example of what may be termed constraint-driven fascism: a political system rhetorically committed to uncompromising anti-Bolshevism, yet compelled by its geopolitical position to engage in opportunistic diplomacy with the Soviet Union.

By situating the Slovak case within discussions of fascist internationalism and the adaptability of ideology to external factors, the article also contributes to recent literature that emphasises the transnational entanglements of fascist regimes over their purely domestic trajectories – studies that, as Raul Carstoea points out, have advanced our understanding of the global fascist mosaic as a creative co-production grounded in symbiosis, rather than on outdated 'big brother-centred' comparisons.¹⁰ The study thereby offers a conceptual lens that highlights how ideological radicalism coexisted with tactical engagement in the context of hierarchical subordination. While analogous patterns of pragmatic accommodation towards the Soviet Union can be observed in other Axis-aligned states – most notably Hungary's oscillation between hardline anti-Bolshevism and tactical restraint, or Bulgaria's attempt to preserve formal neutrality towards Moscow – the Slovak case represents an analytically distinct extreme, given the near-total subordination of its foreign policy to German strategic priorities.

⁶Gabriel Gorodetsky, *Grand Delusion: Stalin and the German Invasion of Russia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 316.

⁷Geoffrey Roberts, 'The Soviet Decision for a Pact with Nazi Germany', *Soviet Studies* 44, no. 2 (1992): 72.

⁸Ingeborg Fleischhauer, 'Soviet Foreign Policy and the Origins of the Hitler–Stalin Pact', in *From Peace to War: Germany, Soviet Russia, and the World, 1939–1941*, ed. Bernd Wegner (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1997), 29.

⁹On the topic of fascist internationalism and cross-border relations, see Aristotle Kallis, 'The Transnational Co-production of Interwar "Fascism": On the Dynamics of Ideational Mobility and Localization', *European History Quarterly* 51, no. 2 (2021): 189–213; Aristotle Kallis, 'Transnational Fascism: The Fascist New Order, Violence, and Creative Destruction', in *Fascism Without Borders: Transnational Connections and Cooperation between Movements and Regimes from 1918 to 1945*, ed. Arnd Bauerkämper and Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe (New York: Berghahn Books, 2019), 39–64; Aristotle Kallis, 'The "Fascist Effect": On the Dynamics of Political Hybridization in Inter-War Europe', in *Rethinking Fascism and Dictatorship in Europe*, ed. António Costa Pinto and Aristotle Kallis (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2014), 13–41; also Roger Griffin, *Fascism: An Introduction to Comparative Fascist Studies* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018); Monica Fioravanzo, *Fascist Europe: From Italian Supremacy to Subservience to the Reich (1932–1943)* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2024); Martin Kristoffer Hamre, *Fascists of the World, Unite? A History of Fascist Internationalism in the 1930s* (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2025); Daniel Hedinger, 'The Imperial Nexus: The Second World War and the Axis in Global Perspective', *Journal of Global History* 12, no. 2 (2017): 184–205.

¹⁰Liam Liburd and Paul Jackson, 'Debate: Decolonising Fascist Studies' (respondent Raul Carstoea), *Fascism* 10, no. 2 (2021): 328.

Any analysis of Slovak–Soviet relations during the period of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact must proceed from the well-established historiographical consensus that the Slovak State emerged as not a fully autonomous political actor but rather a by-product of Nazi Germany's dismantling of Czechoslovakia.¹¹ This was formalised through the *Schutzvertrag* of March 1939, which embedded Slovak foreign policy within a framework of institutional dependence to Berlin. This article does not seek to revise that interpretation; instead, it takes the conditional and asymmetric Slovak–German relationship as its starting premise. Slovak elites were acutely conscious of this dependency. Their limited scope for action was shaped by not only the formal restrictions imposed by the Reich but also persistent anxieties regarding Germany's long-term ambitions in Central Europe, conceptualised by Nazi officials as a *Kernraum* (core area).¹² These anxieties were both structural and political. At a structural level, Slovak leaders feared that Hitler might ultimately privilege Hungary – whose territorial claims and strategic value within the Axis remained significant – over continued support for the project of Slovak statehood.¹³ Politically, internal rivalries within the HSLS further hampered coherent diplomatic action, as competing factions sought to demonstrate loyalty to Berlin.¹⁴

It is within this context of constrained sovereignty that Slovak overtures towards the Soviet Union should be situated. The brief attempt to cultivate relations with Moscow represented not a viable alternative to German dominance but rather an illusory strategy of diversification pursued under specific conditions. Hopes that engagement with the Soviet Union might partially offset Germany's hold over Slovak decision-making were not grounded in a realistic assessment of Soviet intentions or power relations. Instead, they reflected a recurring pattern observable in small Axis states that operated under hegemonic pressure: the search for symbolic, cultural or diplomatic counterweights that were capable of marginally improving their bargaining position without altering the underlying structure of dependence.

Framed in this way, Slovak–Soviet relations can be understood as a limited, and ultimately unsuccessful, attempt to mitigate Slovakia's dependence on Nazi Germany through diversifying its foreign policy alignments through engagement with a power of growing international stature. The temporary rapprochement with Moscow was enabled by a conjunctural alignment of great-power interests,

¹¹ For the various manifestations of the asymmetric German–Slovak relationship and its underlying dynamics, see Tatjana Tönsmeier, *Das Dritte Reich und die Slowakei 1939–1945: Politischer Alltag zwischen Kooperation und Eigensinn* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2003). On the circumstances surrounding the establishment of the state and the formation of relations of superiority and subordination, see Jörg K. Hoensch, *Die Slowakei und Hitlers Ostpolitik: Hlinkas Slowakische Volkspartei zwischen Autonomie und Separation 1938/1939* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1965); David Schriffl, *Die Rolle Wiens im Prozess der Staatswerdung der Slowakei 1938/39* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2004); Eduard Nižňanský et al., *Slovensko-nemecké vzťahy 1938–1941 v dokumentoch I. Od Mníchove k vojne proti ZSSR. / Slowakisch-deutsche Beziehungen 1938–1941 in Dokumenten I. Von München bis zum Krieg gegen die UdSSR* (Prešov: Universum, 2009); Michal Schvarc, Martin Holák and David Schriffl, eds., “*Tretia ríša*” a vznik Slovenského štátu. *Dokumenty I. / Das “Dritte Reich” und die Entstehung des Slowakischen Staates. Dokumente I.* (Bratislava: Ústav pamäti národa – SNM–Múzeum kultúry karpatských Nemcov, 2008); Michal Schvarc and David Schriffl, eds., “*Tretia ríša*” a vznik Slovenského štátu. *Dokumenty II. / Das “Dritte Reich” und die Entstehung des Slowakischen Staates. Dokumente II.* (Bratislava: Ústav pamäti národa – Historický ústav SAV – SNM–Múzeum kultúry karpatských Nemcov, 2010).

¹² Michal Schvarc, “Fahndung nach deutschem Blut?” K otázke budúceho usporiadania slovenského priestoru v kontexte “Volkstumspolitik” SS, in *V perimetri zameriavača: kapitoly z dejín Slovenska v druhej svetovej vojne*, ed. Stanislav Mičev et al. (Banská Bystrica: Múzeum SNP, 2012), 177.

¹³ On the question of Slovak–Hungarian relations in 1938–45, see Petruť, *Zahraničná politika*, 73–85; Dagmar Čierna-Lantayová, ‘Medzinárodné a vnútropolitické faktory slovensko-maďarského vzťahu v období 1939–1945’, in *Slovenská republika 1939–1945 v medzinárodných súvislostiach*, ed. Edita Ivaničková et al. (Bratislava: Historický ústav SAV – Typoset, 2012), 162–88; István Janek, ‘Maďarsko-slovenské diplomatické vzťahy v rokoch 1939–1941’, in *Slovenská republika 1939–1945 očami mladých historikov IV*, ed. Michal Šmigel’ and Peter Mičko (Banská Bystrica: Katedra histórie FHV UMB – Ústav vedy a výskumu UMB, 2005), 334–51; Ladislav Deák, *Slovensko v politike Maďarska v rokoch 1938–1939* (Bratislava: VEDA, 1990).

¹⁴ The intra-party struggle within the HSLS between clerical–nationalist and the revolutionary–fascist faction has been analysed in Anton Hruboň, ‘Slovenský fašizmus’, in *Fašizmus náš slovenský*, ed. Anton Hruboň (Bratislava: Premedia, 2021), 84–143.

yet its scope, limits and eventual collapse were decisively shaped by Germany's turn against the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941. The Slovak case thus illustrates how gestures of apparent autonomy were themselves conditioned by dependency, which produced foreign policy initiatives that were pragmatic in intent but structurally constrained and ultimately ineffective.

This article draws primarily on research conducted in Slovak archival collections, including diplomatic correspondence of the Slovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs, internal memoranda of the HSLS leadership, police and administrative reports and records of the Slovak legations in Berlin and Moscow. These materials are complemented by contemporaneous press coverage (notably the daily *Slovák*), personal diaries and memoirs of key political actors and selected Soviet diplomatic documentation where available. By combining official state records with mediated public discourse and ego-documents, the article seeks to reconstruct both the structural constraints shaping Slovak foreign policy and the discursive frameworks through which rapprochement with the Soviet Union was interpreted and justified.

Perceptions of the Soviet Union in Slovak Politics and Society before the Pact

In early summer 1919, the HSLS newspaper *Slovák* cautioned its readers: 'Slovaks, the homeland is in danger – your common patrimony – so hasten to defend it. Do not be misled by the socialists: they are a corrosive element and the seedbed of Bolshevism.'¹⁵ These warnings reflected the acute anxieties triggered by the advance of the Hungarian Soviet Republic's forces following clashes with the Czechoslovak Army and by the short-lived Slovak Soviet Republic, an experiment initiated by the Hungarian Bolsheviks.¹⁶ For the HSLS – the dominant Slovak political party throughout the 1920s and 1930s in Czechoslovakia and a self-proclaimed bulwark against Marxism – these episodes, together with the Polish–Soviet War (1919–21), crystallised a durable perception of Bolshevism as a destabilising force in Central Europe. For the *ľudáci* (HSLS politicians and supporters), Bolshevism came to embody a profound civilisational and political threat, one that was interpreted through religious, national and anti-socialist lenses. This interpretive framework remained remarkably consistent across the inter-war decades, even as the broader European geopolitical landscape was reshaped after Hitler's rise to power.

The HSLS's hostility towards the Soviet Union culminated in its vehement criticism of the Czechoslovak–Soviet Treaty of Mutual Assistance of 16 May 1935, which formalised diplomatic and military ties.¹⁷ At its seventh congress in Piešťany in September 1936, the party passed a resolution declaring opposition to 'materialist ideology and Judeo-Bolshevik anarchy', symbolically

¹⁵Pravdomil, 'Ťažké chvíle!', *Slovák* 1, no. 23 (21 June 1919): 1.

¹⁶For a more detailed account of the dynamics of Czechoslovakia's southern border, the military clashes and the revolutionary events of 1919 prior to the signing of the Treaty of Trianon, see Juraj Benko, 'Slovenská republika rád 1919 v kontexte povojnovej revolučnej vlny a vojny o Slovensko', in *Počátky Československé republiky 2*, ed. Jan Kober and Stanislav Holubec (Praha: Academia, 2023), 561–88; Karol Fremal, 'Maďarská republika rád a korene bolševizmu na Slovensku', *Historický zborník* 29, no. 2 (2019): 97–107; Marián Hronský, *Trianon: Vznik hraníc Slovenska a problémy jeho bezpečnosti (1918–1920)* (Bratislava: VEDA, 2011), 179–270. Anglophone historiography has only marginally engaged with this topic, most often placing it within the broader context of the dissolution of the historical Hungarian Kingdom: László Kontler, *A History of Hungary* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 328–44; Ignác Romsics, *The Dismantling of Historic Hungary: The Peace Treaty of Trianon, 1920* (Boulder: Center for Hungarian Studies and Publications, 2002), 53–74.

¹⁷The HSLS leaders primarily feared that the treaty would serve as a springboard for the spread of communist ideas in Slovakia. The Hlinka Slovak People's Party questioned the Soviet Union's reliability as a foreign policy partner and, given the geographical distance, remained sceptical about its ability to fulfil defence commitments. As an alternative to the highly uncertain prospects of productive cooperation with the Soviet Union, it advocated normalising Czechoslovakia's relations with Poland and building an allied 'defensive bulwark' in cooperation with the Poles. Róbert Arpáš, 'Postoj HSLS k podpisu československo-sovietskej zmluvy z roku 1935', in *Ľudáci a komunisti: Súperi? Spojenci? Protivníci?*, ed. Xénia Šuchová (Prešov: Universum, 2006), 103–7.

aligning itself with the international anti-communist camp of Christian nations.¹⁸ While conspiratorial in tone, adopting the antisemitic trope of ‘Judeo-Bolshevism’ – a concept embedded in modern political antisemitism and popularised across Europe amid widespread antisemitic sentiment by authoritarian and fascist movements – this position represented continuity rather than rupture.¹⁹ The party’s younger generation had long embraced radical and conspiratorial rhetoric, and such language constituted a staple of its political communication.²⁰

Few observers could have anticipated the dramatic reversal that awaited the HSĽS within three years, when, as the sole governing party of a nominally independent state, it was compelled to adjust to a reconfigured international order. Recognised by dozens of states but not by Western democracies (including France, the United Kingdom and the United States), the Slovak State entered the diplomatic arena on 14 March 1939. The Soviet Union withheld recognition, interpreting the breaking up of Czechoslovakia as a consequence of German expansionism, and adopted a cautious, tentative stance. Foreign Affairs Commissar Maxim M. Litvinov communicated to the German ambassador to Moscow Friedrich von Schulenburg that the annexation of Bohemia and Moravia and the subordination of Slovakia to Nazi interests violated the ‘true will of the Slovak nation.’²¹ Soviet leaders, however, understood that the fate of small states depended less on popular will than on great-power calculations. Their posture effectively deferred a final decision and preserved the possibility of the eventual establishment of diplomatic relations. Slovak Foreign Minister Ferdinand Ďurčanský’s request for de jure recognition thus went unanswered, though Moscow avoided issuing a definitive rejection.

Public perceptions of the Soviet Union in Slovakia were characterised by ambivalence, but the available sources do not allow for a systematic reconstruction of popular attitudes towards the Soviet Union in a sociological sense. What can be observed instead are mediated representations as they circulated through party-controlled newspapers, administrative and police reports, diplomatic correspondence and retrospective testimonies. These materials capture perceptions that were filtered through institutional and discursive frameworks instead of unmediated social experience. Moreover, as historian Dagmar Čierna-Lantayová has aptly observed, assessing the extent of ostensibly ‘pro-Soviet’, or ‘pro-Russian’, attitudes within society is complicated by the fact that such positions did not necessarily reflect any genuine emotional affinity towards the Soviet Union or its policies. Instead, they often functioned as a symbolic point of reference for resistance to Nazi Germany and for anti-German sentiments, which intensified exponentially from 1942 onward.²² Moreover, Slovak society was far from homogeneous. Regional, social, confessional and ethnic differences shaped encounters with political discourse and international developments in uneven ways. Therefore, rather than accurately measuring public opinion, the available sources allow us to examine how state institutions

¹⁸Róbert Arpáš, *Autonómia: víťazstvo alebo prehra? Vyvrcholenie politického zápasu HSĽS o autonómiu Slovenska* (Bratislava: VEDA, 2011), 49.

¹⁹Paul Hanebrink, *A Specter Haunting Europe: The Myth of Judeo-Bolshevism* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018), 83–121. The emergence of the idea of Judeo-Bolshevism within the HSĽS had been examined by Miloslav Szabó against the personal trajectory of one of its prominent officials: the radicalised priest Karol Körper. Miloslav Szabó, ‘Od kampaní proti “židobolševizmu” k návrhom na “riešenie židovskej otázky”. Antisemitizmus v publicistike Karola Körpera v druhej polovici 30. rokov 20. storočia’, *Forum Historiae* 13, no. 1 (2019): 57–74; also: Miloslav Szabó, ‘“Židobolševici?” Antisemitizmus v kontexte protikomunistických a protifašistických kampaní v mestskom prostredí roku 1936’, in *Podoby moderných dejín a spoločnosti v stredoeurópskom priestore. Pocta Elene Mannovej*, ed. Gabriela Dudeková Kováčová et al. (Bratislava: VEDA, 2021), 339–53; Miloslav Szabó, ‘From Protests to the Ban: Demonstrations Against the “Jewish” Films in Interwar Vienna and Bratislava’, *Journal of Contemporary History* 54, no. 1 (2019): 5–29; Hruboň, ‘Slovenský fašizmus’, 67–83.

²⁰Milan Zemko, ‘Slovenskí vzdelanci v spore o Sovietske Rusko tridsiatych rokov’, in *Mýtus – stereotyp – obraz. Rusko v slovenských dejinách a kultúre*, ed. Tatiana Ivantýšynová et al. (Bratislava: SDK SVE – Pro Historia – Historický ústav SAV, 2011), 61–7.

²¹Petruf, *Zahraničná politika*, 189.

²²Dagmar Čierna-Lantayová, ‘Variácie kontaktov medzi Bratislavou a Moskvou v rokoch 1939 – 1945’, in *Slovenská republika 1939 – 1945 v medzinárodných súvislostiach*, ed. Edita Ivaničková et al. (Bratislava: Historický ústav SAV – Typoset, 2012), 130–1.

and political elites interpreted, monitored and instrumentalised perceived shifts in attitudes under changing geopolitical conditions.

References to ambivalence should thus be understood analytically, as opposed to statistically. They point to the coexistence of contradictory representations – entrenched anti-Bolshevik hostility, pragmatic accommodation and residual romanticised images of Russia – within official discourse and administrative observation. Acknowledging these limits clarifies the scope of the argument and underscores the extent to which perceptions of the Soviet Union functioned as a political and discursive resource, with limited relation to any stable societal consensus.

Prior to the transformative events of 1938/39, Slovaks' knowledge of the Soviet Union was mediated mostly through the press. Depending upon political orientation of a given newspaper, articles included either idealised depictions of the 'workers' and peasants' paradise' or, conversely, emphasised poverty, repression and the restrictive nature of Soviet society. At the same time, a romanticised nineteenth-century image of Russia as the 'mighty oak' sheltering all Slavs persisted in segments of the public imagination and was perpetuated by figures of the Slovak national revival such as Ján Kollár, Ľudovít Štúr and Svetozár Hurban Vajanský, despite the limited empirical basis for such notions.²³ Slovak discourse on the Soviet Union tended to ignore the country's multi-ethnic character and regard it as an exclusively Russian or Slavic state. Because of this, certain segments of the Slovak population saw the Soviet Union as a potential leader of a broader protective Slavic alliance against Nazi expansionism.

Beyond governments and political movements, non-party civic associations also played a role in shaping perceptions of the Soviet Union. The League Against Communism, founded in 1928 in Bratislava, functioned primarily in opposition to the Comintern and maintained connections with White émigrés, though its influence gradually diminished.²⁴ In contrast, the Union of Friends of the Soviet Union, which was established in 1931 by young left-wing intellectuals of the *Dav* circle, pursued economic and cultural connections with the Soviet Union.²⁵ This was primarily done through the organisation of study trips to the Soviet Union, through which the organisation sought to counter the country's negative reputation within Slovak society.²⁶ Writers such as Ján Poničan, Peter Jilemnický, Vladimír Clementis, Ladislav Novomeský and Eugen Löbl all visited the Soviet Union as part of these trips and subsequently published enthusiastic accounts. Yet these experiences were usually limited to carefully curated stays in Moscow, whereas life in minor towns and rural areas was concealed from the visitors.²⁷

Despite these initiatives, the vast majority of Slovaks had no experience of the Soviet Union.²⁸ In 1941, only 231 registered Slovak citizens resided in the country and approximately 100 of them ended up in Soviet territory because of the annexations of 1939–40 (eastern Poland, western Ukraine and

²³See Dušan Škvarna, 'Obráz Ruska u neslovanských a slovanských národov habsburskej monarchie', in *Východná dilema strednej Európy*, ed. Tatiana Ivantyšinová and Daniela Kodajová et al. (Bratislava: Spoločnosť pre dejiny a kultúru strednej a východnej Európy, 2010), 18–29.

²⁴For a more detailed overview of Russian emigration history in inter-war Czechoslovakia, see Ľubica Harbuľová, *Ruská emigrácia a Slovensko (Pôsobenie ruskej poškôbenej emigrácie na Slovensku v rokoch 1919–1939)* (Prešov: Filozofická fakulta Prešovskej Univerzity, 2001); Čierna-Lantayová, *Pohľady na východ*, 15.

²⁵The group of young leftist intellectuals was named after the cultural and social journal *DAV*, in which they expressed their views.

²⁶Čierna-Lantayová, *Pohľady na východ*, 23–6.

²⁷Jozef Jambrich, 'Cesty slovenských komunistických intelektuálov do ZSSR v období 1. Československej republiky', in *Radikálny socializmus a komunizmus na Slovensku (1918–1989). Spoločnosť medzi demokraciou a totalitou*, ed. Michal Šmigel et al. (Banská Bystrica: Katedra histórie FHV UMV v Banskej Bystrici – Historický ústav SAV v Bratislave, 2007), 54–67.

²⁸Perhaps the most well-known form of contact with the Soviet Union was Slovak participation in the 'building of socialism' in Kyrgyzstan through the industrial cooperative Interhelpo. Between 1925 and 1932, more than 1,000 people emigrated from Czechoslovakia to the Soviet Union as part of this programme. See Lukáš Onderčanin, *Utópia v Leninovej záhrade. Československá komúna Interhelpo* (Bratislava: Absynt, 2021); Jaromír Marek, *Interhelpo: tragický príbeh československých osadníkov v Sovětském svazu* (Brno: Host, 2020). Reports about living conditions in the Soviet Union also circulated among Slovak

Belarus, northern Romania and the Baltic states).²⁹ A significant portion of this group consisted of Slovak Jews living in multi-ethnic Lviv. Notably, no Slovak citizens were registered in Moscow. There could have been greater numbers of Slovaks living in the country, but those who had migrated to the Soviet Union during the 1920s–30s on the basis of ideological convictions are harder to trace because many became Soviet citizens.³⁰ As a result, first-hand experiential knowledge of Soviet realities remained structurally limited and socially fragmented. The small number of Slovaks residing in the Soviet Union, many of whom had become Soviet citizens or found themselves in annexed borderlands, had only minimal capacity to shape perceptions in Slovakia itself. Consequently, Slovak views of the Soviet Union were formed less through sustained social contact and more through mediated representations – travel writing, political journalism and ideological discourse.

Regional variation further complicates any attempt to generalise Slovak perceptions of the Soviet Union. For example, perceptions differed markedly in eastern Slovakia. This region was characterised by greater ethnic and religious diversity – including sizeable Greek Catholic communities as well as a substantial Jewish population – higher levels of poverty and direct exposure to the consequences of multiple territorial rearrangements. Here, unfulfilled personal expectations, long-term disappointments, layered and conditional regime loyalties and economic and infrastructural marginalisation intersected with local realities that could not be fully subsumed under centrally produced media narratives in Bratislava.³¹

Administrative and situational reports occasionally alluded to such regional differences, particularly in border districts where cross-border contacts, rumours and expectations circulated more intensely. Yet these observations remain fragmentary and shaped more by the priorities of state surveillance than by systematic inquiry. For this reason, the present study does not attempt to reconstruct a regional history of perceptions, which would require a different methodological framework and source base.

Taken together, the available evidence suggests not a coherent or stable societal attitude towards the Soviet Union but rather a spectrum of politically and regionally conditioned perceptions. On the ideological right, entrenched anti-Bolshevism – often couched in civilisational and religious language – framed the Soviet Union as a destructive and alien force. On the left, particularly among intellectual circles, selective admiration was cultivated through curated encounters and mediated representations. Regional and social differences further complicated these perceptions, as borderland experiences, confessional diversity and socio-economic conditions shaped exposure to international developments in uneven ways. Yet despite this diversity, one structural feature remained constant: for the overwhelming majority of Slovaks, the Soviet Union was a distant and largely abstract entity. As a result, the Soviet Union functioned in Slovak public discourse less as an empirically grounded reference point and more as a symbolic construct – alternatively idealised or demonised – onto which competing political projects invested their own ideological expectations.

communities in the United States. The memoirs of a former Slovak communist (and an émigré to America) who became disillusioned after his experiences in the Soviet Union became a bestseller following his arduous return. See Andrew Smith, *I Was a Soviet Worker* (London: R. Hale, 1937). In 1941, the memoir was also published in Slovak. Given the time of release, the memoir naturally fulfilled a certain propaganda function, yet the content appears authentic. In addition to the aforementioned groups, one must not overlook the Slovaks who actively participated in fighting the Bolsheviks during the Russian Civil War.

²⁹List of Slovak Citizens in the Soviet Union, SNA, fond Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Ministerstvo zahraničných vecí*; MZV), box 547.

³⁰Appendix No. 3 – Slovak Minority in the USSR, Report of the Slovak Republic's Legation in Moscow, 25 Jan. 1941, SNA, MZV, box 198. The figure can be roughly estimated at several thousand individuals from across Czechoslovakia, predominantly agricultural settlers. Emil Voráček et al., *V zájmu veľmoci: Československo a Sovětský svaz 1918–1948* (Praha: Historický ústav AV ČR, 2019), 197–8.

³¹The specificities of eastern Slovakia have been examined in the following works: Hana Kubátová, *Christian Nationalism, Nation-Building, and the Making-of the Holocaust in Slovakia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2025); Martin Pekár, *Východné Slovensko 1939–1945. Politické a národnostné pomery v zrkadle agentúry Šarišsko-zemplínskej župy* (Prešov: Prešovská univerzita, 2007); Peter Borza, *Dejiny Gréckokatolíckej cirkvi na Slovensku v období II. svetovej vojny (1939–1945)* (Prešov: Petra, 2006).

From Furious Enmity to a New Starting Line

Following the declaration of Slovak independence on 14 March 1939, Slovak diplomacy lacked any coherent policy towards the states to the east. The *Schutzvertrag* imposed strict diplomatic constraints and the newly created Foreign Ministry was preoccupied with constructing a basic diplomatic network throughout Europe. Consequently, Bratislava followed the course dictated by its protector, which was consistent with the HSLS's long-standing anti-Bolshevik position that had crystallised during the preceding decades. Despite differences in the nature of the regimes of the HSLS and the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP), the two converged on their perception of the Soviet Union as an enemy.

The HSLS-led regime was established in autonomous Slovakia in October 1938, which at the time was still within the Czecho-Slovak Republic. One of the regime's first measures was the systematic curtailment of communist influence: the immediate ban on the Communist Party, the prohibition of the communist press and a ban on the screening of almost all Soviet films in cinemas.³² In the very first weeks following the establishment of the Slovak State, Bratislava hosted an anti-Bolshevik exhibition, which was attended by thousands of visitors who were exposed to propaganda imported directly from Germany.³³ The dramatic reorientation of German–Soviet relations in the second half of 1939 therefore generated deep unease. Although preliminary signals had been evident – and the Slovak press, on the Reich's instructions, had gradually softened its anti-Bolshevik rhetoric over the summer – the announcement of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact nonetheless came as a profound shock. The HSLS daily *Slovák* described it as 'the greatest sensation since 1918'.³⁴

Slovák reproduced German communiqués rather than providing its own commentary. On 25 August 1939 it published Joachim von Ribbentrop's statement on leaving Moscow without comment, declaring that 'Germany and Russia fared ill when they were enemies and well when they were friends'.³⁵ Even Berlin presented the pact as a pragmatic necessity, and in Bratislava it was interpreted as a positive development that might halt the destabilising border revisions that had repeatedly harmed Slovak interests as well as territorial integrity.³⁶ Among the advocates of rapprochement was Foreign Minister Ferdinand Ďurčanský, who regarded diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union as a means of enhancing Slovakia's international standing and mitigating its dependence on Germany.³⁷ Soviet diplomats even referred to an informal 'Ďurčanský group' around the minister.³⁸ Yet despite his intelligence and legal expertise, Ďurčanský's international inexperience led him to miscalculate. His eagerness to cultivate partners beyond German tutelage – albeit pursued in broader contexts – contributed to the removal of the thirty-three-year-old head of Slovak diplomacy in July 1940.³⁹

³²The legal prohibition of socialist parties, SNA, fond Ministry of Interior (*Ministerstvo vnútra*), box 3; Petra Hanáková, *Máme svoj film! Slovenská filmová kultúra a propaganda 1939–1945* (Bratislava: Slovenský filmový ústav, 2024), 353.

³³'Protibolševická výstava', in *Kronika Slovenského štátu 1939–1941*, ed. Ľudovít Hallon et al. (Bratislava: Ottovo nakladateľstvá – Historický ústav SAV – Vojenský historický ústav), 29.

³⁴'Pred dohodou medzi Berlínom a Moskvou', *Slovák* 21, no. 192 (23 Aug. 1939): 1.

³⁵'Vodca a Stalin sa rozhodli za priateľstvo', *Slovák* 21, no. 194 (25 Aug. 1939): 1.

³⁶'Mičianik, 'Slovenská samostatnosť', 17. In the autumn of 1938, as a consequence of the Munich Agreement, Slovakia lost the small municipalities of Devín and Petržalka to Germany. Under the First Vienna Award, it was deprived of one-fifth of its territory in favour of Hungary and it subsequently ceded minor northern areas (parts of the Kysuce, Orava and Spiš regions) to Poland. Following the establishment of the Slovak State in March 1939, it was compelled to surrender further eastern territories to Hungary following the Hungarian army's attack on Slovakia on 23 March 1939.

³⁷Michal Schvarc, 'Zahraničná politika Slovenskej republiky (1939–1945) a jej postavenie v rámci nemeckej sféry vplyvu', in *Kľúčové problémy moderných slovenských dejín*, ed. Valerián Bystrický et al. (Bratislava: VEDA, 2012), 242.

³⁸Pavol Petruf, 'Zahraničná politika Slovenskej republiky v rokoch 1939–1945', in *Slovenská republika 1939–1945*, ed. Katarína Hradská and Ivan Kamenec (Bratislava: VEDA, 2015), 61.

³⁹For a more detailed discussion of the topic, see Michal Schvarc, "'Sicherheitsdienst" a politický pád Ferdinanda Ďurčanského', in *Odvalňujem balvan. Pocta historickému remeslu Jozefa Jablonického*, ed. Norbert Kmeť and Marek Syrný (Bratislava: VEDA – Múzeum SNP, 2013), 94–116.

Nonetheless, the German embassy did not object to the toned-down press image of the Soviet Union, which aligned with Berlin's own tactical adjustment.

The first symbolic step in recasting the Soviet Union's public image appeared in *Slovák* two days before the invasion of Poland in the form of an ode to the Kremlin. The article, effusive in tone, extolled 'Mother Moscow', 'Great Russia' and the 'renowned Kremlin', invoking a vocabulary of civilisational grandeur and cultural continuity. Significantly, the Soviet Union was rhetorically collapsed into 'Russia', with little acknowledgement of its multinational composition. This conflation reveals the extent to which Slovak political discourse relied on inherited cultural imaginaries rather than on a differentiated understanding of the Soviet state. Rather than advancing explicit theological arguments, the text mobilised elevated and quasi-sacral imagery that contrasted sharply with earlier portrayals of the Soviet Union as a barbaric and anti-Christian power. The text concluded by recalling that the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact – 'which stirred the whole world' – had been signed in the Kremlin and inaugurated a new era.⁴⁰ The results of the pact soon became clear: Poland was invaded by Germany on 1 September and by the Soviet Union on 17 September, with Slovakia contributing militarily in a symbolic fashion.⁴¹

The HSEs press reflected this enforced adjustment. On 3 September 1939 *Slovák* featured Molotov's speech that justified rapprochement with Germany and cited Stalin's earlier pledge to consolidate peace 'with all states'. This superficial reconciliation provided both sides with the opportunity to reconsider their hitherto unestablished bilateral relations.⁴² On 14 September 1939, the Slovak envoy in Berlin, Matúš Černák, acting on Ďurčanský's initiative, met his Soviet counterpart Aleksandr A. Shkvartsev, who immediately reported to Moscow and requested instructions. The following day Molotov indicated readiness to recognise Slovakia and de jure recognition followed on 16 September 1939.⁴³ The protests of former Czechoslovak envoy Zdeněk Fierlinger's proved futile: his legation was closed, and he was permitted to remain in Moscow only as a private individual.⁴⁴ In the aftermath of Poland's rapid defeat – an operation in which Slovakia had participated from the outset – few could yet foresee the far-reaching consequences for international politics that would become apparent within two years. The Slovak government publicly celebrated Moscow's recognition as a diplomatic triumph, despite the persistence of critical voices. Karol Sidor, the Slovak envoy to the Holy See and an outspoken critic of Bratislava's politics under his former rival Jozef Tiso's leadership, noted in his diary: 'And this is called going "in the spirit of Andrej Hlinka" . . .⁴⁵ Now they're all in the same sack. Their principles have been hung on a peg!⁴⁶

The unlikely alliance binding together officially Christian and anti-Bolshevik Slovakia with both Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union required urgent rhetorical justification. *Slovák* relied heavily on materials distributed by the *Deutsches Nachrichtenbüro*, Germany's state press agency. Poland – which had previously been held up as a model under Sidor's editorship – was now summarily discredited:

⁴⁰ 'Kreml – bielokamenná pevnosť veľkého Ruska', *Slovák* 21, no. 198 (30 Aug. 1939): 4.

⁴¹ For a detailed overview, see Igor Baka, *Slovenská republika a nacistická agresia proti Poľsku* (Bratislava: Vojenský historický ústav, 2006), or the Polish translation, Igor Baka, *Udział Słowacji w agresji na Polskę w 1939 roku* (Warszawa: Polski Instytut, 2010).

⁴² 'Historický prejav Molotova: Prečo a ako došlo k rusko-nemeckému paktu', *Slovák* 21, no. 202 (3 Sept. 1939): 4.

⁴³ Čierna-Lantayová, *Pohlady na východ*, 90; 'Rusko uznáva Slovenský štát de jure', *Slovák* 21, no. 214 (17 Sept. 1939): 1.

⁴⁴ Čierna-Lantayová, *Pohlady na východ*, 91.

⁴⁵ Andrej Hlinka was the founder and lifelong leader of the Hlinka's Slovak People's Party, a position he held until his death on 16 August 1938. The authoritarian regime of the HSEs, which gradually consolidated after 6 October 1938, later instrumentalised his name. The leaders of the Slovak State named paramilitary organisations after Hlinka – most notably the Hlinka Guard and Hlinka Youth – with clear ideological affinities to comparable fascist formations abroad and invoked decontextualised and misinterpreted quotations that had been attributed to Hlinka to justify anti-Jewish policies and the 1942 deportation of Jews to extermination camps. See Anton Hruboň, 'Tri odtiene Andreja Hlinku: Politická mytológia jednej osobnosti v premenách režimov', *Vojnová kronika* 14, no. 2 (2025): 48–53; Anton Vašek's Report on the "Jewish Question" in Slovakia, 29 Jan. 1943, SNA, fond Office of the President of the Republic (*Kancelária prezidenta republiky*), box 172, 41/43.

⁴⁶ Karol Sidor, *Vatikánsky denník I. Od 17. júna 1939 do 11. júla 1940* (Bratislava: Ústav pamäti národa, 2011), 79.

'The Soviet Army marched across Poland's eastern borders into this country of irresponsible nobles to draw a heavy line under its history . . . May Slavophiles learn from this fall and cease serving sick, nation-destroying ideas.'⁴⁷ According to this article, responsibility for Poland's collapse lay not with the aggressors but with the 'decadent plutocracies' of the United Kingdom and France, whose alliance system had 'encircled' both Germany and the Soviet Union, allegedly forcing them into the 'logical liquidation of an artificial state'.⁴⁸

HSLS propaganda further rationalised this paradox through a lucidly antisemitic contribution by Clément Haraoui, a French-Arab professor based in Prague, who argued that the main obstacle to German-Soviet rapprochement had been 'Jewish Russia'. Only after Stalin's 'de-Judaisation' of the Soviet Union – by which Haraoui meant the removal of leading Jewish communists from their positions – could a 'rebirth of nationalism' and hostility towards Russia's 'age-old enemies' (Poles, Britons and Jews) occur.⁴⁹ The replacement of Litvinov by Molotov symbolised this transformation.⁵⁰ In this way, the alliance of a Christian anti-Bolshevik regime, Nazi Germany and the communist Soviet Union was discursively justified. Internal doubts within the ruling elite found no public expression under a system that was premised on the monopoly of a single truth.

Between Enforced Pragmatism and Naïve Russophilism

Once the psychological barriers to rapprochement had been cleared, both sides proceeded with initial practical steps. President Jozef Tiso appointed his cousin, Fraňo Tiso, as envoy to Moscow, where he arrived on 11 December 1939.⁵¹ On 2 February 1940, Grigorii M. Pushkin assumed his post as Soviet envoy in Bratislava, accompanied by Legation Secretary Kovalev.⁵² At his credential ceremony at the Presidential Palace Pushkin proclaimed that 'in view of the war in Europe, the establishment of relations between the Soviet Union and Slovakia transcends the interests of our two countries; it serves the cause of general peace and thus the interests of all peace-loving nations.'⁵³ The statement was emblematic of the paradox: the representative of a 'peace-loving' power – one that had recently invaded Poland (September 1939), attacked Finland (November 1939), and in the months that followed annexed the Baltic states (August 1940), and occupied Romania's Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina (June–July 1940) – was now received cordially in Bratislava. Pushkin held discussions with leading Slovak officials, including President Tiso and Foreign Minister Ďurčanský, and departed with favourable impressions. He quickly discerned the boundaries of Slovak cooperation: a willingness to cooperate in economic, cultural and select political matters, but the categorical rejection of Bolshevik ideology, especially within a country that Germany regarded as firmly inside its sphere of influence.

Pushkin likewise made a positive impression on Tiso. As a Catholic priest, Tiso appreciated that the envoy avoided the rhetoric of militant atheism, promised to abstain from communist propaganda, referred to 'Russia' and the 'Russian nation' and even delivered several sentences in liturgical

⁴⁷ 'Nafúkanosť vždy viedla do záhuby', *Slovák*, 21, no. 215 (19 Sept. 1939): 1.

⁴⁸ 'Ide o novú rovnováhu v Európe', *Slovák* 21, no. 234 (11 Oct. 1939): 1. The idea of 'the Western powers' encirclement policy' was also adopted in Slovak foreign policy. These very words were explicitly stated in a report from late April 1939 by Minister Ferdinand Ďurčanský (Ďurčanský's Report of Slovak Foreign Politics, 27 Apr. 1939, SNA, MZV, box 112, 1/1939). Of course, this was merely a propagandistic cliché of two totalitarian regimes, intended to justify their joint aggression of September 1939 to the outside world. The Polish *Armia Krajowa* lacked both the technological and personnel capacities necessary to withstand a military confrontation with the modernised German armed forces.

⁴⁹ Clément Haraoui, 'Odžidovčenie Ruska a moskovský pakt', *Slovák* 21, no. 234 (11 Oct. 1939): 1.

⁵⁰ Ľubica Harbuľová, 'Vzťahy ZSSR a Slovenska v kontexte sovietskej zahraničnej politiky (marec 1939–jún 1941)', in *Slovenský štát 1939–1945. Predstavy a realita*, ed. Martina Fiamová et al. (Bratislava: Historický ústav SAV, 2014), 95.

⁵¹ Hungarian diplomacy eagerly exploited this fact for propaganda purposes, seeking to discredit Jozef Tiso in the eyes of the Germans as a 'nepotist' and 'Bolshevik sympathizer'. Čierna-Lantayová, *Pohľady na východ*, 101; Černák's report to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 15 Dec. 1939, SNA, MZV, box 180, 31/1939.

⁵² 'Sovietsky vyslanec pre Slovenskú republiku pricestoval do Bratislavy', *Slovák* 22, no. 28 (4 Feb. 1940): 3.

⁵³ 'Nástupná audiencia sovietskeho vyslanca u prezidenta republiky', *Slovák* 22, no. 37 (15 Feb. 1940): 1.

Church Slavonic during the meeting.⁵⁴ Yet Pushkin also warned Tiso that the Soviet Union could not be regarded as a genuinely Slavic state, since a notable share of its peoples were non-Slavic, and Slavic solidarity could not provide a foundation for bilateral relations.⁵⁵ Pushkin's remarks punctured rumours, born of naïve Slavism, that the Red Army intended to seize Carpathian Ukraine (then part of Hungary) and open a 'Slavic corridor' to Slovakia.⁵⁶ In reality, Soviet strategic priorities lay elsewhere.

The months immediately following diplomatic recognition unfolded in an almost idyllic atmosphere. Leaders exchanged greetings on national holidays – 7 November for the Bolshevik Revolution and 14 March for Slovak independence – while the Slovak pro-regime press adopted a friendlier tone.⁵⁷ Anti-Soviet polemics largely disappeared, and sensitive aspects of Soviet politics were deliberately downplayed. Beyond elite politics, administrative reports even noted a rise in latent Russophile sentiment among the population, reflecting popular hopes that closer ties with Moscow might counterbalance the ubiquitous pro-German rhetoric of 'fateful Slovak–German friendship'.⁵⁸

Two main dimensions defined Slovak–Soviet relations under the pact: geopolitics and economics.⁵⁹ On the geopolitical level, Bratislava sought Soviet support in shifting the Slovak–Hungarian border that had been imposed by the First Vienna Award and the so-called Little War armistice of 1938–9.⁶⁰ Ďurčanský again assumed the initiative, urging Pushkin in spring 1940 to consider the Soviet occupation of Carpathian Ukraine, which had been annexed by Hungary in 1938/39.⁶¹ He argued that a common border would weaken German interference and curb Hungarian revisionism. Such proposals, however, misread Soviet ambitions. For Slovakia, stabilising its precarious international position was a perennial objective. Pushkin summarised Bratislava's attitude succinctly in a report to Moscow: 'The Slovaks probably expect more from us than we can give.'⁶² His assessment was vindicated at Salzburg in July 1940, when Hitler, as already mentioned, forced Ďurčanský's removal from his joint appointment as minister of foreign affairs and minister of the interior. He was replaced by Vojtech Tuka (minister of foreign affairs) and Alexander Mach (minister of the interior). Ďurčanský's forced replacement marked a tighter alignment of the Slovak State with the Reich, the

⁵⁴ Mičianik, 'Slovenská samostatnosť', 19–21.

⁵⁵ Čierna-Lantayová, *Pohlady na východ*, 109.

⁵⁶ Report on the Spread of Communist Propaganda in Slovakia, 28 Nov. 1939, SNA, MZV, box 112, 21,047/39. A portion of Carpathian Ukraine (Subcarpathian Rus') was acquired by Hungary through the First Vienna Award of 2 November 1938. As a result of this decision by the German–Italian (Ribbentrop–Ciano) arbitration commission, Hungary annexed the territories of the south-western tip of the region (the towns of Uzhhorod, Mukachevo, Berehove and their surrounding areas). After Slovakia declared independence on 14 March 1939, the remainder of Carpathian Ukraine, following a one-day episode of independence, was militarily occupied and incorporated into Hungary. After 1945, it was annexed to the Soviet Union as part of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic.

⁵⁷ Čierna-Lantayová, *Pohlady na východ*, 95, 114.

⁵⁸ These shifting public moods are captured in the situation reports of district prefects, which were submitted on a monthly basis from all Slovak districts to the central political institutions of the Slovak State. The political reports are preserved in the State Archives in Bratislava, Nitra, Žilina (based in Bytča), Banská Bystrica and Prešov, within the collections of the respective county offices. Situation reports from later in the war on the mood of the population within the regions document more pronounced centrifugal tendencies vis-à-vis the HSEs regime and its protector. These reports have been published in the following volumes: Martin Lacko, *Situačné hlásenia okresných náčelníkov, január–august 1944* (Trnava: Univerzita sv. Cyrila a Metoda, 2005); Marek Syrný and Marian Uhrin, eds., *Situačné hlásenia okresných náčelníkov (september 1944–február 1945)* (Banská Bystrica: Múzeum Slovenského národného povstania, 2012).

⁵⁹ Valentina V. Marjina, 'Slovensko (1939–1945) v dokumentoch ruských archívov', *Vojenská história* 15, no. 2 (2011): 148.

⁶⁰ See note 36.

⁶¹ Petruš, *Zahraničná politika*, 194.

⁶² Valeria Vladimirovna Marjina, 'Brána na Balkán'. Slovensko v geopolitických plánech SSSR a Nemecka v letech 1939–1941', *Soudobé dějiny* 1, no. 6 (1994): 834. For further discussion of the issue, see also Aliaksandr Piahanaŭ, 'Slovak–Hungarian Relations in the Mirror of the German–Soviet Conflictive Alliance (1939–1941)', *Prague Papers on the History of International Relations* 16, no. 2 (2012): 144–63; Dagmar Čierna-Lantayová, 'Poznámky sovietskeho zástupcu v Bratislave k prejavom napätia medzi Slovenskom a Maďarskom (február 1940–apríl 1941)', *Historické štúdie* 43 (2004): 237–49.

systematic enforcement of Nazi principles in both domestic and foreign policy and the end of any experiments in multi-vector foreign policy.⁶³

Cultural initiatives further reflected unfulfilled hopes for Slavic unity. In January 1940 a Soviet delegation led by Sergei V. Kaftanov, head of the All-Union Committee for Higher Education, attended Tuka's inauguration as rector of the Slovak University and held meetings with Slovak officials and academics. Kaftanov's subsequent report highlighted strong Slovak interest in educational and scientific cooperation, exemplified by requests for Russian-language textbooks.⁶⁴ The delegation avoided religious ceremonies but attended a performance of Musorgsky's *Khovanshchina* at the Slovak National Theatre – an event that visibly unsettled the German envoy Hans Bernard, who left early.⁶⁵

Economically, relations with the Soviet Union carried symbolic weight. Because trade with the West had virtually been suspended, Slovakia's commerce was heavily dependent on Germany (and the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia as its integral part), which made access to the Soviet market attractive. Negotiations culminated in December 1940 with a trade and shipping agreement and protocols on the exchange of goods. Slovakia committed to exporting cables, electric motors, steel pipes and textiles, while the Soviet Union would provide cotton, grain and phosphates.⁶⁶ A joint trade commission was established in Bratislava. Despite these measures, the volume of trade remained modest: between January and June 1941, Slovak imports from the Soviet Union totalled 60.4 million Slovak crowns (1.7 per cent of overall imports), while exports amounted to only 15.2 million (0.5 per cent).⁶⁷ In practice, Soviet–Slovak economic exchange was minimal.

Slovak–Soviet Estrangement and a Return to Radical Anti-Bolshevism

From late summer 1940, following the enforced reshuffle of the Bratislava government and the Nazification of public life under the National Socialist wing of the HSLS, Slovak–Soviet relations entered a phase of visible decline.⁶⁸ The Slovak police began to closely monitor the Soviet legation, recording visitors, checking their documents and often summoning them for interrogation days later. Moscow was well informed: in early September Deputy Foreign Commissar Vladimir G. Dekanozov complained to Slovak chargé d'affaires in Moscow Gejza Krno.⁶⁹

These practices marked the first serious rupture in an already-deteriorating relationship. As envoy Pushkin himself observed, the initiative for cooling of relations came from not Bratislava but Berlin, once again underscoring the scale of Slovak subordination. Germany regarded the growth of Slovak–Soviet contacts with suspicion. After the Salzburg humiliation of July 1940, Berlin made clear

⁶³In 1939–40, Ferdinand Ďurčanský simultaneously headed the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and the Interior – two portfolios that were strategic to the ideological and institutional consolidation of the Hlinka's Slovak People's Party regime (and the Slovak State). His undoing came in 1939–40 with his attempt to establish diplomatic relations with France and the United Kingdom via Italy – states with which Germany had been at war since the invasion of Poland. The pivotal document in Ďurčanský's political destruction was a verbal note delivered on 29 March 1940 by the Slovak envoy Jozef M. Zvrškovec to the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for transmission to London. The note asserted that Slovakia should be regarded as a neutral state in the ongoing conflict – an assertion the Germans condemned as an audacious provocation. The *Sicherheitsdienst* was promptly instructed to compile compromising material on Ďurčanský with the aim of removing him from political life. Ďurčanský's bold – if naïve – ambitions and his subsequent political fall are discussed in Schvarc, 'Zahraničná politika Slovenskej republiky', 239–42.

⁶⁴Čierna-Lantayová, *Pohľady na východ*, 105.

⁶⁵Čierna-Lantayová, *Pohľady na východ*, 104–5.

⁶⁶'Dohoda o výmene tovaru medzi Slovenskom a SSSR', *Slovák* 22, no. 291 (8 Dec. 1940): 2; also: Peter Mičko, *Hospodárska politika Slovenského štátu. Kapitoly z hospodárskych dejín Slovenska v rokoch 1938–1945* (Krakov: Spolok Slovákov v Poľsku – Katedra histórie FHV UMB, 2010), 142.

⁶⁷Anna Štefániková, 'O niektorých aspektoch zahraničného obchodu Slovenskej republiky v období rokov 1939–1945', *Historický časopis* 48, no. 3 (2000): 470, 473.

⁶⁸See Szabó, 'Hitler Gave the Slovaks a State', 64–87; also Tatjana Tönsmeier, 'The German Advisors in Slovakia, 1939–1945: Conflict or Co-operation?', in *Czechoslovakia in a Nationalist and Fascist Europe, 1918–1948*, ed. Mark Cornwall and Richard J. W. Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 169–84.

⁶⁹Petruf, *Zahraničná politika*, 196.

that the ‘Đurčanský era’ of attempts at manoeuvring beyond German control was definitively over.⁷⁰ While accommodating Soviet expansion elsewhere during the Pact, Germany considered Central Europe – and Slovakia in particular – its exclusive preserve. Concessions to Moscow were intended to prevent rapprochement with Western democracies and redirect Soviet ambitions towards other regions (notably the Baltics), while discouraging Soviet interest in territories that were deemed to be vital to Germany’s war economy, including Slovakia with its armament industries and refineries.⁷¹ The Soviet Union, aware of its limited leverage in Central Europe, attempted instead to spread disinformation to foster distrust within the fascist Axis. Soviet ambassador Shkvartsev even warned Černák in Berlin that Slovakia faced imminent threat from its own protector, an unfounded allegation at the time.⁷²

Bilateral relations cooled in tandem with a rise in German–Soviet tensions. When the newly appointed Slovak envoy Julián Šimko presented credentials to Mikhail Ivanovich Kalinin in Moscow, he could not anticipate that his mission would end almost as soon as it began. The Axis invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941 – which Slovakia joined alongside Germany – abruptly terminated his mandate.⁷³ Karol Sidor, a keen observer and commentator on international politics, aptly noted in his diary: ‘Today, Sunday 22 June 1941, is truly a historic day. A clash has begun, and no one knows how it will end for both worlds.’⁷⁴

Pushkin had already left Bratislava on 15 June 1941 for consultations and did not return; other staff departed gradually. Neutral Sweden assumed responsibility for Slovak interests in the Soviet Union after diplomatic relations were severed.⁷⁵ The break with Moscow, despite its evident costs, paradoxically brought relief to the Slovak leadership. On the one hand, Bratislava lost the partner that had allowed it to claim a semblance of balanced foreign policy. On the other, it shed the uncomfortable mask of formal comradeship with the ideological antithesis of the regime’s professed identity.

The Slovak government and press immediately adopted the Nazi explanatory framework. The invasion was presented as necessary to counter an alleged existential threat posed by Soviet policy and ‘subversive communist agitation.’⁷⁶ As in September 1939, roles of aggressor and victim were inverted: Germany and its allies were portrayed as waging a preventive, defensive war to forestall imminent Soviet aggression. This posture was echoed in official diplomacy: President Tiso telegraphed Hitler, pledging Slovakia’s participation in the ‘fateful struggle of the European community for justice and civilization’, assuring fidelity and invoking divine blessing.⁷⁷ Like other client regimes, the HSLS framed Slovakia’s entry into the war as a prerequisite for participation in the post-war, German-dominated *Neueuropa*.

In the short term, the regime appeared comfortable in the role of victorious co-aggressor. Even if some leaders did not regard the war as their own, they embraced its civilisational framing. The notion of a ‘crusade against the Bolshevik hydra’ resonated with the Christian nationalist policy orientation cultivated by the HSLS. The trope of a war against ‘Judeo-Bolshevism’ dovetailed with the regime’s escalating anti-Jewish policies and provided a rhetorical and moral justification for measures clearly contrasting the declared Christian values.⁷⁸ The logic was straightforward: if the

⁷⁰ Čierna-Lantayová, *Pohľady na východ*, 152.

⁷¹ Černák’s Report to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 27 Mar. 1940, SNA, MZV, box 180, 28/1940.

⁷² Černák’s Report to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 23 Apr. 1940, SNA, MZV, box 180, 28/1940.

⁷³ For further context, see Igor Baka, *Slovenská armáda vo vojne proti Sovietskemu zväzu a slovensko-nemecké vzťahy 1941–1945* (Bratislava: Vojenský historický ústav, 2019), 39–53.

⁷⁴ Karol Sidor, *Vatikánsky denník II. Od 12. júla 1940 do 31. decembra 1941* (Bratislava: Ústav pamäti národa, 2012), 366.

⁷⁵ Petruš, *Zahraničná politika*, 195.

⁷⁶ ‘Začal sa gigantický zápas’, *Slovák* 23, no. 142 (22 June 1941): 1.

⁷⁷ ‘Vodca Slovákov Führerovi novej Európy’, *Slovák* 23, no. 144 (25 June 1941): 1.

⁷⁸ For an in-depth examination of the anti-Jewish policies of the Slovak State, see Ivan Kamenec, *On the Trail of Tragedy: The Holocaust in Slovakia* (Bratislava: Hajko & Hajková, 2007); Eduard Nižňanský, *Politika antisemitizmu a holocaust na Slovensku v rokoch 1938–1945* (Banská Bystrica: Múzeum Slovenského národného povstania, 2016); Kubátová, *Christian Nationalism*.

struggle against 'Judeo-Bolshevism' was deemed legitimate on the Eastern Front, then so too was the fight against its supposed representatives at home – Jews and 'Bolsheviks'. This logic culminated in the 1942 deportations, the renewed transports after autumn 1944 and the killings perpetrated by Einsatzkommandos and Slovak Hlinka Guard emergency squads following the suppression of the Slovak National Uprising.

The HSLS regime's decision to join the June 1941 invasion of the Soviet Union had multiple repercussions. Over the next three years, roughly 100,000 Slovak soldiers (out of a population of 2.6 million) rotated through the Eastern Front.⁷⁹ Upon their return, they disseminated first-hand accounts of what they had witnessed. Many described the horrors of Bolshevism – abandoned corpses of prisoners and civilians executed by retreating NKVD units – but more frequently emphasised extreme poverty: peasants living in near-medieval conditions, destitute civilians and barefoot children begging for coins or selling wild berries to survive. Deeply religious Slovaks were also disturbed by the sight of Orthodox churches converted into communist culture houses, with icons replaced by portraits of Lenin, Stalin, Marx and Engels.⁸⁰

Although difficult to establish empirically, such oral testimonies may have shaped the political behaviour of the Slovaks in the post-war period. In the last free elections before the communist coup held on 26 May 1946, the Democratic Party secured an overwhelming victory in Slovakia with 61.43 per cent of the vote, far ahead of the Communists (30.48 per cent).⁸¹ In contrast, the Communists triumphed in the Czech lands, where the population had not undergone this kind of direct 'contact with Bolshevism' (the Protectorate's government army, considered unreliable by the Germans, had not served on the Eastern Front).

Slovak soldiers also bore witness to another dimension of violence that was suppressed by regime propaganda: the beginnings of the Holocaust by bullets prior to the introduction of industrialised extermination in gas chambers. Beyond mass executions of Jews, they could not ignore atrocities committed against local Slavic populations – peoples who had initially, paradoxically, welcomed the invaders as liberators. Such genocidal practices against fellow Slavs raised profound questions about the credibility of the proclaimed 'new just Europe' and whether the Nazi *Übermensch* project might one day turn against the Slovaks themselves. Reports from the period suggest that Slovak society gradually recognised the discrepancy between the rhetoric of 'friendship for all time' and the assimilationist logic underpinning Hitler's vision for Europe after the purported *Endsieg*.⁸²

Conclusion

The Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union cemented Slovakia's dependence on Nazi Germany more profoundly than ever before. The vision entertained by some HSLS elites of creating a 'second Switzerland' in both economic and foreign policy terms proved entirely illusory.⁸³ Moscow never renewed relations with Bratislava; a temporary suspension became permanent. Less than a month after Operation Barbarossa started, on 18 July 1941, the Soviet cabinet recognised Edvard Beneš's Czechoslovak government-in-exile in London and the legitimacy of the so-called Provisional State Establishment (*Dočasné státní zřízení*), thereby formally nullifying its earlier recognition of the Slovak

⁷⁹ Martin Lacko, *Dezercie a zajatia príslušníkov Zaisťovacej divízie v ZSSR v rokoch 1942–1943* (Bratislava: Ústav pamäti národa, 2007), 11.

⁸⁰ These unsettling experiences are documented in the photographic collection of the Slovak Press Agency, which is preserved in the Slovak National Archive in Bratislava.

⁸¹ Róbert Letz, *Slovensko v rokoch 1945–1948. Na ceste ku komunistickej totalite* (Bratislava: Ústredie slovenskej kresťanskej inteligencie v Bratislave, 1994), 39.

⁸² See: Baka, *Slovenská armáda vo vojne proti Sovietskemu zväzu*, 232–397.

⁸³ Čierna-Lantayová, *Pohlady na východ*, 122.

State on 16 September 1939.⁸⁴ In 1945, the war's conclusion brought down HSLS rule and restored the Czechoslovak Republic, re-establishing its state authority in practice.

The brief 1939–41 episode of Slovak–Soviet relations did not originate in genuine bilateralism. Rather, it was the product of German strategic design and not the free choice of two equal actors. Formally independent, Slovakia's foreign policy most clearly revealed the structural limits of its sovereignty and the extent of its subordination to the German Reich. The relationship with the Soviet Union, awkward from the outset, collapsed before it could assume a substantive form. Its trajectory illustrates the theatrical nature of Slovak diplomacy: the decision to establish relations with Moscow, the scope of their limited development and their abrupt termination were all dictated by German foreign policy. This corroborates contemporary assessments within the Slovak Foreign Ministry that 'Berlin counts on the stability of the Slovak State and cares about it; yet such 'stability' was defined exclusively in accordance with German, not Slovak, interests.'⁸⁵

The case of Slovak–Soviet wartime relations underscores the validity of the *rebus sic stantibus* principle: international obligations remain binding only insofar as the conditions under which they were concluded persist. The Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact enabled Slovak–Soviet recognition, but once it collapsed, so too did the bilateral relationship. The Slovak case demonstrates that for small states whose very existence was derivative of great-power arrangements, the durability of international agreements was especially tenuous. Recognition, trade agreements and diplomatic rituals proved meaningful only while the continental geopolitical constellation sustained them. When those conditions shifted, Slovakia's commitments were rendered void practically overnight. This episode also raises broader questions about fascism as both ideology and practice in the context of small-state dependency. The HSLS, a ruling party of Axis Slovakia, defined itself ideologically as an uncompromisingly Christian, anti-Bolshevik and nationalist movement and, from the summer of 1940 onward, also nominally aligned itself with National Socialism. Yet within months, the same leadership celebrated diplomatic alignment with the Soviet Union (an openly atheist and internationalist power), invoked a vocabulary of Slavic reciprocity and muted its anti-communist rhetoric. The paradox illustrates the pliability of fascist ideology when confronted with the imperatives of survival under hegemonic domination. The anti-Bolshevik paradigm was not dismantled in 1939 but merely bracketed under conditions of German–Soviet rapprochement. Its rapid and almost frictionless restoration after 22 June 1941 demonstrates that the ideological core of the regime had remained intact throughout the period of diplomatic accommodation.

At the same time, this pragmatism entailed tangible costs. The attempt to reconcile ideological hostility with opportunistic engagement exposed the regime's vulnerability and its lack of autonomous agency. For a satellite state, the official ideological positioning operated less as a coherent doctrine and more as a flexible tool for mobilisation and legitimisation. The Slovak case thereby illuminates the enduring tension within pro-fascist Axis regimes between doctrinal purity and political expediency. In practice, ideological rigidity yielded to strategic fluidity, revealing its capacity to accommodate pragmatic compromises even with ideological opponents.

In a comparative perspective, Slovakia can thus be regarded as a prime example of a regime whose pro-Axis orientation was shaped by structural dependency and external constraints: a regime rhetorically committed to civilisational struggle (or, in Jozef Tiso's words, into Adolf Hitler's 'great family of nations'), yet compelled by its structural position to engage in opportunistic diplomacy with its proclaimed mortal enemy.⁸⁶ This duality – ideological radicalism combined with pragmatic

⁸⁴ Bohuslav Litera, *Cesta na výsluní. Zahraniční politika Sovětského svazu 1917–1945* (Praha: Dokořán, 2015), 176–7. For a more detailed account of the shifting Soviet position regarding the question of Slovak independence, see Jan Rychlík, 'Postoj SSSR k myšlenke samostatného Slovenska za druhé svetovej války', *Slovanské historické studie* (1997): 201–4.

⁸⁵ Neumann's Report for the Propaganda Office on the Consolidation of the International Position of the Slovak State, 6 July 1939, SNA, MZV, box 112, 6401/39.

⁸⁶ 'Prezident Dr. Jozef Tiso: Nech žije Adolf Hitler, otec veľkej rodiny národov!', *Slovák* 23, no. 92 (22 Apr. 1941): 3.

accommodation – was not a contradiction but rather a constitutive feature of politics in some other small states aligned with the Axis, too.

The Slovak State was not unique in its oscillation between ideological hostility and contingent friendship towards the Soviet Union.⁸⁷ Hungary, while retaining greater sovereignty, likewise oscillated between anti-Bolshevik radicalism and concessions under German pressure. Bulgaria attempted to preserve neutrality in its relations with Moscow, revealing yet another modality of dependency politics.⁸⁸ Romania and the Independent State of Croatia, in contrast, displayed more openly hostile positions towards the Soviet Union.⁸⁹ In this comparative light, Slovakia may be considered a control case: a satellite with virtually limited sovereignty, where ideological flexibility was most clearly dictated by external imperatives. Such a juxtaposition underlines the diverse strategies through which small or dependent states navigated the paradox of fascist ideology and diplomacy in the Axis orbit.

By framing the Slovak case as an instance of constraint-driven fascist–Axis regime, this article demonstrates that ideological rigidity was a malleable repertoire that could be adjusted to survive under conditions of submission.

This case study thereby refines prevailing understandings of fascism and small-state politics. First, it demonstrates that fascist ideology in satellite regimes was not a fixed set of immutable principles but a flexible political toolkit: capable of recalibrating from uncompromising anti-Bolshevism to diplomatic accommodation of Moscow without undermining its self-image and ideological continuity. Second, it reveals that even heavily constrained small states exercised modest but genuine agency. Slovak elites experimented with multi-vector strategies and discursive resources in order to expand their autonomy. Third, the article reconceptualises ‘Russophilia’ as not a stable ideological commitment but rather a pragmatic and fluid discourse that was mobilised to legitimise paradoxical alignments. Finally, in comparative perspective, Slovakia functions as an example that highlights how structural dependency shaped the oscillation between a hardline stance and adaptive diplomatic behaviour more clearly than in many other Axis satellites. Taken together, these arguments demonstrate that ideological flexibility and politics were not anomalies but rather constitutive elements of transnational fascist interactions.

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⁸⁷For an overview of Soviet strategies and examples illustrating the Soviet Union’s shifts and responsiveness to the dynamic developments in wartime Europe, see Geoffrey Roberts, ‘Ideology, Calculation and Improvisation: Spheres of Influence and Soviet Foreign Policy 1939–1945’, *Review of International Studies* 25, no. 4 (1999): 655–73.

⁸⁸Peter Pastor, ‘Hungarian–Soviet Diplomatic Relations 1935–1941: A Failed Rapprochement’, *Europe–Asia Studies* 56, no. 5 (2004): 731–50; Richard J. Crampton, *Bulgaria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 220–57.

⁸⁹Fedor Sinitsyn, ‘Ethnic and Territorial Aspects of the Soviet–Romanian Relations in 1918–1945’, Sinitsyn, F., *Istoriya* 9, no. 10/74 (2018); Aleksandar Životić, ‘Sovjetska diplomacija o nastanku Nezavisne Države Hrvatske’, *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 51, no. 2 (2019): 465–80.

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