



# MEPS FROM CENTRAL EUROPE: A BULWARK AGAINST AUTHORITARIANISM

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## Executive summary

This paper summarizes the findings of a four-year research project on the foreign policy-related votes of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) from Central and Southeastern European countries in the 9th European Parliamentary term (2019-2024). This is a continuation of the two studies we have published in recent years within the framework of the project<sup>1</sup>. We have analyzed 152 votes cast by MEPs from Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Austria, Romania and Bulgaria between 2019 and 2023 to determine the potential openness of these MEPs to authoritarian influence, particularly from Russia and China. We have categorized the votes into three groups: (1) Counter-authoritarian, (2) Kremlin-critical, and (3) China-critical. Based on the individual votes, we have created the corresponding indices, namely the Counter-Authoritarian Index (CAI), the Kremlin-Critical Index (KCI), and the China-Critical Index (CCI). All indices have a value on a scale of 0-100, with a higher number representing a more critical voting pattern towards the Kremlin, China or all other authoritarian regimes. See the methodology section below for more information. The key findings are as follows.

- 1. Mainstream political groups are strongly critical of authoritarians, while groups at either end of the spectrum are much more supportive, with the ECR in between.** Overall, the Renew group is the most critical of authoritarian countries in general, closely followed by the EPP, the Greens/EFA and the S&D, with the ECR lagging behind. The least critical groups are the ID and the Left, far behind the others. While most political groups are similarly critical of all authoritarian countries, the ID is significantly the least critical of Russia and the Left of both Russia and China.
- 2. Bulwark against authoritarianism.** Most delegations from the Central and Eastern European (CEE) region in the European Parliament are highly critical of the Kremlin, China and other authoritarian regimes, although there are differences between them. This CEE “bulwark” against authoritarian steps is propped up mainly by Polish and Romanian MEPs, who were the toughest on authoritarianism in the 9<sup>th</sup> EP term from this region, with only one of these MEPs finishing with a CAI, KCI or CCI score under 70%.<sup>2</sup>
- 3. Concerns for the Council of the EU.** Some relatively large or highly important CEE delegations in the EP have fairly low index scores, such as Fidesz, SMER or the Bulgarian Socialist Party. The importance of these delegations is heightened by the fact that two of them (Fidesz and SMER) are currently leading the Hungarian and Slovak national governments, respectively. Thus, the Kremlin’s, China’s or other malign regimes’ influence has a better chance to be reflected in EU policies via Fidesz and SMER through their work in the Council. Meanwhile, the BSP remains the main opposition party in Bulgaria.
- 4. Some parties seem to be close friends of authoritarians.** Some national parties, such as the FPÖ from Austria, the SPD from Czechia or the Slovak Patriot have extremely low scores on all indices, sometimes even lower than like-minded parties from the far-right Identity and Democracy (ID) or far-left The Left groups. These parties can be deemed as the main entry points for authoritarian regimes into influencing the contents of EP resolutions, although their weight is too low for any chance of success.

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<sup>1</sup> The preceding studies are available [here](#) and [here](#).

<sup>2</sup> The number would be 2, but Włodzimierz Karpinski only was only an MEP for a few of the votes, and he missed all potential opportunities to cast a vote. Thus, he can be deemed irrelevant for the purpose of this research project.

5. **There are some “soft defenders” of authoritarians.** Fidesz MEP’s strategy on foreign policy votes can be described as “soft defense”; meaning that oftentimes, they seem to miss votes deliberately to avoid having to condemn regimes friendly to the Hungarian government. The soft defense strategy might be influenced either way (open rejection or a more Kremlin-critical voting pattern) depending on which political family Fidesz ends up in after the 2024 EP elections.
6. **A growing threat.** While MEPs from the CEE region were indeed a bulwark against authoritarianism in the 9<sup>th</sup> EP term, the situation could get worse after the 2024 EP election. Extremist parties like the FPÖ stand to gain more EP seats, while new ones, such as the Hungarian Mi Hazánk, are likely to join the Parliament. This will certainly weaken resolve against authoritarian regimes in the EP, as there will be more entry points for authoritarian countries to influence EP decisions. However, it remains unlikely that these parties will be able to turn the European Parliament into a dovish body from its current, hawkish foreign policy approach.

# Acknowledgement

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## Introduction

The European Parliament's 9<sup>th</sup> parliamentary cycle (2019-2024) has seen MEPs having to navigate unprecedented crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's unprovoked aggression against Ukraine, and they had to react to an increasingly assertive China that is now threatening Taiwan openly. While the European Parliament has no real decision-making power in the field of foreign policy, the actions of authoritarian states show that their word still matters on the world stage. In June 2023, China's Foreign Ministry condemned the EP's resolution on the deterioration of fundamental freedoms and the increasing level of repression in Hong Kong<sup>3</sup>, and Chinese attempts to police diaspora communities abroad. China stated that "the political drama of a few foreign politicians cannot shake the [Hong Kong] government's firm determination to administer" the territory according to law.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the Qatargate scandal shed light on the fact that authoritarian states are willing to spend resources on buying influence in the European Parliament and its committees.<sup>5</sup> The events of the 9<sup>th</sup> parliamentary term highlighted the value of analyzing the foreign policy-related votes of the European Parliament.

Political Capital's previous study on this issue<sup>6</sup> already noted that the European Parliament has achieved results in influencing the Union's foreign policy decisions. For example, by advocating for a human rights sanctions regime that was adopted on 7 December 2020, voting to freeze the ratification of the EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment,<sup>7</sup> or approving the Ukraine Facility to help fund Ukraine in its struggle against Russia.<sup>8</sup>

Naturally, the Parliament's powers can only go so far. The EP can be considered a foreign policy hawk based on the language of its resolutions, but its hawkish approach has often been swept aside by the Commission itself and – especially – by member states. The EP had long been calling for tougher sanctions on Russia due to its aggression against Ukraine before the Kremlin started its full-scale invasion, but these calls were not answered by other EU decision-making bodies.<sup>9</sup> Calls from the EP to member states and EU leaders to "fully and unconditionally support Ukraine" to allow it to regain full control over its entire territory have not been successful either,<sup>10</sup> as Kyiv had to give up territory in 2024 due to a lack of artillery shells to fight Russia.<sup>11</sup> The EU also fell short in delivering one million artillery shells to Ukraine within the promised one-year period.<sup>12</sup>

Overall, the European Parliament alone is not enough to turn the ship of EU foreign policy, but through its resolutions, it can exert some influence over it. This influence would likely grow substantially if the unanimity voting requirement in foreign affairs changed to qualified majority, but this is unlikely to

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<sup>3</sup> [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/RC-9-2023-0276\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/RC-9-2023-0276_EN.html)

<sup>4</sup> <https://apnews.com/article/hong-kong-freedoms-eu-resolution-china-12ecfa52fd2e24b0c6cb7a985f8440c6>

<sup>5</sup> See Politico's articles on the topic at: <https://www.politico.eu/european-parliament-qatargate-corruption-scandal-updates/>

<sup>6</sup> The Specter of Authoritarian Regimes is Haunting Europe: Populist Friends Seek to Help Lowering the EU's Guard [https://politicalcapital.hu/pc-admin/source/documents/PC\\_NED\\_The\\_Specter\\_of\\_Authoritarian\\_Regimes\\_is\\_Haunting\\_Europe\\_STUDY\\_2021\\_08.pdf](https://politicalcapital.hu/pc-admin/source/documents/PC_NED_The_Specter_of_Authoritarian_Regimes_is_Haunting_Europe_STUDY_2021_08.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.csis.org/analysis/rise-and-demise-eu-china-investment-agreement-takeaways-future-german-debate-china>

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2023-0363\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2023-0363_EN.html)

<sup>9</sup> [https://politicalcapital.hu/pc-admin/source/documents/PC\\_NED\\_The\\_Specter\\_of\\_Authoritarian\\_Regimes\\_is\\_Haunting\\_Europe\\_STUDY\\_2021\\_08.pdf](https://politicalcapital.hu/pc-admin/source/documents/PC_NED_The_Specter_of_Authoritarian_Regimes_is_Haunting_Europe_STUDY_2021_08.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2022-0353\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2022-0353_EN.html)

<sup>11</sup> <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-avdiivka-war-063ab1bd47a500ad4a815b12f3d1386d>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.euractiv.com/section/defence-and-security/news/eu-months-late-on-one-million-ammunition-target-for-ukraine/>

happen in the short- to mid-term. Their influence is, naturally, higher on issues where the EP has decision-making powers, such as trade deals or the accession of new member states. The new corps of MEPs taking their seats after the June 2024 EP elections can remain at least as important in shaping the EU's policies towards third countries as their predecessors were if the critics of authoritarian regimes maintain their substantial majority. The following analysis will help outline which parties have been consistently critical of authoritarian countries in Austria, Bulgaria, Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia.

## Methodology

We analyzed 152 votes cast by Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) between 2019 and 2023. We categorized these votes into the following groups (the number of votes included in each category indicated in parentheses):

- **Counter-authoritarian (94):** votes condemning authoritarian practices in third countries outside of Russia and China, and efforts to uphold European values in these nations.
- **Kremlin-critical (47):** votes condemning the authoritarian practices of the Russian regime and its aggressive foreign policy including its war against Ukraine.
- **China-critical (22):** votes condemning the authoritarian practices of the Chinese regime and its aggressive foreign policy.

In a few cases, resolutions condemned both China and Russia. We categorized these votes both as Kremlin-critical and as China-critical. For instance, the resolution on foreign interference in all democratic processes in the European Union, including disinformation<sup>13</sup> expressed concerns regarding the malign influence of these countries.

MEPs can vote in three different ways: they can vote 'for' or 'against' a proposal, or they can abstain. We also included instances when MEPs did not vote on a given proposal or when they were no longer/not yet members of the EP. Categorizing the votes allows us to analyze how representatives, national parties, countries, and EP party families vote on resolutions or reports addressing similar issues, and we can see whether they support or disapprove of proposals. To help us better understand trends, we created indices from the results. Each category received a separate index, but all were constructed with the same methodology.

1. In each case, we decided what type of vote can be considered critical (because it supports proposals seeking to condemn the practices of authoritarian regimes) and, in contrast, what can be considered a vote that supports authoritarian regimes. In all the votes included in this research, 'for' was the critical decision and 'against' was the supportive decision. (In the preceding study we included a few cases when this was the other way around. Generally, this happened pertaining to amendments proposed by a far-right or far-left party.)
2. We have added up the number of critical votes, supportive votes, abstentions and missed votes. The result is the number of potential votes. When aggregating, we took into account which MEPs were active at the time of the vote, as well as which national party and EP group they sat in at the time. We ensured the accuracy of this by following all changes during the cycle.
3. When calculating index scores, we assigned a point value or weight to every single vote. Critical votes are worth one point, supportive votes are worth zero, a missed vote is worth 0.5, and abstentions are worth 0.25. In the case of a missed vote, we seldom know the reason and how an MEP would have voted if they had attended, so we positioned its value halfway between

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<sup>13</sup> [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2023-0219\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2023-0219_EN.html)



critical and supportive votes. At the same time, we believe that abstentions should rather be considered weak supportive votes, so we weighted this halfway between a supportive vote and a missed vote.

4. The actual score of a given actor (individual MEP, national party, party family) is the weighted aggregate of the total number of votes, and the potential score is the highest possible score. This would be achieved if all votes were critical (worth one point). The actual value of the index is the quotient of the actual score and potential score in percentage points. (For instance, assume that the number of potential votes is 10, and the votes cast are as follows: 4 critical, 1 supportive, 3 abstentions, 2 missed votes. Thus, the actual score would be  $4*1+1*0+3*0.25+2*0.5=5.75$ . Since the potential score is 10, the index value would be  $5.75/10=0.575=57.5\%$ .)
5. The higher the index score, the more critical a voting pattern is in the given topic. An MEP or group would have an index score of 0% if they took part in all votes and voted supportively. It would be 100% if they took part in all votes and voted critically.
6. A particular value on the scale, such as the 57.5% in the example above, cannot be interpreted in terms of how critical a particular actor is of a particular authoritarian regime, as several voting patterns can achieve that value. What matters is where it ranks on the 0-100 scale and how it compares with others.

# 1. Parties' and party groups' attitudes to the Kremlin, China and other authoritarians

Overall, the Renew group is the most critical of authoritarian countries in general, with an average score of 95%, closely followed by the EPP (91.3% on average), the Greens/EFA and the S&D, with the latter two neck-and-neck with 90.3% each. Somewhat behind this leading group is the ECR with an average score of 81.3%. The ranking is completed by the least critical groups, the ID (51.3%) and the Left (47%), which are far behind the others. While most political groups have similar scores on all three indices, with very little difference between the EPP, the Greens/EFA and the S&D, the ID is significantly more critical of China and other authoritarian countries than of Russia, while the Left is similarly less critical of Russia and China, and more critical of other authoritarians.

**THE KREMLIN-CRITICAL INDEX, THE CHINA-CRITICAL INDEX AND THE COUNTER-AUTHORITARIAN INDEX SCORES AND RANKINGS, AS WELL AS THE AVERAGE SCORE AND THE OVERALL RANKING OF EACH POLITICAL GROUP, RANKED BY THE AVERAGE SCORE**

Group	Kremlin-Critical Index		China-Critical Index		Counter-Authoritarian index		Average score (%)	Overall ranking
	Score (%)	Ranking	Score (%)	Ranking	Score (%)	Ranking		
<b>Renew</b>	94	1	96	1	95	1	95	1
<b>EPP</b>	91	3	93	2	90	2	91.3	2
<b>Greens/EFA</b>	92	2	90	4	89	4	90.3	3
<b>S&amp;D</b>	89	4	92	3	90	2	90.3	3
<b>ECR</b>	81	5	81	5	82	5	81.3	5
<b>ID</b>	46	6	54	6	54	7	51.3	6
<b>The Left</b>	44	7	40	7	57	6	47	7

## 1.1. The Kremlin-Critical Index scores of the party groups in the EP

Over the 9<sup>th</sup> parliamentary term, three European parliamentary groups achieved a Kremlin-Critical Index score (KCI) higher than 90%; namely, Renew Europe (RE, 94), the Greens/EFA (92) and the European People's Party (EPP, 91). Two groups were between a score of 80 and 90%: the Socialists & Democrats (S&D, 89) and the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR, 81). These political groups can all be considered fairly or strongly critical of the Kremlin's actions.

The rest of the groups, however, were substantially more friendly towards Russia: The far-left The Left group achieved a score of 44%, while the far-right Identity and Democracy (ID) group only fared slightly better with a score of 46%. Independent MEPs had an overall score of 53%, but they cannot be counted, as they are – as their name indicates – not a supposedly united group of political parties.

As the table below shows, Renew MEPs were the most likely to vote for resolutions condemning the Kremlin, while representatives from the far-left The Left group were the least likely to do so. ID was the only EP group that was more likely to vote against these resolutions than to vote for them. The Left has a lower overall KCI score likely because of their extremely high rate of abstention, which was likely used to avoid the perception of supporting the Kremlin openly.

**KCI SCORE AND VOTE DISTRIBUTION OF POLITICAL GROUPS IN THE EP FROM THE TOTAL VOTES POSSIBLE ON KREMLIN-RELATED ISSUES (47 RESOLUTIONS X NUMBER OF MEPS IN GROUP). NUMBERS ROUNDED, SO THE TOTAL MIGHT BE LOWER OR HIGHER THAN 100%.**

Group	KCI score (%)	Distribution of votes (%)			
		for	against	abstentions	did not vote
Renew	94	89	0	1	9
Greens/EFA	92	86	1	4	9
EPP	91	83	1	3	13
S&D	89	80	1	4	15
ECR	81	73	4	13	10
ID	46	35	36	16	12
The Left	44	29	26	30	15

## 1.2. The China-Critical Index scores of the party groups

The situation is not much different in the case of China. Renew has the highest China-Critical Index (CCI) score with 96%, followed by the EPP (93), S&D (92), the Greens/EFA (90) and the ECR (81). One key difference, however, is that the ID group has a substantially higher CCI score with 54% than its KCI score, while The Left's CCI is even lower than its KCI with a score of 40.

As the table below shows, ID MEPs voted for resolutions critical of China in 44% of all possible occasions, which is 8 percentage points higher than in the case of Kremlin-critical resolutions. They were also less likely to vote against these resolutions.

**CCI SCORE AND VOTE DISTRIBUTION OF POLITICAL GROUPS IN THE EP FROM THE TOTAL VOTES POSSIBLE ON CHINA-RELATED ISSUES (22 RESOLUTIONS X NUMBER OF MEPS IN GROUP). NUMBERS ROUNDED, SO THE TOTAL MIGHT BE LOWER OR HIGHER THAN 100%.**

Group	CCI score (%)	Distribution of votes (%)			
		for	against	abstentions	did not vote
Renew	96	92	0	1	8
EPP	93	87	1	2	9
S&D	92	85	0	3	11
Greens/EFA	90	85	1	8	6
ECR	81	74	6	12	8
ID	54	44	28	18	10
The Left	40	25	26	38	11

## 1.3. The Counter-Authoritarian Index scores of the party groups

The ranking of parties is rather similar in the case of the Counter-Authoritarian Index score as well, with RE scoring the highest (95%), followed by the EPP (93%), the S&D and the Greens/EFA (both at 90%), and the ECR (81%). On this index, The Left (57%) scores higher than ID (54%). Political Capital noted in its earlier study on MEPs' votes that left-wing parties were more likely to condemn right-wing authoritarian

regimes, whereas right-wing parties preferred to condemn leftist autocrats.<sup>14</sup> This trend continued over the entire 9<sup>th</sup> parliamentary term (see, for instance, the Hungarian country report).

As the table below shows, the key difference is that The Left was much “braver” in condemning authoritarian regimes that are not Russia and China: they voted for such resolutions 46% of the time versus 25% in the case of China and 29% in the case of Russia.

**CAI SCORE AND VOTE DISTRIBUTION OF POLITICAL GROUPS IN THE EP FROM THE TOTAL VOTES POSSIBLE ON AUTHORITARIAN REGIME-RELATED ISSUES (94 RESOLUTIONS X NUMBER OF MEPs IN GROUP). NUMBERS ROUNDED, SO THE TOTAL MIGHT BE LOWER OR HIGHER THAN 100%.**

Group	CAI score (%)	Distribution of votes (%)			
		for	against	abstentions	did not vote
Renew	95	91	0	1	8
EPP	90	83	1	4	12
S&D	90	83	2	3	12
Greens/EFA	89	85	5	2	8
ECR	82	74	4	13	9
The Left	57	46	19	24	11
ID	54	43	23	24	10

#### 1.4. Changes after February 2022

After the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the Kremlin-critical score of most major European parliamentary groups fell. The EPP dropped from 92% to 88%, Renew from 97% to 93%, the S&D from 91% to 88%, and ECR from 90% to 77%. These changes are generally caused by an increase in the number of missed votes, where MEPs were simply absent. This is also partly true for the ECR, but in their case, the number of abstentions also increased substantially. Their pre-2022 abstention rate was around 8%, increasing to around 16% after the full-scale aggression. Despite the fall in the scores of most mainstream groups, the average score for all groups fell only from 82% to 81%. This is because the Greens/EFA actually improved by 1 percentage point, while the score of the far-left group The Left increased from 26% to 53%, and that of the ID from 35% to 52%. The increase in the non-voting rate may be partly explained by the fact that the European Parliament returned to physical presence sessions in November 2021, after remote participation since March 2020. While the remote sessions improved the voting rate, the return to physical presence also meant a return to the higher non-voting rates known from the pre-pandemic period. Another factor that may have played a role is the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia, which was such a blatant violation of international norms that it caused such an uproar in European societies that it was too much for some of these extremist forces to ignore.

The trends are fairly similar in terms of the China-Critical Index. Mainstream parties’ scores dropped compared to the period before February 2022, as MEPs from these groups started missing more votes. However, in this case, only the Greens/EFA’s and The Left’s scores increased in the period before the full-scale aggression, as ID became slightly more lenient with China, as the group’s score fell from 58% to 50%.

<sup>14</sup> *The Specter of Authoritarian Regimes is Haunting Europe: Populist Friends Seek to Help Lowering the EU’s Guard*, [https://politicalcapital.hu/pc-admin/source/documents/PC\\_NED\\_The\\_Specter\\_of\\_Authoritarian\\_Regimes\\_is\\_Haunting\\_Europe\\_STUDY\\_2021\\_08.pdf](https://politicalcapital.hu/pc-admin/source/documents/PC_NED_The_Specter_of_Authoritarian_Regimes_is_Haunting_Europe_STUDY_2021_08.pdf)

Very similar observations can be made regarding the Counter-Authoritarian Index, although in this case, once again, ID's score improved slightly besides the Greens/EFA and The Left.

Overall, the trends suggest that MEPs as a whole were fairly consistent in their criticism of Russia, China and other authoritarian regimes regardless of the full-scale invasion. The ECR was the only group where the lower post-war KCI score can be attributed to something else than more missed votes, as they likely objected to some proposals designed to help Ukraine, which they showed with abstentions (see, for instance, the country chapter on Poland, where the Law and Justice's (PiS, ECR) abstentions are highlighted).

## 1.5. Outstanding national parties

It is worth highlighting the best and worst performing national parties<sup>15</sup> in the V4, Romania and Bulgaria in the 9<sup>th</sup> European Parliament.

**Hungary** was the only one country where no political force achieved a KCI score of over 90%. Among Hungarian parties represented in the EP, the former extreme right party Jobbik (Independent) has the highest score with 89%. The fairly young liberal party Momentum (RE) achieved a score of 90 both on the China-Critical Index (CCI) and the Counter-Authoritarian Index (CAI), but these are the only cases when a Hungarian party achieved this milestone on any of the indices.

Every party from **Austria** achieved a score above 90% consistently on all indices, except for the far-right Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ, ID), who seem to be very friendly towards the Kremlin, and very lenient towards China and other authoritarian regimes.

Concerning **Bulgarian** parties' delegations, the conservative Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB, EPP) and the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF, EPP), and the liberal Movement for Rights and Freedom (DPS, RE) all achieved a score higher than 90%, and even the populist right VMRO has a KCI score of 78%. The Bulgarian field includes one of the most pro-Kremlin parties within the S&D group, the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) with a score of 65%. The results are largely the same in the case of China, although both Bulgarian National Movement (VMRO, ECR) (86%) and the BSP (73%) were more critical towards the communist regime in Beijing. The same trends can be observed on the Counter-Authoritarian Index.

In the **Czech** EP delegation, three parties achieved a KCI score over 90%: the Pirates (Greens/EFA), TOP 09 (EPP), and the Christian and Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party (KDU-ČSL; EPP), and independent Czech MEPs are also highly critical of the Kremlin. On China, the former ruling ANO 2011 (RE) also joins the club of parties with a score of over 90, as well as the STAN (EPP) delegation. The trends are the same in the case of the Counter-Authoritarian Index once again.

In **Poland**, political parties achieved very high scores in all indexes in general, and the social-liberal Spring (Wiosna; S&D) achieved a KCI score of 100%, although they were only represented in the EP for 25 out of the 47 possible Kremlin-related votes. Only the Republican Party (ECR) and the PiS had a KCI score under 90, and no Polish force had a score under 84%, which confirms that Poland is one of the most critical of Russia among the countries analyzed in this study. The trends are largely the same on the other indices as well.

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<sup>15</sup> Only counting political parties with a substantial voting history in the European Parliament; so, for instance, *Modrá Koalícia* does not count, as they only have two recorded Kremlin-related votes.

Trends in **Romania** are highly similar to what was observed in Poland, with the lowest KCI score of 84% by the Social Democratic Party (PSD, S&D), not counting Cristian TERHEȘ (ECR), who has changed parties several times, and one independent MEP with a lower score, but was only present for 9 potential votes and did not vote in five of those. Once again, no significant differences can be observed in party behavior regarding China and other authoritarian regimes. Overall, the Romanian delegation also seems to have been a strong defender of democratic values in the 9<sup>th</sup> EP.

The **Slovak** delegation was more of a mixed bag with 5 relevant parties achieving a KCI score of over 90%: Together-Civic Democracy (SPOLU, RE-100%), Freedom and Solidarity (SaS, ECR-95%), Christian Democratic Movement (KDH, EPP-92%), Progressive Slovakia (PS, RE-91%) and Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (OL'ANO, EPP-90%). The picture is very similar on the other two indices as well. In contrast, the two far-right parties, the Slovak Patriot (Independent) only achieved a KCI score of 18% and the Republic Movement (Independent) 9%.

**Parties with the lowest scores**, apart from the Slovak Patriot and the Republic Movement, include the Czech Communist Party (KSČM, The Left) with a 19% score and the far-right Freedom and Direct (SPD, ID) with 14%. The final “contestant” with a very Kremlin-friendly attitude is the FPÖ with a KCI score of 25%. These parties score significantly lower than even the far-right and far-left EP parliamentary groups on average, indicating that their commitment to aiding authoritarian interests is very strong, especially in the case of Russia. These parties are then followed by Hungary’s Fidesz (Independent) at 57% and the Bulgarian BSP with 65%.

**The overall picture is clear: in the 9<sup>th</sup> parliamentary term, MEPs from the six Central- and Eastern European countries observed were highly critical of the Kremlin, China and other authoritarian countries. It is true, however, that some political forces (as seen in Bulgaria) are more likely to condemn actions by China and other authoritarian regimes than the actions of the Kremlin**, indicating that old Russia-CEE relations have left a mark on some politicians from the region.

The strong critical attitude of the CEE region might deteriorate somewhat in the next EP: the FPÖ has been leading the polls in Austria for months, the Fidesz delegation might end up being more lenient with Russia depending on which populist right or far-right European Parliamentary group they join. The Hungarian far-right, pro-Kremlin Our Homeland (Mi Hazánk) is also likely to gain seats in the next EP, and the increasingly pro-Kremlin Slovak ruling SMER<sup>16</sup> party (Independent) looks set to win the Slovak EP elections as well.

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.politico.eu/article/slovakia-robert-fico-night-wolves-mc-europe-head-from-sanctions-list/>

## 2. Country chapter on Hungary: War as a stark dividing line for some MEPs

The key conclusions for the work of Hungarian MEPs in the 9<sup>th</sup> EP parliamentary cycle (2019-2024) are the following:

1. **Searching for a family.** The larger Hungarian ruling party Fidesz has been searching for a party family since they left the European People's Party (EPP). The party likely seeks to enter the soft Eurosceptic European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR), but a significant portion of ECR members want to see Fidesz outside their circles. The far-right Identity and Democracy (ID) would welcome Fidesz with open arms, but their distance from the mainstream makes membership in their ranks less prestigious than in the ECR. In addition, Fidesz is unwilling to sit in the same group as the German AfD because of its extremist and hardline pro-Kremlin stance, and because of fears that any association with the AfD would further alienate Fidesz from mainstream German conservatives.
2. **Soft defenders.** Fidesz's votes have changed considerably since Fidesz left the European People's Party in 2021. Fidesz MEP's strategy on foreign policy votes can be described as "soft defense" for authoritarian regimes meaning that oftentimes, they seem to miss votes deliberately to avoid having to condemn regimes friendly to the Hungarian government. This strategy means that the Kremlin-Critical (KCI), China-Critical (CCI) and Counter-Authoritarian Index (CAI) scores of Fidesz fall in-between the averages of the ECR and ID – and they are closer to ID after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The soft defense strategy might be influenced either way depending on which political family Fidesz ends up in after the 2024 EP elections.
3. **The full-scale invasion was a strong dividing line.** As noted above already, the voting patterns of Fidesz and the Christian Democratic People's Party (KDNP) changed substantially after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, causing their KCI, CCI and CAI scores to fall. This division was especially stark in the case of Kremlin-critical votes, which not only marked an increase in the proportion of votes representatives of the Hungarian ruling parties missed, but also the beginning of them voting against resolutions condemning the Kremlin.
4. **The rest are critical of authoritarians.** Hungarian MEPs from the ranks of the opposition parties are generally in favor of resolutions condemning authoritarian regimes. However, they are also missing numerous votes, even compared to Western populist parties. One notable figure here is István Ujhelyi, who missed 73% of the votes concerning China, likely exhibiting a "soft defense" strategy towards China, similarly to Fidesz's strategy.

### 2.1. Hungarian MEPs: same group, different parties

In 2019, the Hungarian ruling Fidesz-KDNP coalition secured more than half of the ballots cast (52.56%). They were followed by the Democratic Coalition (DK) of former Hungarian PM Ferenc Gyurcsány with 16.05% of the vote. The liberal Momentum party performed better than expected, securing 9.93% of ballots cast. The coalition of the former ruling Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) and Párbeszéd, and the conservative, formerly far-right Jobbik party also managed to gain enough votes to send MEPs to the European Parliament.

Fidesz-KDNP sent 13 MEPs to Strasburg, with one of them, György Hölvényi belonging to the smaller coalition party, KDNP. The Democratic Coalition has had 4 MEPs, Momentum 2, MSZP-Párbeszéd 1 and Jobbik 1 in the 9<sup>th</sup> parliamentary cycle. 13 Hungarian MEPs (Fidesz-KDNP) sat in the European People's

Party group in 2019, 5 (DK, MSZP) in the Socialists & Democrats, 2 (Momentum) in Renew Europe and 1, Jobbik's Márton Gyöngyösi was not in any of the groups (NI).

The list of Hungarian MEPs remained almost constant throughout the 9<sup>th</sup> parliamentary cycle, with one notable example. On 29 November 2020, long-time Fidesz MEP Szájer and former whip of the European People's Party József Szájer resigned from his mandate, stating it was the result of "a lot of thinking."<sup>17</sup> Days later, it was revealed that the MEP had been caught at a lockdown-busting party by Belgian police amidst 25 naked men. Szájer tried to flee by climbing down the gutter, but he was apprehended, and police found narcotics in his backpack.<sup>18</sup> After his resignation, József Szájer was replaced by Ernő Schaller-Baross.

## 2.2. The ECR can be Fidesz's post-election goal

There was more turmoil in terms of party affiliation. Fidesz had already been suspended from the EPP before the 2019 EP elections, prompted by a campaign launched by the Hungarian government against the EPP-affiliated (now former) European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker. The billboards featuring the Commission president were taken down after strong backlash from the EPP, but that did not stop an initiative by 13 EPP member parties to get Fidesz suspended. The larger Hungarian ruling party was threatening with leaving the party family if they were suspended, but they did not do so after the decision was made. According to the official rhetoric of Fidesz, they jointly agreed on suspension with other EPP members.<sup>19</sup> Manfred Weber, who – at the time – led the EPP's parliamentary group in EP and was the party family's lead candidate in the elections, demanded that (1) the anti-Juncker billboards are withdrawn with immediate effect, (2) Fidesz fully refrains from similar attacks in the future, and (3) the legal issues regarding the Central European University are clarified.<sup>20</sup>

The EPP set up a committee that monitored Fidesz's implementation of the conditions agreed, consisting of former Belgian PM and European Council President Herman Van Rompuy, former EP President Hans-Gert Pöttering and former Austrian Chancellor Wolfgang Schüssel.<sup>21</sup> On 3 February 2020, the EPP decided to prolong Fidesz's suspension indefinitely over concerns about the rule of law in the country and the anti-Brussels rhetoric of Fidesz, then-EPP Vice President Siegfried Muresan noted that the future relationship between the sides depended on events in Hungary.<sup>22</sup>

Finally, in March 2021, as the EPP was making moves to expulse Fidesz-affiliated MEPs from the EPP's parliamentary group, Hungarian PM Viktor Orbán wrote a letter to the EPP that Fidesz would leave the group, ending years of tensions between the sides.<sup>23</sup> Afterwards, Fidesz MEPs became independent (NI) in the European Parliament, and they have not found a party family since. However, it is key to note that KDNP-affiliated MEP György Hölvényi has remained in the EPP, as the smaller governing party was never suspended or threatened with expulsion.

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<sup>17</sup> [https://index.hu/belfold/2020/11/29/szajer\\_jozsef\\_lemondott\\_europai\\_parlamenti\\_kepviselei\\_fidesz/](https://index.hu/belfold/2020/11/29/szajer_jozsef_lemondott_europai_parlamenti_kepviselei_fidesz/)

<sup>18</sup> [https://www.politico.eu/article/sex-lies-sunglasses-11-most-embarrassing-political-resignations/?utm\\_source=email&utm\\_medium=alert&utm\\_campaign=Sex%2C%20lies%20and%20stolen%20sunglasses%3A%20The%2011%20most%20embarrassing%20political%20resignations](https://www.politico.eu/article/sex-lies-sunglasses-11-most-embarrassing-political-resignations/?utm_source=email&utm_medium=alert&utm_campaign=Sex%2C%20lies%20and%20stolen%20sunglasses%3A%20The%2011%20most%20embarrassing%20political%20resignations)

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.epp.eu/press-releases/fidesz-membership-suspended-after-epp-political-assembly/>

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[https://index.hu/english/2019/03/20/epp\\_political\\_assembly\\_fidesz\\_suspension\\_orban\\_presser\\_weber\\_juncker\\_kramp\\_karrenbauer/](https://index.hu/english/2019/03/20/epp_political_assembly_fidesz_suspension_orban_presser_weber_juncker_kramp_karrenbauer/)

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.epp.eu/press-releases/fidesz-membership-suspended-after-epp-political-assembly/>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.politico.eu/article/epp-prolongs-suspension-of-hungarys-fidesz-indefinitely/>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.politico.eu/article/epp-suspension-rules-fidesz-european-parliament-viktor-orban-hungary/>



As the European Parliament elections are approaching, there is talk about Fidesz joining the soft Eurosceptic European Conservative and Reformists (ECR) group led by Giorgia Meloni's Brothers of Italy and the former Polish ruling party PiS. According to Italian media, PM Viktor Orbán stated in an interview with *La Repubblica* and *La Stampa* that Fidesz would join the ECR after the elections.<sup>24</sup> But Giorgia Meloni was more cautious when talking about the possibility of Fidesz joining the group. This is probably because several ECR member parties such as the Sweden Democrats, the Finns Party, the Latvian National Alliance, the Belgian New Flemish Alliance, the Czech Civic Democratic Party and the Slovak Freedom and Solidarity have announced that they would consider leaving the ECR if Fidesz were to join.<sup>25</sup>

In terms of national party affiliations, there was only once change: István Ujhelyi, the sole MEP from the Hungarian Socialist Party, left the party in October 2022, noting that he had tried to re-energize the party after a series of huge electoral losses. He is currently working on "continuing building the Esély Magyar Szociáldemokrata Közösség"<sup>26</sup>, but he is unlikely to be re-elected into the European Parliament.

### 2.3. Kremlin-critical votes

Overall, Jobbik's Kremlin-Critical Index (KCI) score was the highest among Hungarian parties at 89%, while Momentum's and DK's scores of 88 and 87%, respectively, were almost identical; the key difference was merely that Jobbik's sole MEP missed a lower percentage of potential votes than the representatives of the other parties. MSZP/Esély's sole MEP achieved a score of 81%, entirely due to the very high percentage of potential votes missed.

The Kremlin Critical Index scores of the Hungarian ruling parties look entirely different. Fidesz MEPs and KDNP's György Hölvényi have both missed more votes on issues relevant to Russia than the number of Kremlin-critical votes they cast. Fidesz's representatives voted critically of Russia 194 times altogether, but failed to cast any vote 220 times.<sup>27</sup> They abstained on a further 66 occasions and voted in line with the Kremlin's interest 84 times. György Hölvényi's actions mirrored those of Fidesz-affiliated MEPs. This resulted in a 57% KCI score for Fidesz and 63% for KDNP. To put this into a broader, European context, Renew, the EPP and the Greens/EFA were the most critical of the Kremlin with scores of 94, 92 and 91%, respectively. The ECR's score was 81%, much higher than those of the Hungarian ruling parties. ID's overall score of 46% is closer to that of Fidesz, which suggest that on the issue of Russia, they are more aligned with the extreme right parliamentary group.

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<sup>24</sup> [https://www.ansa.it/europa/notizie/rubriche/altrenews/2024/02/01/orban-dopo-le-elezioni-entreremonecr-di-meloni\\_74fdf62b-2c70-4130-8c03-8725948c4618.html](https://www.ansa.it/europa/notizie/rubriche/altrenews/2024/02/01/orban-dopo-le-elezioni-entreremonecr-di-meloni_74fdf62b-2c70-4130-8c03-8725948c4618.html)

<sup>25</sup> Political Capital (2024): Competing for the third place [https://politicalcapital.hu/news.php?article\\_read=1&article\\_id=3348](https://politicalcapital.hu/news.php?article_read=1&article_id=3348); Political Capital (2024): Fidesz could make or break the ECR's move towards the European mainstream, [https://politicalcapital.hu/news.php?article\\_read=1&article\\_id=3365](https://politicalcapital.hu/news.php?article_read=1&article_id=3365); Agence France-Presse (2024): Right-Wing Nationalists Rising — and Divided — as EU Vote Looms, <https://www.voanews.com/a/right-wing-nationalists-rising---and-divided---as-eu-vote-looms-/7521367.html>

<sup>26</sup> Translates to "Chance – Hungarian Social Democratic Community"

<sup>27</sup> The total potential votes are calculated by multiplying the number of party-affiliated MEPs (12 in the case of Fidesz) with the number of relevant votes included in our sample (47 in the case of Russia). Thus, Fidesz MEPs altogether could decide on the Kremlin 564 times.

**KCI SCORE AND VOTE DISTRIBUTION OF HUNGARIAN PARTIES IN THE EP FROM THE TOTAL VOTES POSSIBLE ON KREMLIN-RELATED ISSUES. NUMBERS ROUNDED, SO THE TOTAL MIGHT BE LOWER OR HIGHER THAN 100%.**

Group	KCI score (%)	Distribution of votes (%)			
		for	against	abstentions	did not vote
Jobbik (1 MEP)	89	79	0	2	19
Momentum (2)	88	77	0	0	23
DK (4)	87	73	0	0	27
MSZP/Esély (1)	81	62	0	0	38
KDNP (1)	63	38	2	19	40
Fidesz (12)	57	34	15	12	39

The start of Russia’s invasion was a very strong dividing line for Fidesz and KDNP. Before the war started, Fidesz and KDNP maintained a KCI score of 85 and 93%, respectively. There is no evidence that the ruling parties started voting much differently on this issue after they quit the EPP – and this would not have influenced the votes of György Hölvényi, who still sits in the center-right group. Before the war, Hungarian MEPs did not abstain or vote against a single proposal critical of the Kremlin that is included in this study. After the war started, however, Fidesz’s and the KDNP’s KCI score dropped to 44 and 49%, respectively, which is very close to the overall score achieved by the ID parliamentary group. The results show that the two parties’ behavior shifted significantly towards a pro-Kremlin position after the invasion. This is likely how the parties’ increasingly Kremlin-friendly domestic rhetoric is mirrored in their voting behavior. Since the war started, Fidesz’s 12 MEPs only voted critically of the Kremlin 68 times out of the total of 384 opportunities<sup>28</sup> they had.

The KCI scores of all Hungarian political parties dropped after the war started, but these are due to missed votes, partially as a result of the MEPs more active involvement in domestic politics due to the April 2022 general election in Hungary. However, the MEPs of DK, Jobbik, Momentum and MSZP/Esély did not cast a single vote in favor of the Kremlin, and the only abstention on a relevant decision was by Jobbik’s MEP Márton Gyöngyösi.

On the level of individual MEPs, Hungarian representatives in the EP mostly vote in line with their colleagues from the same political party. The main differences on the individual level across MEPs with the same affiliation occur as a result of more missed votes.

### **Key votes and statements**

The Hungarian ruling parties did not vote on a number of key votes. For instance, they did not vote on a resolution condemning Russia for its unprovoked, unjustifiable war of aggression against Ukraine, as well as Belarus’ alliance with Russia, on the occasion of the anniversary of the invasion.<sup>29</sup> Fidesz MEPs also failed to vote on a resolution recognizing the brutality and inhumanity of Russian troops’ treatment of Ukrainian civilians.<sup>30</sup> KDNP’s György Hölvényi abstained on the vote.

The MEPs affiliated with the Hungarian ruling parties did not vote or voted against a resolution establishing the Ukraine Facility aimed at supporting the attacked country in addressing the social, economic, environmental and psychological consequences of Russia’s war of aggression.<sup>31</sup> This was the one vote where Jobbik’s Márton Gyöngyösi abstained as well.

<sup>28</sup> There are 12 Fidesz MEPs and 32 relevant post-war votes, which constitutes 384 “opportunities”.

<sup>29</sup> [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2023-0056\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2023-0056_EN.html)

<sup>30</sup> [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2022-0405\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2022-0405_EN.html)

<sup>31</sup> [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2023-0363\\_HU.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2023-0363_HU.html)

Andrea Bocskor is a notable Fidesz-affiliated MEP for the fact that she was born in Berehove, a Ukrainian city with a high ethnic Hungarian population. As such, she often contributed to debates on Ukraine. A day before the vote on the resolution about the one-year anniversary of Russia’s invasion, she said during the debate that they support Ukraine’s territorial integrity and called Russia’s actions an aggression.<sup>32</sup> However, she did not cast a vote the next day.

In contrast, on 1 March 2022, all Hungarian MEPs voted for a resolution condemning Russia for its unjustified military aggression against Ukraine.<sup>33</sup> Fidesz MEP Kinga Gál already mentioned during the debate that the sides must negotiate to create peace, but at that time, this did not prevent Fidesz from voting for the resolution.<sup>34</sup>

**THE FIDESZ POSITION ON THE KREMLIN-RELATED RESOLUTIONS, BASED ON THE INDIVIDUAL VOTES OF MEPS. A POSITION IS CONSIDERED “DID NOT VOTE” IF NO MEP OF THE PARTY HAS CAST A VALID VOTE.**

	for	against	abstentions	did not vote
Before 2/2022 (15 resolutions)	12	0	0	3
After 2/2022 (32 resolutions)	8	8	8	8
Total (47 resolutions)	20	8	8	11

## 2.4. China-critical votes

Regarding China-critical votes, the overall picture is very similar to KCI scores achieved by Hungarian MEPs, but there is one significant difference. Momentum (90%), Democratic Coalition (88%) and Jobbik (86%) can once again be listed as highly critical parties, with their scores only being differentiated by the number of times their MEP(s) did not cast a vote. However, the score of MSZP/Esély is only 64% due to the fact that while István Ujhelyi, their sole MEP, voted critically of China six times, he missed 16 votes out of 22 opportunities. István Ujhelyi has often been highlighted as a politician that is rather friendly towards China. He announced in October 2023 that he would start advising the Shenzhen Chamber of Commerce on improving relations with Europe, noting that this non-paid position is a form of “bridge building” between Shenzhen and Europe.<sup>35</sup> The MEP was also present on the “Belt and Road Initiative” event held in Beijing in October 2023, although he “demonstratively” left the room where Russian President Vladimir Putin held his speech.<sup>36</sup>

**CCI SCORE AND VOTE DISTRIBUTION OF HUNGARIAN PARTIES IN THE EP FROM THE TOTAL VOTES POSSIBLE ON CHINA-RELATED ISSUES. NUMBERS ROUNDED, SO THE TOTAL MIGHT BE LOWER OR HIGHER THAN 100%.**

Group	CCI score (%)	Distribution of votes (%)			
		for	against	abstentions	did not vote
Momentum (2)	90	80	0	0	20
DK (4)	88	76	0	0	24
Jobbik (1 MEP)	86	73	0	0	27
MSZP/Esély (1)	64	27	0	0	73
KDNP (1)	57	23	0	18	59
Fidesz (12)	45	24	26	16	34

<sup>32</sup> [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2023-02-15-INT-3-040-0000\\_HU.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2023-02-15-INT-3-040-0000_HU.html)

<sup>33</sup> [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2022-0052\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2022-0052_EN.pdf)

<sup>34</sup> [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2022-03-01-ITM-009\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2022-03-01-ITM-009_EN.html)

<sup>35</sup> [https://www.facebook.com/dr.ujhelyi.istvan/posts/873630324122129?ref=embed\\_post](https://www.facebook.com/dr.ujhelyi.istvan/posts/873630324122129?ref=embed_post)

<sup>36</sup> <https://24.hu/kulfold/2023/10/18/ujhelyi-istvan-kivonul-putyin-beszed-pekking-kina/>

György Hölvényi, KDNP's sole MEP achieved a score of 57%, as he did not vote on 13 occasions and abstained on 4. Fidesz's score was only 45%, however, as the party's MEPs voted against China-critical proposals more times than they voted for them (68 vs 64 times, respectively), and they did not vote in about one-third of the cases. Fidesz's score is lower than even ID's average of 54%, and only slightly higher than the 40% score of the far-left The Left parliamentary group, who are ideologically substantially closer to China, at least theoretically.

The war in China's case was less of a dividing line. Fidesz was very active in defending the Chinese regime in the EP even before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, as they had a China-Critical Index (CCI) score of 51% at the time, which fell to 25% after the war. This is still a substantial change, but – unlike in the case of Russia – Fidesz MEPs did cast votes against resolutions condemning China before the war already. This once again mirrors the Hungarian ruling party's domestic rhetoric, which depicts China as a land of opportunity for Hungary to improve its economy. More recently, multiple Chinese battery and vehicle manufacturers have announced investments into Hungary, which foreshadows that Fidesz will seek to protect Chinese interests even more within the EU and the European Parliament in the future.

### **Key votes and statements**

In terms of key votes, there is two that can be compared quite well. In 2020, the EP votes to condemn the national security law Beijing imposed on Hong Kong.<sup>37</sup> This resolution was backed by all Hungarian MEPs present.

In June 2023, another vote was held on Hong Kong, which condemned the deteriorating situation of fundamental rights there.<sup>38</sup> This vote was missed by all but three Hungarian MEPs, including all from the ruling parties.

In September 2022, another key China-related vote took place, that time on the situation in the Strait of Taiwan. This was also approved by four Hungarian MEPs, with the ruling party's representatives missing the vote once again.

Hungarian MEPs also made no statements on the above-mentioned key votes, so it is fairly hard to outline their views on China based on their performance in the European Parliament.

## **2.5. Counter-Authoritarian Index**

When it comes to votes cast to condemn other authoritarian regimes, Hungarian political parties ranked similarly to what we saw in the case of Kremlin-critical votes. On the Counter-Authoritarian Index (CAI), Momentum achieved the highest score (91%), followed by Jobbik (87%), DK (85%) and MSZP (85%). The scores of Fidesz and KDNP were somewhat higher than in other categories, standing at 69 and 70%, respectively, likely because these parties were more inclined to condemn abuse committed by leftist regimes (e.g., Cuba, Venezuela). Fidesz's scores were between those of the ECR (82%) and ID (54%) once again.

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<sup>37</sup> The PRC national security law for Hong Kong and the need for the EU to defend Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy.

<sup>38</sup> [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2023-0242\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2023-0242_EN.html)

**CAI SCORE AND VOTE DISTRIBUTION OF HUNGARIAN PARTIES IN THE EP FROM THE TOTAL VOTES POSSIBLE ON AUTHORITARIAN REGIME-RELATED ISSUES. NUMBERS ROUNDED, SO THE TOTAL MIGHT BE LOWER OR HIGHER THAN 100%.**

Group	CAI score (%)	Distribution of votes (%)			
		for	against	abstentions	did not vote
Momentum (2)	91	82	1	1	16
Jobbik (1 MEP)	87	76	0	3	21
DK (4)	85	72	1	3	24
MSZP/Esély (1)	85	74	1	5	19
KDNP (1)	70	49	1	17	33
Fidesz (12)	69	50	4	14	31

One difference compared to the Kremlin-critical and China-critical votes is that all parties except for Jobbik voted against a proposal condemning an authoritarian regime at least once, which is probably the result of their respective party families deciding to vote against one resolution or another.

The war, however, once again proved to be somewhat of a dividing line, as Fidesz's and KDNP's scores fell from 80 and 81% to 49 and 53%, respectively, after the war started. Just as in the case of the KCI, these scores are much closer to ID's averages than the ECR's.

There can be multiple reasons for this. One is that there were multiple post-war resolutions against Azerbaijan due to the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, and Fidesz defended the Azerbaijani regime in these cases, which is in line with the Hungarian government's preferences. Second, and most importantly, the change likely mirrors the fact that Fidesz became even more brazenly pro-East in the wake of Russia's invasion in Ukraine. Third, the Hungarian ruling party itself is cracking down on independent civil society even more since the 2022 general elections, so it is becoming less likely to condemn similar abuses in other countries.

### **Key votes and statements**

The MEPs affiliated with the Hungarian ruling parties did not vote on resolutions addressing the case of imprisoned Azerbaijani opposition figure Dr. Gubad Ibadoghlu,<sup>39</sup> or one on the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh after Azerbaijan's attack.<sup>40</sup> In the latter case, it must be noted that only 3 Hungarian MEPs were present to cast a vote.

However, MEPs from Fidesz and KDNP seem to have somewhat better voting morale when it comes to regimes that the Hungarian government is not on good terms with. In 2021, all ruling party MEPs present voted for a resolution condemning Cuba's crackdown on protesters,<sup>41</sup> while MEPs from the S&D abstained, in line with the party family's decision. Fidesz MEPs who were present also voted for a resolution condemning HAMAS's terrorist attack against Israel and the supporters, proxies contributing to these events.<sup>42</sup> Fidesz MEP Edina Tóth stated at the debate that she strongly condemned the attack on Israel, noted that it could lead to the destabilization of the Middle East region, and highlighted that it was shocking for her to see so many "pro-terror" demonstrations referring to pro-Palestinian protests

<sup>39</sup> [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2023-0323\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2023-0323_EN.html)

<sup>40</sup> [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2023-0356\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2023-0356_EN.html)

<sup>41</sup> [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0389\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0389_EN.html)

<sup>42</sup> A Hamász aljas terrorista támadása Izrael ellen és Izrael joga az önvédelemhez, összhangban a humanitárius és nemzetközi joggal, valamint a humanitárius helyzet Gázában.

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2023-0373\\_HU.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2023-0373_HU.html)

across Europe, which was in line with the Hungarian government’s narrative. György Hölvényi also noted in the debate that the EU must use all tools to support Member States’ steps against terrorism.<sup>43</sup>

Some regimes that fall under the CAI scale enjoyed even stronger protection: 6 Fidesz MEPs voted against a resolution that reiterated that the 2020 presidential election in Belarus was fraudulent and condemned the subsequent repression unleashed by Belarusian authorities.<sup>44</sup> In contrast, less than three years before, while still sitting in the EPP, the very same MEPs (as well as the rest from the ruling parties) agreed to condiment the same fraudulent elections.<sup>45</sup>

## 2.6. Absences

Absences from voting have been mentioned frequently throughout this country chapter, and they need further evaluation.

**PERCENTAGE OF VOTES RELEVANT TO THE THREE INDICES MISSED BY HUNGARIAN PARTIES. FDI, RN AND AFD PRESENT FOR COMPARISON. THE NUMBER IN PARENTHESES IS THE NUMBER OF MEPS DELEGATED BY THE PARTY.**

<b>Party</b>	<b>KCI, % of missed votes</b>	<b>CCI, % of missed votes</b>	<b>CAI, % of missed votes</b>
FIDESZ (12)	39	34	35
KDNP (1)	40	59	38
DK (4)	27	24	24
Momentum (2)	23	20	19
Jobbik (1)	19	27	20
MSZP/Esély (1)	38	73	30
Fratelli d’Italia (10)	13	11	13
Rassablement National (18)	15	13	11
AfD (9)	10	6	8

The table above highlights that the MEPs of most Hungarian political parties missed more time than the populist Western parties selected for comparison. However, the percentage of votes missed by Fidesz and KDNP are extremely high, only rivalled by István Ujhelyi’s (MSZP/Esély) proportion in the case of China-related votes. The high proportion of missed votes by Fidesz- and KDNP-affiliated MEPs indicates that the absence from votes is a strategy followed to avoid condemning friendly authoritarian regimes. Rassablement National or AfD have considerably worse KCI, CCI and CAI scores than the Hungarian ruling parties, but mainly due to the fact that they seem to openly reject EP resolutions rather than following a the “soft defense” strategy of the former. The sole MSZP/Esély MEP, István Ujhelyi is likely following a similar strategy concerning China.

There is a good chance that this “soft defense” strategy could evolve based on which party family Fidesz ends up joining after the 2024 EP elections – if they manage to join any.

<sup>43</sup> [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2023-10-18-ITM-002\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2023-10-18-ITM-002_EN.html)

<sup>44</sup> [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2023-0321\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2023-0321_EN.html)

<sup>45</sup> [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2020-0231\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2020-0231_EN.html)

### 3. Country chapter on Austria: FPÖ among the leading defenders of authoritarians

The key conclusions for the work of Austrian MEPs in the 9<sup>th</sup> EP parliamentary cycle (2019-2024) are the following:

1. **High scores for most Austrian parties.** Four of the five Austrian parties represented in the European Parliament scored very high on all three measured scores: The conservative ÖVP, the Social Democrats, the Greens and the liberal Neos all have results of over 90%. In contrast, the far-right FPÖ scored way below 50% on all three indices.
2. **The FPÖ are very friendly towards Russia.** The FPÖ scores especially low on the Kremlin-Critical Index with a result of just 25%. Their score fell after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The FPÖ is notorious for its close relationship with the Kremlin, as the party signed a friendship treaty with Putin-party "United Russia" in 2016.
3. **Austrians vote along party lines.** There no substantial variation between MEPs from the same party. Most of the time, Austrian MEPs voted along party lines.
4. **ÖVP's MEPs might differ from their national counterparts.** Reports have indicated that Austria's ÖVP-led government blocked Kremlin-critical initiatives within EU institutions. Based on KCI scores, this did not take place in the European Parliament, as the ÖVP's score is 90%, largely in line with the overall EPP score. Thus, if the rumors are true, the ÖVP's efforts are likely to be focused on the Council or the Council of the EU.

#### 3.1. Elections during turbulent times in Austrian politics

The 2019 European elections were held at a time of substantial political turbulence in Austria. Only a few days before the vote, a significant scandal caused the dissolution of government: A video showed Heinz Christian Strache, then the leader of the far-right FPÖ and a vice-chancellor, negotiating corrupt deals with a woman pretending to be a Russian oligarch's niece.

This explains why the parties scored rather differently than predicted in polls and why some likely candidates did not get to take their seat in the European Parliament. The ÖVP won nearly 35% of the vote, with long-time MEP Othmar Karas as their top candidate and Karoline Edtstadler as his unofficial "running mate." Edtstadler scored more than 100.000 preferential votes, but left the EP in 2020 to become Austrian minister for European affairs. The SPÖ was led by former Austrian MP Andreas Schieder and held onto its five seats in the EP.

The FPÖ got 18% of the vote, losing one seat compared to the 8<sup>th</sup> parliamentary cycle and scoring much worse than predicted. The Green party, which did not make it into the Austrian Parliament in the national elections in 2017, successfully returned to the political stage with 14% of the vote. Its top candidate, Werner Kogler, went on to be the top candidate in national elections held in the fall of 2019, and he is now vice-chancellor. The liberal Neos managed to hold onto their one seat in the EP, which is occupied by Claudia Gamon.

The Austrian EP delegation has remained largely the same since the beginning of the 9<sup>th</sup> term.

#### 3.2. Far-right "friends" of the Kremlin

All of the Austrian parties score very high on the Kremlin-Critical Index (KCI), except for the FPÖ. This is not surprising: The FPÖ has cultivated ties with Moscow for years, even signing a "friendship agreement" with the Russian ruling United Russia party in 2016. The far-right party has a KCI of 25%, quite similar to the French National Front.

The FPÖ failed to even condemn Russia’s attack on Ukraine in clear words or via their actions, as their KCI score fell from 30 to 23% after February 2022. The FPÖ is the only Austrian party that is agitating against sanctions levied on Russia. As early as fall 2022, the party called for a popular vote on sanctions.

MEP Harald Vilimsky, the leader of the FPÖ-delegation in Strasbourg, said that a “small clique of EU-centralists are endangering our prosperity and freedom” with these sanctions.

**KCI SCORE AND VOTE DISTRIBUTION OF AUSTRIAN PARTIES IN THE EP FROM THE TOTAL VOTES POSSIBLE ON KREMLIN-RELATED ISSUES. NUMBERS ROUNDED, SO THE TOTAL MIGHT BE LOWER OR HIGHER THAN 100%.**

Party (Group, MEPs)	KCI score (%)	Distribution of votes (%)			
		for	against	abstentions	did not vote
Die Grünen (Greens/EFA, 3)	95	91	0	4	4
NEOS (Renew, 1)	94	87	0	0	13
SPÖ (S&D, 5)	93	88	1	3	9
ÖVP (EPP, 7)	90	81	0	4	15
FPÖ (ID, 3)	25	11	35	51	4

The conservative ÖVP scored second-lowest on the Kremlin-critical index, although with a very high result of 90%. Its MEPs abstained 13 times; for instance on a resolution demanding the release of Alexei Navalny. The ÖVP delegation never voted against a Kremlin-critical resolution. But there is cause for speculation that the ÖVP has weakened sanctions against Russia in the Council of the EU, which needs to unanimously approve new sanction measures and extend existing ones. The party has ties to the Raiffeisen group, one of Austria’s most important banks with subsidiaries in Russia and Belarus. There were a number of reports in Austrian media that the Austrian government would only approve new sanctions against Russia if Ukraine were to strike Raiffeisen from its “sponsors of war”-list.<sup>46</sup> There are also a number of oligarchs with assets in Austria; e.g., Oleg Deripaska. Rumors about Austria blocking sanctions against Deripaska have been denied by the Foreign Ministry and Chancellor Karl Nehammer.<sup>47</sup> Deripaska, for instance, is deeply intertwined with important companies in Austria: He held shares in the construction group Strabag, which is now being transferred to a group of investors through Raiffeisen bank – which has allegedly alarmed US-officials.<sup>48</sup> Deripaska also has close ties to manager Siegfried Wolf, who is well connected in Austrian politics. In private chats, Wolf urged then-chancellor Sebastian Kurz several times to intervene with the US sanction department to help Deripaska.<sup>49</sup>

The SPÖ, the liberal Neos and the Greens and scored high on the KCI with 93%, 94% and 95%, respectively, which is in line with their widely communicated Kremlin-critical stance. Andreas Schieder, leader of the social democratic delegation, only recently called the Kremlin a “criminal regime without a future.”<sup>50</sup> There were no significant changes in the index-scores after Russia’s attack on Ukraine, except for the far-right party, as noted above. The FPÖ has openly rejected financial support for Ukraine, indicated by the fact that they voted against establishing the Ukraine facility, and Ukraine’s integration into the Transatlantic community.

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.kleinezeitung.at/wirtschaft/17918037/raiffeisen-bekommt-im-streit-mit-ukraine-politische-rueckendeckung>

<sup>47</sup> <https://orf.at/stories/3252777/>

<sup>48</sup> <https://www.derstandard.at/story/3000000210612/presse-rbi-vertreter-wegen-deripaska-deal-bei-us-sanktionsw228chtern>

<sup>49</sup> <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000134388831/wolf-bat-kurz-um-hilfe-fuer-oligarchen-wenn-du-white>

<sup>50</sup> [https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS\\_20240223\\_OTSO072/spoe-schieder-zum-jahrestag-des-russischen-angriffs-putins-verbrecherregime-hat-keine-zukunft](https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20240223_OTSO072/spoe-schieder-zum-jahrestag-des-russischen-angriffs-putins-verbrecherregime-hat-keine-zukunft)



### 3.3. A hard stance towards China

The China-critical index offers a pretty similar picture to the Kremlin-critical index: All Austrian parties are above 90%, with the exception of the far-right Freedom party. Its MEPs abstained from the vote condemning China's new security laws for Hongkong and on a vote calling for a stronger relationship with Taiwan. The FPÖ did condemn the treatment of the Uyghur minority in Xianjiang, however.

**CCI SCORE AND VOTE DISTRIBUTION OF AUSTRIAN PARTIES IN THE EP FROM THE TOTAL VOTES POSSIBLE ON CHINA-RELATED ISSUES. NUMBERS ROUNDED, SO THE TOTAL MIGHT BE LOWER OR HIGHER THAN 100%.**

Party (Group, MEPs)	CCI score (%)	Distribution of votes (%)			
		for	against	abstentions	did not vote
SPÖ (S&D, 5)	98	95	0	0	5
ÖVP (EPP, 7)	95	90	0	0	10
NEOS (Renew, 1)	93	86	0	0	14
Die Grünen (Greens/EFA, 3)	91	86	0	9	5
FPÖ (ID, 3)	39	29	30	41	0

The CCI once again highlights that the FPÖ is not changing its interpretation of Austrian neutrality. The party is arguing that Austria must not interfere with domestic policies of other countries. It is also promoting a geopolitical landscape of multiple strong nations, not wanting to commit to the US as Europe's closest partner. Therefore, the FPÖ is mostly abstaining from votes. They did defend China openly on some occasions; Its MEPs, for example, voted against the reports on China's influence on the Western Balkans. This could be due to the fact that the FPÖ has cultivated a good relationship to several leaders there for quite some time, e.g. to Serbia's president Aleksandr Vucic.<sup>51</sup>

Interestingly, on China, the FPÖ is scoring significantly better than the French National Front, while the Kremlin-critical index scores of the two parties was quite similar.

### 3.4. Ambiguous stances on other authoritarian regimes

The FPÖ's foreign policies also explain the scores of the Counter-Authoritarian index, where once again the Freedom party is the only Austrian party scoring far below 90%. The FPÖ's 45 % score is caused mainly by abstentions (with 161 instances out of a possible 282) than by votes openly defending authoritarian regimes (30 instances). In fact, the FPÖ voted for resolutions more often than against them in this category. It is difficult to see a clear reason for this. For example, the FPÖ voted for a resolution voicing solidarity with political prisoners in Belarus and for a resolution condemning religious blasphemy laws in Pakistan, yet voted against a resolution condemning the media crackdown in Kyrgyzstan – and it abstained from another vote demanding the immediate stop of violence against the people of Belarus.

**CAI SCORE AND VOTE DISTRIBUTION OF AUSTRIAN PARTIES IN THE EP FROM THE TOTAL VOTES POSSIBLE ON AUTHORITARIAN REGIME-RELATED ISSUES. NUMBERS ROUNDED, SO THE TOTAL MIGHT BE LOWER OR HIGHER THAN 100%.**

Party (Group, MEPs)	CAI score (%)	Distribution of votes (%)			
		for	against	abstentions	did not vote
NEOS (Renew, 1)	93	85	0	0	15
SPÖ (S&D, 5)	91	87	2	4	7
Die Grünen (Greens/EFA, 3)	90	87	7	1	5
ÖVP (EPP, 7)	89	80	0	6	14
FPÖ (ID, 3)	45	29	11	57	4

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.heute.at/s/strache-und-gudenus-zu-besuch-in-serbien-54781321>

There are some interesting voting decisions made by other parties. The Green's Monika Vana was the only Austrian MEP who voted against condemning the Maduro regime in Venezuela. She and her party colleague Sarah Wiener also voted against concerns about the election process in Bolivia. The reason for the decision on Venezuela seems to be that the Green party is of the view that this resolution is too soft on Maduro's rivals and not respectful of the Venezuelan people's vote for Maduro.<sup>52</sup> The reason for the decision on Bolivian elections seems to be that MEPs Vana and Wiener believed the resolution was too soft regarding a "coup" against Evo Morales, as the Greens had proposed a much stronger resolution.<sup>53</sup> It is interesting to highlight that the ÖVP missed nearly 14% of the votes concerning authoritarian regimes, and the liberal NEOS reached a similar percentage.

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<sup>52</sup> [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2019-07-16-ITM-014\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2019-07-16-ITM-014_EN.html)

<sup>53</sup> [https://oeil.secure.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/ficheprocedure.do?lang=en&reference=2019/2896\(RSP\)](https://oeil.secure.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/ficheprocedure.do?lang=en&reference=2019/2896(RSP))

## 4. Country chapter on Bulgaria: A “soft” defender of the Kremlin in the form of the BSP

The key conclusions for the work of Bulgarian MEPs in the 9<sup>th</sup> EP parliamentary cycle (2019-2024) are the following:

1. **Authoritarian critics, with one glaring exception.** Most Bulgarian political parties currently represented in the 2019-2024 term of the European Parliament (EP) tend to support resolutions and positions critical of Russia, China and authoritarian regimes as a whole. A notable exception is that of the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), which deviates most starkly from both its Bulgarian counterparts and its own European political family, the Progressive Alliance of the Socialists and Democrats (S&D) in assuming voting stances that are much less critical of Moscow and Beijing.
2. **Leaving, when necessary, to help friends.** A distinctive pattern that emerges in BSP MEPs’ voting behavior is the non-participation or abstention from voting on resolutions that condemn authoritarian states’ actions. That is, instead of directly challenging Kremlin-critical positions, in particular, the party’s representatives most often prefer to withdraw from the voting process, presumably for considerations of the reputational costs that outright support for Russia and China could incur. BSP’s actions are similar to Fidesz’s “soft defense” strategy outlined in the Hungarian country chapter.
3. **BSP has not picked a side, yet.** The socialists’ deviant behavior calls into question the extent to which the BSP – the formal successor to the Bulgarian Communist Party, Europeanized its outlook and positions since 1989 in the direction of deep internalization of pro-Western, democratic values. Moreover, the frequently emphasized supposed dividing line between the party’s traditionalist-nationalist, pro-Russia stances at home and pro-European attitudes abroad cannot necessarily be sustained as pro-Russian perspectives continue to be espoused in the EP too.
4. **Some are only friendly to the Kremlin at home.** Although the socialists most overtly display sympathies for authoritarian regimes, other parties, particularly GERB and the MRF, may also conceal domestically forged pro-Russian views and connections that are not however immediately visible in voting patterns at the EP.
5. **Chance will come in 2024.** Overall, Bulgaria’s new political representation in the EP as of 2024 is likely to change substantially as a reflection of the reconfiguration of the internal party-political constellation that has taken place in the aftermath of the 2020 protests against corruption and inadequate governance. Most significantly, the emergence of the pro-Western We Continue the Change as one of the major political parties in the country and the concomitant rise and consolidation of the far-right, pro-Russian Vazrazhdane (translated as Revival) will reinforce the opposition between authoritarian-critical and authoritarian-friendly Bulgarian stances in the European Parliament. At the same time, BSP’s electoral weight is set to decline measurably, while VMRO’s current political presence is negligible.

### 4.1. The Bulgarian party-political constellation in the European Parliament and on the domestic scene

The parties that won seats in the 2019 EP elections in a descending order of the share of the vote gained<sup>54</sup> are: GERB (Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria), the BSP, MRF (Movement for Rights and Freedoms), VMRO (Bulgarian National Movement) and Democrats for strong Bulgaria (part of Democratic Bulgaria).<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> [‘Резултати от избори за членове на Европейски парламент. Разпределение на мандати’](#)

<sup>55</sup> [‘Bulgaria’s balancing act’](#)

GERB is a member of the European People's Party (EPP) in the EP and is represented by its 5 MEPs: Andrey Kovatchev, Eva Maydell, Andrey Novakov, Emil Radev and Asim Ademov. GERB entered into a coalition with the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) ahead of the 2019 EP elections and UDF's member, Alexander Yordanov, was elected MEP as part of the joint ticket. GERB held the reins of power in Bulgaria for twelve years between 2009 and 2021 and has sent mixed signals in relation to Russia over the years. On the one hand, GERB has been consistently in favor of Bulgaria's Euro-Atlantic strategic orientation. On the other hand, the party has occupied pro-Russian positions, particularly in the sphere of energy (gas and nuclear projects, most notably in enabling the construction of the Turkish Stream pipeline) and economic ties (tourism and arms industry). Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, GERB has occupied a strong stance in support of weapons exports to Ukraine and has pursued a strategy of rhetorical self-enhancement that presents the party as staunchly Euro-Atlanticist.

The BSP is a member of the Progressive Alliance of the Socialists and Democrats (S&D) and is represented by 5 MEPs: Sergei Stanishev, Elena Yoncheva, Petar Vitanov, Tsvetelina Penkova, Ivo Hristov. Since the end of communism, the party gradually came to accept Bulgaria's Euro-Atlantic integration (embracing the EU but more grudgingly acquiescing into NATO membership). It traditionally favors close political, economic and cultural ties with Russia and has refused to back sanctions on the Kremlin or military aid for Kyiv.

The MRF is a member of the Renew Europe Group and is represented by 3 MEPs, including Ilhan Kyuchyuk, Iskra Mihaylova and Atidzhe Alieva-Veli. The Movement for Rights and Freedoms represents and draws its support primarily from the ethnic Turkish constituency. It has been consistently present on the Bulgarian political scene for the last three decades and has been alleged to maintain ties with Russian groups and interests. Nevertheless, the MRF has traditionally portrayed itself as a supporter of Sofia's Euro-Atlantic orientation and has supported weapons exports to Kyiv.

VMRO belongs to the European Conservatives and Reformists Group and is represented by two MEPs: Angel Dzhambazki and Andrey Slabakov. The party claims its origins to the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization, active especially at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. VMRO generally espouses nationalist, occasionally anti-Russian positions, and often occupies anti-EU stances as well (railing against liberal values and deeper European integration).

Democrats for a strong Bulgaria is a constituent party of Democratic Bulgaria, a coalition of pro-European political parties. It is a member of the European People's Party and is represented by its only MEP, Radan Kanev. DSB originated as a splinter group that left the Union of Democratic Forces – the erstwhile democratic opposition that emerged in the wake of the collapse of communism. DSB and Democratic Bulgaria as a whole have consistently followed a pro-Western line. They are critical of Moscow's authoritarianism, condemn the Kremlin's military aggression and are strongly supportive of Bulgarian military assistance to Ukraine.

Two caveats stand out in relation to the Bulgarian party-political setting. First, party-political distinctions notwithstanding, there has been a degree of collusion and unifying, often covert, Russian connections. The fact that prominent politicians from GERB, the BSP and MRF have all been sanctioned under the Magnitsky Act is testimony to the cross-cutting and opaque nature of Bulgarian parties' Kremlin involvements. Hence, overt pro-Western statements and even voting patterns on the part of some political actors do not necessarily translate into substantive belief and action.

Second, the 2020 protests against corrupt and untransparent governance ushered in a transformation of Bulgarian politics, which is likely to lead to a realignment of Bulgarian MEPs' voting stances in the new 2024 term of the European Parliament. The reconfiguration is based on the emergence of a chasm between the 'status quo', embodied by older political parties, and 'the forces of change', epitomized

most notably by the We Continue the Change party (WCC) that was formed in 2021. Headed by a new generation of Western-educated politicians, WCC has become a major political force that spearheads Bulgaria’s Euro-Atlantic, democratic orientation. Simultaneously, the far-right, pro-Russian party Vazrazhdane gradually assumed political prominence, garnering 14% of the vote in the 2023 parliamentary elections.<sup>56</sup> It has lent vociferous support to the Kremlin’s political agenda, actively disseminating pro-Kremlin disinformation in Bulgaria. Vazrazhdane has organized protests condemning the dispatch of weapons to Ukraine and has called for Bulgarian neutrality in the war.

In contrast, the BSP’s fortunes have declined significantly since the 2019 EP elections and from the largest opposition party (second to GERB), it has plummeted to historic low levels of support amounting to around 9%.<sup>57</sup> For its part, VMRO has disappeared as an influential political force following its participation as a junior partner in the GERB-led government between 2017 and 2021. Despite VMRO’s attempt to revive its electoral standing, arguably on the basis of whipping up nationalist sentiment through tough stances on North Macedonia (leading to the adoption of Sofia’s veto on Skopje’s EU accession negotiations), since 2021, the party has been absent from political debates and policy-making.

Hence, the BSP’s and VMRO’s respective pro-Russian and nationalist positions are likely to be vehemently expressed by Vazrazhdane in the next European Parliament. At the same time, We Continue the Change, which may extend its coalition with Democratic Bulgaria (in place since 2023) for the EP elections, will stand up for authoritarian-critical and pro-European decisions.

#### 4.2. BSP’s KCI score: Defending the Kremlin silently

The key trend that comes to the fore with respect to voting on Kremlin-related resolutions shows that the majority of Bulgarian political parties represented in the European Parliament generally display a high degree of alignment with Kremlin-critical positions, except for the BSP. The latter emerges as a strong and consistent outlier that deviates from its Bulgarian counterparts and the socialist European political family by holding Russia-friendly stances. Even VMRO – known for its incendiary rhetoric – registers a higher Kremlin-critical result (albeit not as high as the ones achieved by the rest of the Bulgarian parties in the EP).

Thus, on the one hand, the MRF and Union of Democratic Forces attain the most outstanding Kremlin-critical results, standing at 96%, followed by Democrats for Strong Bulgaria at 91% and GERB at 90%. On the other hand, the lowest KCI score is that of the BSP, amounting to only 65%, while VMRO still manages to reach 78%. Correspondingly, Bulgarian political parties tend to vote in line with their European Parliament groups except for the BSP, whose KCI of 65% is significantly lower than that of the Socialists and Democrats, which totals 89%. Individual MEPs’ voting behavior mirrors party trends.

**KCI SCORE AND VOTE DISTRIBUTION OF BULGARIAN PARTIES IN THE EP FROM THE TOTAL VOTES POSSIBLE ON KREMLIN-RELATED ISSUES. NUMBERS ROUNDED, SO THE TOTAL MIGHT BE LOWER OR HIGHER THAN 100%.**

Party (Group, MEPs)	KCI score (%)	Distribution of votes (%)			
		for	against	abstentions	did not vote
BSP (S&D, 5)	65	93	15	16	111
GERB (EPP, 5)	90	193	1	4	37
Movement for Rights and Freedoms (Renew, 3)	96	129			12
VMRO (ECR, 2)	78	62	3	13	16

<sup>56</sup> [‘Избори за народни представители. Сумарни данни’](#)

<sup>57</sup> [‘Обществено-политически нагласи: март 2024’](#)

Party (Group, MEPs)	KCI score (%)	Distribution of votes (%)			
		for	against	abstentions	did not vote
Union of Democratic Forces (EPP, 1)	96	44		1	2
Democrats for Strong Bulgaria (EPP, 1)	91	40		2	5

Delving deeper into the BSP's voting behavior reveals a persistent tendency of non-participation or abstention from voting on resolutions that condemn Russia's actions. This pattern does not simply constitute intermittent individual absenteeism on the part of certain MEPs but looks to amount to a coordinated behavior as BSP parliamentarians act similarly. Indeed, the aggregated result of the socialists of not voting across all votes on Russia-related resolutions in the EP reaches 111 non-voting instances, 16 abstentions and 15 votes against. By comparison, GERB is the party with the second highest score of non-participation in voting that equals 37 such instances.

It can be surmised therefore that BSP representatives most often opt for withdrawal from voting or abstention as a hedging and reputation-saving strategy. Instead of outrightly opposing Kremlin-critical positions, Bulgaria's socialist MEPs express Russia-friendly views in a more concealed and subdued manner through non-voting, while supporting a few resolutions that generally condemn the most outrageous aspects of Russian behavior and promote EU defense against foreign malign influence. Accordingly, the BSP's MEPs supported the 2022 Resolution on Russian aggression against Ukraine; the 2022 resolution on setting up a special committee on foreign interference in all democratic processes in the European Union and the 2023 resolution on foreign interference in all democratic processes in the European Union, including disinformation (Hristov did not vote); as well as the 2023 proposal to establish a Ukraine facility (Yoncheva did not vote).

However, on specific aspects that go against Russia's regime interests (such as support for Alexey Navalny's cause) or that can promote Kyiv's further integration in the EU, BSP MEPs have maintained silence. Notable examples of BSP MEPs absence or abstention from voting on key resolutions both before and after the start of Russia's 2022 reinvasion of Ukraine include the following:

- Situation in Russia, the poisoning of Aleksei Navalny (2020) (with the exception of Yoncheva, who voted in favor);
- The arrest of Alexei Navalny (2021);
- EU Association Agreement with Ukraine (2021);
- Russia, the case of Alexei Navalny, military build-up on Ukraine's border and Russian attack in the Czech Republic (2021);
- Situation at the Ukrainian border and in Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine (2021);
- Security in the Eastern Partnership area and the role of the common security and defense policy (2022) (with the exception of Hristov, who voted against);
- The EU's Foreign, Security and Defence Policy after the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine (2022) (with the exception of Hristov, who voted against);
- One year of Russia's invasion and war of aggression against Ukraine (2023);

On a few occasions, BSP MEPs have unanimously voted against initiatives that adversely affected Russia's international position such as the 2021 Report on the direction of EU-Russia relations and the 2022 resolution on recognizing the Russian Federation as a state sponsor of terrorism.

### 4.3. The BSP was tougher on China

A similar picture of party-political voting patterns emerges also with respect to resolutions related to China, although discussions of the consequences and mitigation responses to malign Chinese political, economic and academic influence have not featured prominently or at all in Bulgarian public life.<sup>58</sup>

The MRF scores highest on the China-critical index, reaching 98%, followed by the Union of Democratic Forces and GERB, both of whose results amount to 95%. Democrats for Strong Bulgaria achieved a 90% score. By contrast, the BSP's CCI result is once again the lowest of all parties, standing at 73% (albeit 8 points higher than its Kremlin-critical index), and is exceeded by nationalist VMRO's 86%.

**CCI SCORE AND VOTE DISTRIBUTION OF BULGARIAN PARTIES IN THE EP FROM THE TOTAL VOTES POSSIBLE ON CHINA-RELATED ISSUES. NUMBERS ROUNDED, SO THE TOTAL MIGHT BE LOWER OR HIGHER THAN 100%.**

Party (Group, MEPs)	CCI score (%)	Distribution of votes (%)			
		for	against	abstentions	did not vote
BSP (S&D, 5)	73	58	2	10	40
GERB (EPP, 5)	95	100		2	8
Movement for Rights and Freedoms (Renew, 3)	98	63			3
VMRO (ECR, 2)	86	35	1	4	4
Union of Democratic Forces (EPP, 1)	95	20			2
Democrats for Strong Bulgaria (EPP, 1)	90	18		1	3

On the individual MEP level, three MEPs stand out with a 100% score on the CCI: GERB's Andrey Novakov as well as MRF's Ilhan Kyuchyuk and Iskra Mihaylova. Andrey Kovatchev and Asim Ademov from GERB follow closely, each scoring 97%. The lowest results are again scored by socialist representatives: Ivo Hristov (61%) and Elena Yoncheva (68%).

As in the case of Kremlin-related resolutions, the BSP made much more frequent use of the non-vote and abstention compared to other parties, in this way refusing to fully back motions that undercut the interests of the Chinese regime. 40 instances of non-participation in voting and 10 abstentions were recorded. Conversely, all other parties' non-participation occasions hovered between 8 and 2. The following resolutions exemplify prominent initiatives of the EP condemning Chinese behavior, in which the socialist representatives either did not participate or abstained:

- The crackdown on the democratic opposition in Hong Kong;
- Hong Kong autonomy;
- Forced labour and the situation of the Uyghurs in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (with the exception of Stanishev, who voted in favor);
- The Arctic: opportunities, concerns and security challenges.

Occasionally, BSP MEPs have supported resolutions of a general character, arguably to avoid associations of a wholesale enabling of pro-Chinese stances. Such resolutions include Violations of fundamental freedoms in Hong Kong and the proposal for closer EU-Taiwan political relations and cooperation (Hristov did not vote).

<sup>58</sup> ['Bulgarian Elections and the Indo-Pacific: Worlds Apart'](#)

#### 4.4. Not condemning “friends,” even if they do the same as “enemies”

The aggregated Counter-Authoritarian Index, which measures voting patterns on authoritarian regimes around the world beyond Russia and China, reflects trends analogous to Bulgarian political parties’ scores on the Kremlin- and China-critical Index. Yet, there is a somewhat smaller margin of difference among the parties on the aggregated index, which can be explained by the fact that the more distant geographically and concerns-wise a given authoritarian regime is, the lesser the stakes and motivation of MEPs to vote become.

The Union of Democratic Forces and the Democrats for Strong Bulgaria achieve the highest result of 92%, closely followed by MRF’s 91%. GERB reached 85%. The VMRO scored the lowest result standing at 74%, lagging behind VMRO by 6 percentage points.

**CAI SCORE AND VOTE DISTRIBUTION OF BULGARIAN PARTIES IN THE EP FROM THE TOTAL VOTES POSSIBLE ON AUTHORITARIAN REGIME-RELATED ISSUES. NUMBERS ROUNDED, SO THE TOTAL MIGHT BE LOWER OR HIGHER THAN 100%.**

Party (Group, MEPs)	CAI score (%)	Distribution of votes (%)			
		for	against	abstentions	did not vote
BSP (S&D, 5)	80	315	20	24	111
GERB (EPP, 5)	85	349	1	31	89
Movement for Rights and Freedoms (Renew, 3)	91	241	1	18	22
VMRO (ECR, 2)	74	117	13	28	30
Union of Democratic Forces (EPP, 1)	92	81	1	5	5
Democrats for Strong Bulgaria (EPP, 1)	92	81		5	8

Socialist representatives’ non-participation or abstention from votes continues to be a distinguishing feature. The BSP did not vote on 111 occasions on authoritarian regime-related resolutions, followed by GERB with the second largest contingent of non-voting. Notably, the socialists have not participated, abstained or sometimes voted against resolutions that concern authoritarian regimes connected to Russia and China and with which the BSP shares left-wing ideological affinities, including:

- Condemning the Maduro regime (2019);
- Concerns about elections in Bolivia (2019);
- Concerns about rule of law in Cuba (2019);
- Parliamentary coup in Venezuela (2020);
- Government crackdown on protesters and citizens in Cuba (2021);
- The Syrian conflict - 10 years after the uprising (2021).

Yet, the BSP’s representatives have demonstrated a greater willingness to condemn abuses of power and human rights violations in countries that are not necessarily closely linked to the Russian and Chinese regimes. For example, the socialists MEPs have supported resolutions on the situation in the Philippines, including the case of Maria Ressa (2020); The humanitarian situation in Mozambique (2020); The ‘Foreign Agents’ Law in Nicaragua (2020).



## 4.5. Conclusion: Europeanization still in progress

Overall, the voting patterns of Bulgarian MEPs over the course of the EP's 2019-2024 term indicate that most of Bulgaria's representatives align themselves with resolutions that are critical of Russia, China and authoritarian regimes in general. However, it should be noted that GERB's and the MRF's strict adherence to these resolutions may well hide deep-seated attitudes and behaviors that are favorable to Russian and, occasionally, Chinese interests. That is, authoritarian-critical voting stances may reflect concerns with social desirability within the European arena (as well as the convictions of individual MEPs), whereas domestic party-political stances over time have pointed to more equivocal dispositions towards authoritarian regimes and their political and economic goals in Bulgaria.

The BSP conceals its pro-Russian stances even less by opting out of Kremlin- and Beijing-critical resolutions through non-participation and abstention. Such a tendency calls into question socialist factions' attitudinal positioning, whereby the European representation of the party is portrayed as much more Europeanized than its domestic base. Instead, the BSP's external as well as internal stances on Russia, in particular, resemble each other significantly, while the measure on which they differ is former BSP leader and former President of the Party of European Socialists Sergei Stanishev's attempt to forge a more liberal orientation on gender identity.

Hence, the socialists have shown themselves as the group of Bulgarian MEPs that diverge the most from European criticisms of Russia and China. Yet, other parties' domestic commitments – beyond voting in the EP – cast a doubt on the internalization of 'European-ness,' which means that Bulgaria's Europeanization is still a work in progress.

## 5. Country chapter on Czechia: Strongly critical of authoritarians, but there are two strong exceptions

The key conclusions for the work of Czech MEPs in the 9<sup>th</sup> EP parliamentary cycle (2019-2024) are the following:

1. **The Czech Republic remains a regional beacon of resilience.** Authoritarian regimes are not popular among Czech MEPs, who are committed to highly critical stances towards Russia, China and other authoritarian regimes, regardless of political colors. This includes the current governing five-party coalition of liberal and conservative parties, but also the main opposition party, the populist-leaning ANO movement, despite its differences with the government on domestic affairs. Czech resilience has remained a constant despite the domestic change of power at the end of 2021.
2. **Human rights-focused foreign policy.** The foreign policy preferences of Czech MEPs are directed by the principle of support for human rights and continues the value-based tradition of Václav Havel's diplomacy. Authoritarian crackdowns on human rights and freedoms and aggressive behavior both at home and abroad is unambiguously condemned by Czech MEPs. Although the Czech political debate has not forgotten considerations for a pragmatic foreign policy, it does not override the priority of supporting human rights. This has been demonstrated by their increasingly critical approach to China.
3. **China went down with Russia.** The start of the Russian war in Ukraine was an eye-opener about the threats posed by authoritarian regimes in general and impacted the Czech approach to China as well. Although Czech politicians acknowledge the need for healthy pragmatism in relations with an economy the size of China, they do not turn away from China and its behavior towards Taiwan, Hong Kong or Xinjiang. This approach is reinforced by the Czech affinity to Taiwan, especially in the areas of trade and investment in modern technologies. Moreover, Jan Zahradil (ODS), through whom Chinese influence materialized among Czech MEPs, will be leaving Brussels after 20 years.
4. **Bold stances, careful steps.** Czech MEPs do not struggle with taking clear critical stances towards authoritarian behavior, whether it relates to Russia, China or other authoritarian regimes. However, the strong barricade wavers when agreement is needed on specific steps against authoritarian regimes. Then, the utilization of abstention or non-participation in votes increases. This is the case concerning resolutions that pertain to issues of diversified support for Ukraine, sanctions, EU candidate status, or taking steps against foreign interference in democratic processes, including disinformation. But rather than authoritarian influence in the EP, this hesitancy stems out of the political sensitivity of such issues at home.
5. **Potential disruptors are not influential (yet).** As in any democratic country, political consensus on any issue is not absolute, as is the case of the Czech Republic versus authoritarian regimes. However, Czech EP figures demonstrating a non-critical stance towards authoritarians do not hold substantial influence, at least not yet. The most pro-authoritarian MEPs come from the far-left and far-right parties, and are represented by only 3 MEPs out of the 21-member Czech representation. However, the populist far-right Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD) party maintains its spot at around 10% in domestic polls and can pose a risk especially if they partner with ANO, the leading opposition party, who is ahead in the polls and can be more hesitant in counter-authoritarian votes in the EP. The Czech parliamentary election about to take place in 2025 will determine the power shifts that could also influence the future of Czech voting in the EP.

## 5.1. A united front against Russia

Czech MEPs present a unified front against Russia with a high Kremlin-Critical Index (KCI) score. This unified stance has been constant even despite domestic political changes, when ANO, with the highest representation in the EP, turned from the ruling party to the main opposition party following the 2021 parliamentary elections. The current liberal-conservative five-party government coalition, in power since December 2021, has been clear from the start about the fact that their foreign and security policy towards Russia will not be lenient. The government coalition's Kremlin-Critical Index ranks around 90% and higher, with the Czech Pirate Party leading with 96%. The main critical voices include the Pirates' Markéta Gregorová (96%) and Mikuláš Peksa (96%) as well as Luděk Niedermayer (99%) representing TOP 09 and Mayors.

Despite differences on domestic grounds, MEPs from the government parties are joined in their Kremlin-critical stance by MEPs from ANO (88%). The majority of the Czech MEPs publicly condemn Russia's aggression and express support for Ukraine, despite minor variations in their voting patterns. However, ANO's rhetoric has become increasingly populist and nationalist at home, and especially as the main opposition party, they have engaged in anti-Ukrainian narratives such as spreading what could be called alarming messages about Czech mobilization<sup>59</sup> for the war in Ukraine or about contaminated Ukrainian grain.<sup>60</sup> These narratives have been used mainly to set ANO apart from their political opponents, including the current government, which is highly supportive of Ukraine. ANO's leader Andrej Babiš also attempted to discredit his opponent Petr Pavel in the early 2023 presidential election with a campaign claiming that Pavel, a retired general, would use the presidential position to drag the Czech Republic into the Russian war in Ukraine.<sup>61</sup>

The only outliers when it comes to the critical approach to Russia are 3 MEPs from fringe parties, the far-right Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD) and the far-left Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM).<sup>62</sup> These parties and their representatives consistently engage in pro-Kremlin discourse both at home and in the EP. The SPD can be characterized as far-right, more populist leaning, with almost 10% gained in the last Czech parliamentary elections. Its leading members include MEP Ivan David (KCI 18%), one of the leading voices on Czech social media when it comes to anti-establishment and often also pro-Kremlin narratives, overcoming any other government or non-government party with their online outreach. SPD's Kremlin-Critical Index score comes as low as 14%, which is consistent with the party's stances and rhetoric at home. On the other hand, KSČM is currently a true fringe party after the Czech left's generally unsuccessful attempt in the last parliamentary elections. The party's Kremlin-Critical Index score, represented by the stances of its only MEP Kateřina Konečná, is at 19%. However, Konečná's influence does not extend further than the relatively small circle of core Russian supporters in the Czech Republic, which most polls place at 6% of the Czech population.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> <https://www.novinky.cz/clanek/volby-prezidenta-babis-na-billboardech-strasi-vaikou-kerou-ale-prezident-nevyhlasuje-40420071>

<sup>60</sup> [https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/babis-kohout-silver-obili-ukrajina-reakce-politickych-souperu.A240304\\_102259\\_domaci\\_kop](https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/babis-kohout-silver-obili-ukrajina-reakce-politickych-souperu.A240304_102259_domaci_kop)

<sup>61</sup> [https://www.pssi.cz/download//docs/10229\\_czech-presidential-elections-in-the-online-space-2nd-round-the-topic-of-the-war-in-ukraine-in-the-pre-election-debate.pdf](https://www.pssi.cz/download//docs/10229_czech-presidential-elections-in-the-online-space-2nd-round-the-topic-of-the-war-in-ukraine-in-the-pre-election-debate.pdf)

<sup>62</sup> With one SPD representative, Hynek Blaško (KCI 11%), independent since 2022.

<sup>63</sup> [https://www.irozhlas.cz/zpravy-domov/spolecnost-neduvery-konspirace-dezinformace-stat-politika-duvera-serial\\_2306170600\\_pik](https://www.irozhlas.cz/zpravy-domov/spolecnost-neduvery-konspirace-dezinformace-stat-politika-duvera-serial_2306170600_pik)

**KCI SCORE AND VOTE DISTRIBUTION OF CZECH PARTIES IN THE EP FROM THE TOTAL VOTES POSSIBLE ON KREMLIN-RELATED ISSUES. NUMBERS ROUNDED, SO THE TOTAL MIGHT BE LOWER OR HIGHER THAN 100%.**

Party (Group, MEPs)	KCI score (%)	Distribution of votes (%)			
		for	against	abstentions	did not vote
Piráti (Greens/EFA, 3)	96	133	2	3	3
TOP 09 + Mayors (EPP, 2)	95	85	0	0	9
KDU-ČSL (EPP, 2)	91	80	0	5	9
STAN (EPP, 1)	89	37	0	0	10
ANO (Renew, 3)	88	195	3	17	25
ODS (ECR, 4)	87	153	4	21	10
KSČM (The Left, 1)	19	1	22	7	47
SPD (ID, 1)	14	6	67	12	9

Even before the start of the Russian invasion, Czech MEPs were consistently critical in their voting on Russia-related resolutions. Whether it was about taking a stance towards Russia's undemocratic behavior domestically (persecution of the Russian opposition led by Navalny) or increasingly aggressive activities towards its neighborhood (like the military build-up at the Ukrainian border), Czech MEPs were perceptive to the Russian security threat. The only outliers followed the overall pattern of Czech voting behavior, with 3 MEPs from SPD and KSČM frequently voting against or abstaining (especially in case of Konečná from KSČM). Overall, Czech MEPs have been consistent in their highly Kremlin-critical approach throughout the change of government from Babiš's ANO to Fiala's coalition led by ODS at the end of 2021, as well throughout the developments in the war of Ukraine and the resulting economic and energy crisis.

Czech MEPs have demonstrated a unified approach when it comes to resolutions on their overall stance towards Russia. Both the vote on Russian aggression against Ukraine after its start and recognizing Russia as a state sponsor of terrorism in 2022 saw unambiguous results, besides the usual 3 outliers from SPD and KSČM. However, other resolutions regarding the war that outlined more detailed steps on behalf of the EU saw a higher rate of abstaining or not voting across the whole political spectrum of Czech MEPs. This pertained to resolutions supporting various forms of support for Ukraine (humanitarian, financial and military), sanctions or granting EU candidate status to Ukraine. The voting behavior on these resolutions indicated a more careful approach and uncertainty about the extent to which the EU member states should be active in supporting Ukraine.

When it comes to the issue of EU enlargement, Czech governments have been generally supportive. The current government coalition continues the trend, although even within the coalition, there is no agreement on the specifics, including the future of the unanimity rules.<sup>64</sup> The voting behavior of MEPs on resolutions regarding the status of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia mirror these trends. However, it is especially the main opposition party ANO representatives who stand out with frequent abstentions or no votes on these matters. ANO's leader and former PM Andrej Babiš has been increasingly more vocal about Ukraine and what its entry would mean for the European agricultural market. Besides sticking with the populist guns, Babiš also has special interest in the matter since thanks to his entrepreneurial activities, he is known as the Czech "agricultural baron". Therefore, it is unlikely that his and ANO's stance towards the Ukrainian status will become more lenient.

<sup>64</sup> <https://zpravy.aktualne.cz/zahranici/eu-se-zase-rozroste-prehledne-otazky-ktere-se-toho-tykaji/r~6bb7a30e477611eebc030cc47ab5f122/>

In 2022, MEPs also showed broad support for setting up a special committee on foreign interference in all democratic processes in the EU, including disinformation, with only two SPD MEPs voting against.<sup>65</sup> However, the commitment to addressing this issue wavered when a resolution from 2023 specified this initiative with consolidated effort against foreign interference, especially in the context of Russian activities, intensified support for CSOs and more investment in regulatory and technological remedies.<sup>66</sup> This vote saw abstention and non-participation from multiple government and opposition parties and was even voted against by representatives of the liberal Pirates who otherwise support the agenda of countering disinformation. This vote demonstrated that challenges related to this agenda, like the question of regulation and boundaries of freedom of speech, remain a contentious topic.

## 5.2. Getting serious about China

The Czech perception of China felt the impact of the Russian war in Ukraine as well. The Russian aggression has opened eyes about the threats posed by authoritarian regimes and helped strengthen Czech wariness about such states beyond Russia. The Chinese behavior towards Taiwan, Hong Kong or Xinjiang has not escaped the Czech politicians nor their electorate and the concern for the state of human rights in China continues to trump the economic advantages of Czecho-Chinese relations, maybe more than ever. The critical approach to China is also reinforced by the Czech Republic's close relations to Taiwan, especially in the areas of trade and investment in modern technologies, underscored by official visits of the chairman of the Czech Senate and President of the Chamber of Deputies to Taiwan.

Czech China-critical voices are concentrated in the TOP 09 and Mayors parties (97%) as well as among independent MEPs (98%), championed by Luděk Niedermayer with unwaveringly critical votes (100%), and the independents Radka Maxová and Dita Charanzová (98%). As in the case of Russia, the least critical voices are coming from the far-left KSČM (Kateřina Konečná with 16%) and from the populist far-right SPD (Ivan David with 11%, Hynek Blaško with 8%, now independent). The stances towards China are even more polarized between representatives of mainstream and more fringe parties than in the case of Russia, with the far-right and far-left being exceptionally sympathetic towards China. The approach of the Czech far-left and far-right towards China is even more friendly than that of the far-left and far-right European party groups, whose scores are at 40 and 54%, respectively. These Czech fringe politicians unite on the pro-authoritarian narrative that since the Czech Republic already destroyed its relationship with an important partner like Russia, they cannot afford to do the same with China. However, this narrative does not have impact outside of the core circle of supporters of the fringe parties.

**CCI SCORE AND VOTE DISTRIBUTION OF CZECH PARTIES IN THE EP FROM THE TOTAL VOTES POSSIBLE ON CHINA-RELATED ISSUES. NUMBERS ROUNDED, SO THE TOTAL MIGHT BE LOWER OR HIGHER THAN 100%.**

Party (Group, MEPs)	CCI score (%)	Distribution of votes (%)			
		for	against	abstentions	did not vote
TOP 09 + Mayors (EPP, 2)	97	41	0	0	3
Piráti (Greens/EFA, 3)	94	61	2	3	0
KDU-ČSL (EPP, 2)	94	40	0	3	1
ANO (Renew, 3)	92	97	2	2	10
STAN (EPP, 1)	91	18	0	0	4
ODS (ECR, 4)	83	68	4	13	3
KSČM (The Left, 1)	16	1	13	6	2
SPD (ID, 1)	10	2	34	7	1

<sup>65</sup> [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2023-0219\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2023-0219_EN.html)

<sup>66</sup> [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2023-0219\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2023-0219_EN.html)

Overall, almost all government coalition parties, as well the leading opposition party, rank above 90% on the China-Critical Index. However, the case of the coalition leader ODS shows how authoritarian influence can seep in through certain individuals. ODS’ China-Critical Index is at 83%, the lowest among Czech mainstream parties. The lower score is caused almost solely by the votes of their conservative member Jan Zahradil with a score of 60%. Zahradil is known for participating in initiatives with ties to the communist parties and officials of China and Vietnam. He is a vocal supporter of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative and also headed an unofficial grouping of MEPs called the EU-China Friendship Group, which served as a tool of Chinese propaganda and connected MEPs with Chinese influence organizations across Europe. However, after 20 years in the European Parliament, Zahradil is leaving Brussels and with him, a channel of Chinese influence does too. Although the 2025 Czech parliamentary elections might be his next plan, his departure can strengthen the already strong Czech barricade against Chinese influence in the EP.

Voting patterns on China-related resolutions in recent years confirm the Czech MEPs’ commitment to value-based foreign policy prioritizing human rights. The Czech representation in the EP continues to condemn violations of human rights in Hong Kong and China such as autonomy issues, crackdowns on democratic opposition, forced labor in Xinjiang, and Chinese counter-sanctions, and supports human rights as a pre-condition for engaging in trade and investments with China. Although the domestic political debate about China underscores the need for a measure of healthy pragmatism in dealing with the economic superpower, this awareness does not weaken the Czech commitment to human rights. A certain variation can be traced in the voting behavior of ANO MEPs who sometimes abstain or do not participate in China-related votes. Some members of ANO have been known for their individual ties to China, but on the EP platform, they generally join the mainstream China-critical trend.

### 5.3. Votes regarding other authoritarian regimes

Authoritarian regimes besides Russia and China are a point of the strongest consensus among Czech MEPs. The overall Czech pattern of voting behavior applies here as well — the government coalition and opposition leader ANO rank around 90% and higher on the Counter-Authoritarian Index. The far-right and far-left represented by KSČM (48%) and SPD (39%) are constant outliers, but their stances are more critical than in cases of Russia and China. The biggest critics are members of STAN (94%), alongside the trio of TOP 09 and Mayors, Piráti, and ANO with 92%.

**CAI SCORE AND VOTE DISTRIBUTION OF CZECH PARTIES IN THE EP FROM THE TOTAL VOTES POSSIBLE ON AUTHORITARIAN REGIME-RELATED ISSUES. NUMBERS ROUNDED, SO THE TOTAL MIGHT BE LOWER OR HIGHER THAN 100%.**

Party (Group, MEPs)	CAI score (%)	Distribution of votes (%)			
		for	against	abstentions	did not vote
STAN (EPP, 1)	94	84	0	3	7
TOP 09 + Mayors (EPP, 2)	92	160	0	5	23
Piráti (Greens/EFA, 3)	92	247	13	5	11
ANO (Renew, 3)	92	422	3	26	28
KDU-ČSL (EPP, 2)	91	162	1	13	12
ODS (ECR, 4)	87	307	5	54	10
KSČM (The Left, 1)	48	31	20	29	14
SPD (ID, 1)	39	53	65	59	7

Specifically, the most critical voices are independents Dita Charanzová and Radka Maxová (95%), Luděk Niedermayer of TOP 09 (94%), Stanislav Polčák of STAN (94%) and Martin Hlavaček from ANO (94%). In terms of the five-party coalition, its leading ODS again stands out as the least critical (87%), mainly because of the voting behavior of its more conservative members Jan Zahradil (86%) and Alexandr Vondra (85%). On the other end of the spectrum, Konečná (KSČM, 48%), David (43%) and Blaško (34%) maintain their position as the least critical MEPs towards authoritarian regimes.

When it comes to votes on other authoritarian regimes, distance does not impact the political sensitivity of the vote. Whether the vote is on regimes on the border of Europe and Asia, in the Middle East, Africa or South America, the Czech voting behavior follows its general pattern. Condemning human rights violations and repression, and calling for an end of violence all around the world overwhelmingly unites MEPs across the political spectrum. MEPs unite in addressing repression in Belarus, violence in Afghanistan or Myanmar or even preparing a Special European Council on Turkey, demonstrating a broad consensus among MEPs regarding the need to address Turkey's role in the Eastern Mediterranean and escalating tensions in the region. This vote was supported even by MEPs from SPD and KSČM, who usually go against the rest of the Czech representation.

Authoritarian regimes are not popular among Czech MEPs, whose voting behavior is directed by the principle of support for human rights. Regardless of political colors, they are committed to highly critical stances towards Russia, China and other authoritarian regimes, an attitude reinforced by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and its eye-opening demonstration of the threats emanating from authoritarian regimes. Potential disruptors of this counter-authoritarian barricade in the EP do not hold significant influence as of now, but populist far-right figures could pose a risk in the future.

## 6. Country chapter on Poland: The Polish political elite is united against authoritarian states

The key conclusions for the work of Polish MEPs in the 9<sup>th</sup> EP parliamentary cycle (2019-2024) are the following:

- 1. The dividing line is between Polish democrats and the PiS, but all parties score well on all three indices.** Polish MEPs score relatively high in all three indices. Their scores can be associated with their political family affiliation, notably with lack of Polish representatives in the most radical groups. There has never been Polish members in the The Left group, but in previous terms, a Polish voice on the radical right was well heard both in Brussels and in Warsaw.<sup>67</sup> The current composition of the Polish representation in the EP allows to distinguish two clusters: PiS and the democrats. The previous one denotes all Polish ECR MEPs and the latter one is composed of all other MEPs, belonging to EPP, S&D, Renew Europe and the Greens/EFA (parties associated with the incumbent Polish government). The democrats do well in all three indices, demonstrating their skepticism towards Russia, China and authoritarianism. PiS performed worse, but the differences are not striking if we look at numbers. They are, however, if we look at rhetoric. The two clusters crash specifically in their attitudes regarding democracy, rule of law, and human rights – important components of the Counter-Authoritarian Index – which are the key topics in the domestic political debate. PiS has represented its ideological views (e.g. on sovereignty) and stance on current internal events on the European level, which is especially visible in discussions about the rule of law and minority rights. For the full picture, the lack of approval of S&D and the Greens/EFA MEPs for resolutions regarding left-wing regimes in Latin America should be noted.
- 2. A generally Kremlin-critical atmosphere.** Differences in the Kremlin-Critical Index are overshadowed by the general anti-Kremlin sentiment present in Polish politics. It prevents any forms of open and intentional support for initiatives targeted at aiding Russian interest. The situation is different in the case of the China-Critical Index, as the position of Polish parties on China is not as intransigent as on Russia. Regardless, relations towards China are also subject to scrutiny as a consequence of widespread anti-communist and pro-American (and, by extension, pro-West) sentiments. That said, the approach to Beijing can also be more pragmatic. Polish parties reached high results on the China-Critical Index. Their scores vary between 89% and 100%, with the lowest being the PiS – although their 89% can also be considered as a very critical stance. Objections and abstentions in voting related to Russia and China should not be associated with support for these states and their agendas, at least not in Poland's case.
- 3. Questions about respect for democracy.** The voting patterns and statements of the Polish MEPs in the ECR group should raise concerns from the perspective of respect for democracy. MEPs who used to play and still want to play prominent roles in national politics use the most alarming language expressing their anti-democratic and anti-European views, which is very visible in the EP during discussions about the rule of law and minority rights. Among all Polish MEPs, the behavior of Ryszard Czarnecki (PiS) appears to be the most disturbing (visibly low score in CCI and CAI) and should be observed closely in the future. Czarnecki not only achieved low scores in CCI and CAI, but made a name for himself for complimenting regimes; for instance the Azerbaijani one. (After participating in an unauthorized mission in Baku and labeling elections there as “high

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<sup>67</sup> Four MEPs of the New Right elected in 2014 (affiliated with the Europe of Nations and Freedom and Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy), including Janusz Korwin-Mikke, who was sanctioned by the EP due to a hateful and inappropriate speech.



standard,” “calm” and “without incidents,” he was banned from acting as election observers by the EP.<sup>68</sup>)

4. **Those who want to play a role at home are the loudest critics of democratic values.** Among Polish MEPs who sit in the ECR group, almost all have shown some tendency towards authoritarianism. However, it is MEPs who likely seek to take up roles in domestic politics later are the most vocal in their criticism of – for instance – the LGBTQI+ community.

## 6.1. Background

The 2019 EP elections in Poland were extraordinary in the sense that they took place during the period when the PiS had absolute majority in both chambers of the Polish Parliament. At this time, this party’s government was implementing a series of highly controversial reforms (e.g. of the judiciary, media and the education system), clashed with European institutions and key allies in the West, and promoted narratives geared towards conflicts and social divisions. The level of political polarization reached its peak around the EP elections, which was aggravated further by the forthcoming elections to the Sejm and Senate. The latter ones were scheduled for Autumn, and the EP campaign was treated by all political actors as a prelude before the most important election of the year.

The aforementioned circumstances lead to the strong mobilization of the electorate. 45,68% of Poles entitled to vote went to polling stations on 26 May. This turnout significantly exceeded results from 2014, 2009 and 2004 (23,83%, 24,54% and 20,87% respectively), approximating the European average (50,66% in 2019) and getting closer to participation rates in national elections (e.g. 50,91% in the Sejm and Senate elections of 2015). This level of voter engagement shaped the composition of the Polish representation in the EP significantly. Usually, because of low interest, smaller parties could win seats in Brussels and Strasbourg; in particular parties with a strong pro- and anti-European agenda. In 2019, only the most significant players passed the parliamentary threshold of 5%.

The campaign was shaped as a referendum about the government and was dominated by two camps: PiS and anti-PiS blocs, with the European Coalition in the latter role. PiS won 45.38% of the vote, which translated into 27 seats, and the European Coalition received 38.47% of ballots and 22 seats. The only other movement to participate in allotment of the seats was the newly created, progressive Spring party, which got 6.06% of the vote and 3 MEPs. The polarization pushed the most vocal anti-European actors, such as the far-right Confederation (4.55%), the populist Kukiz’15 (3.69%), and the marginal Coalition of PolExit (0.06%) and National Unity (0.02%),<sup>69</sup> below the threshold.

It is worth pointing out that the Polish political scene is composed of blocks created by parties forming (rather) durable pre-electoral alliances. What is commonly known as PiS is also an alliance, composed of the PiS party and its satellites (also known as the United Right). Two of them won seats in the EP, the Solidarity Poland (SP, 2 seats) and the Agreement party (1 seat). The latter one belongs to Adam Bielan, who created the Republican Party, which replaced the Alliance in the United Right. MEPs from all these parties joined the ECR. The European Coalition was a very wide alliance formed only for this campaign by, among others, the Civic Platform (PO), the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD), Polish People’s Party (PSL), Modern, and the Greens. Out of the European Coalition’s 22 MEPs, 15 represent the PO (party members and independents supported by PO) and 2 the PSL, who joined the EPP. The remaining 5 MEPs represented SLD and they all joined the S&D group. All three MEPs elected from the Spring’s list joined S&D, too. Two noteworthy transfers occurred during the term: in 2020 Sylwia Spurek left S&D and joined the Greens/EFA group in the EP (she is not a member of any political party) and in 2021 Róża Thun left

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<sup>68</sup> <https://wyborcza.pl/7,75399,23904329,co-czarnecki-robil-na-malediwach-a-co-powiedzial-w-azerbejdzanie.html>

<sup>69</sup> Additionally, Left Together got 1.24%, and Poland Fair Play received 0.54% of the vote.

the EPP and joined Renew Europe as a representative of the newly established Poland 2050 party. No Polish MEP has in the ID group and in The Left.

## 6.2. Bulwark against the Kremlin’s influence?

Polish society and the Polish political class share strong anti-Russian – or rather anti-Kremlin or anti-Putin – sentiment. It stretches back to before the partitions of Poland in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, and was exacerbated by the events of World War II, and over 40 years of Soviet domination after 1945. The Polish political and cultural elites after 1989 unequivocally opted for integration with the West, labeling the Russian state as one of the biggest threats to the country’s independence and development. Only 2% of Poles view Russia favorably, which is the lowest of any country in a global study, the Spring 2022 Global Attitude Survey by the Pew Research Center.<sup>70</sup> Liberal and progressive parties see Russia as a radiating center of ideas incompatible with democracy, the rule of law and human rights, while the illiberal right uses the Smoleńsk plane crash<sup>71</sup> – placing the blame solely on Russia for the death of President Lech Kaczyński and 95 others – as one of its founding myths. Openly pro-Russian politicians can be found on the extreme right of the political spectrum, in the Confederation block<sup>72</sup> represented in the Sejm and some extra-parliamentary groupings.<sup>73</sup>

This observation is confirmed by voting pattern of MEPs from Poland. It is worth stressing that none of them has voted against any of the Russia-related votes. The Kremlin-Critical Index is very high for all the parties. It reaches over 95% in case of the PSL, and for the Left (bearing in mind organizational changes) and Poland 2050 (having regard to their short presence in the EP), it is 94% for the Civic Platform. The score reached 90% even for the hard-right SP party. It is the lowest for PiS and the Republican Party, 88% and 84% respectively, but these are still relatively high numbers; higher than the general score of the ECR group (81%). It is worth pointing out that Polish parties (or individual MEPs in political groups) have performed better in the index than the European groups they belong to. Two MEPs with the lowest scores, namely Ryszard Legutko and Karol Karski, 77% and 76% respectively, landed on the bottom of the ranking mostly due to their absences during voting.

**KCI SCORE AND VOTE DISTRIBUTION OF POLISH PARTIES IN THE EP FROM THE TOTAL VOTES POSSIBLE ON KREMLIN-RELATED ISSUES. NUMBERS ROUNDED, SO THE TOTAL MIGHT BE LOWER OR HIGHER THAN 100%.**

Party (Group, MEPs)	KCI score (%)	Distribution of votes (%)			
		for	against	abstentions	did not vote
PSL (EPP, 2)	97	131	0	1	8
Polska 2050 (Renew, 1)	97	33	0	0	2
PO (EPP, 11)	94	460	0	3	64
Nowa Lewica (S&D, 5)	93	163	0	3	23
SP (ECR, 1)	90	81	0	11	2
PiS (ECR, 25)	88	918	0	124	93
PR (ECR, 1)	84	27	0	4	6

<sup>70</sup> <https://notesfrompoland.com/2022/06/22/only-2-of-poles-view-russia-favourably-lowest-of-any-country-in-global-study/>

<sup>71</sup> Read more: <https://www.politico.eu/article/the-air-disaster-that-haunts-polish-politics/>

<sup>72</sup> <https://visegradinsight.eu/the-kremlins-influence-reaches-warsaw/>

<sup>73</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/19/poland-detains-pro-kremlin-party-leader-mateusz-piskorski-spying>

What lowered the final score of some MEPs are abstentions. In case of the ECR members, in five votes, practically the entire Polish representations decided to abstain: *The impact of the war against Ukraine on women* (21 MEPs from PiS and 2 from SP abstained); the *2021 Report on Bosnia and Herzegovina* (21 MEPs from PiS, 2 from SP, and 1 from the Republican Party); the votes on *EU-Armenia relations* and *EU-Azerbaijan relations* (21 MEPs and 1 from the Republican Party); and on *Establishing the Ukraine Facility* (18 PiS MEPs abstained). There were various reasons for these abstentions, including PiS's ideological objection to all documents containing a reference to the concept of 'gender', but they should not be associated with support for Russia.

### 6.3. Poles also realize the threat of China

The situation looks similar in the case of the China-Critical Index. All Polish democratic parties scored over 90%; and only PiS and its small ally, the Republican Party, did not pass this threshold, finishing with 89% and 82% respectively. It is worth noting that the hard right partner of PiS, the SP, got 92%. All three parties that made up the previous government of Poland sat at a higher average than their EP group, the ECR (81%). Other Polish parties did not differ significantly from the average of their EP groups.

**CCI SCORE AND VOTE DISTRIBUTION OF POLISH PARTIES IN THE EP FROM THE TOTAL VOTES POSSIBLE ON CHINA-RELATED ISSUES. NUMBERS ROUNDED, SO THE TOTAL MIGHT BE LOWER OR HIGHER THAN 100%.**

Party (Group, MEPs)	CCI score (%)	Distribution of votes (%)			
		for	against	abstentions	did not vote
PSL (EPP, 2)	96	62		3	1
Polska 2050 (Renew, 1)	96	13			1
PO (EPP, 11)	96	224			22
SP (ECR, 1)	92	39		4	1
Nowa Lewica (S&D, 5)	91	71	1	1	12
PiS (ECR, 25)	89	440		47	46
PR (ECR, 1)	82	12		2	3

Two MEPs with the lowest score in the index, Zdzisław Kranodębski and Karol Karski, belong to the ECR. However, their distinctive result (72%) is rather explained by absence from the voting than with pro-Chinese views. The situation is slightly different with two MEPs with the next lowest scores: Marek Balt (76%) and Ryszard Czarnecki (77%). Czarnecki abstained six times and Balt voted against China-critical resolutions twice and abstained once,<sup>74</sup> which makes them the least China-critical Polish MEPs. Czarnecki abstained in four votes, including concerning the EU-China strategy, fundamental rights in Hong Kong and the situation in the Taiwan Strait. Balt voted against a report on EU-Taiwan political relations and the new EU-China strategy. Moreover, in some votes the Polish ECR delegation abstained *en masse*; namely on the EU's post-war Security and Defense Policy, a report on Bosnia. Balt is not known for any pro-Chinese stances, and does not comment on China. In contrast, Czarnecki is in general a very visible and very vocal MEP; e.g., he praised President Duda's visit to China with the following words: "We should be very pragmatic in foreign policy. It is not China that is attacking Poland about all possible uncommitted sins, guilt and crimes. It is various circles in Western Europe and America."<sup>75</sup> He commented in the press on China's role in international relations, asking – among others – if Beijing could regain its "historical

<sup>74</sup> Only one more Polish MEP objected in the listed votes, namely Magdalena Adamowicz (independent in the EPP Group) in the Deterioration of fundamental freedoms in Hong Kong, notably the case of Jimmy Lai vote. Adamowicz is a lawyer and belong to the progressive wing of the Polish EPP fraction.

<sup>75</sup> <https://wnet.fm/2021/03/03/stosunki-rp-chrl-czarnecki-w-polityce-zagranicznej-powinnismy-byc-bardzo-pragmatyczni-to-nie-chiny-atakuja-polske/>

land” from Russia.<sup>76</sup> He visited China with the official EP delegation and did not spare good words about it.<sup>77</sup>

Czarnecki is a controversial politician. He has been requested by the EP to pay back illegally claimed per diems and car travel reimbursements.<sup>78</sup> He is known for his contacts with various interest groups and devotion to international travels; e.g., he went to the Maldives with a tourist visa and claimed there that he was with an official EP mission. He also went to Azerbaijan and assessed the elections there positively. It was demonstrated by the EU Disinfo Lab that Czarnecki was spreading disinformation under the influence of the Indian Srivastava Group, targeting international institutions to serve Indian interests.<sup>79</sup> According to the think tank, Czarnecki was regularly involved in activities from “Indian Chronicles” – the name given to the misinformation operation which resurrected dead media, dead think-tanks and NGOs.<sup>80</sup> Czarnecki helped organizing events in the EP and authored op-eds to aid this project.<sup>81</sup> It cannot be excluded that he is under influence of other groups.

#### 6.4. United against authoritarianism – as long as domestic politics do not interfere

In recent years, the Polish public debate focused on the topics of democracy and the rule of law, since the main fault line of the political scene was between the illiberal camp accused of illiberal tendencies, centered around the PiS, and the so-called democratic opposition composed of the Civic Coalition, the Left and the Third Way. In such circumstances, it could have been expected that the differences between parties in the Counter-Authoritarian Index were pronounced. But, as a matter of fact, since the index does not cover votes concerning domestic affairs – in Poland or in the EU - but rather views on the situation in third countries, differences between parties are noticeable but not stunningly large.

Polish parties score relatively high in the Counter-Authoritarian Index (CAI). All democratic parties achieved results above 90%, equaling or surpassing the performance of their groups in the EP; e.g., the PO’s score is 90% and the PSL’s is 91%, versus 90% for the EPP. The three Polish members of the ECR (PiS, SP, and the Republican Party) were below the 90% threshold, achieving respectively, scores of 83%, 85%, and 83% (ECR 82%).

**CAI SCORE AND VOTE DISTRIBUTION OF POLISH PARTIES IN THE EP FROM THE TOTAL VOTES POSSIBLE ON AUTHORITARIAN REGIME-RELATED ISSUES. NUMBERS ROUNDED, SO THE TOTAL MIGHT BE LOWER OR HIGHER THAN 100%.**

Party (Group, MEPs)	CAI score (%)	Distribution of votes (%)			
		for	against	abstentions	did not vote
Polska 2050 (Renew, 1)	96	46	0	1	2
PSL (EPP, 2)	91	237	0	19	24
PO (EPP, 11)	90	885	3	60	117
Nowa Lewica (S&D, 5)	90	220	1	6	42
SP (ECR, 1)	85	150	7	24	7

<sup>76</sup> <https://dorzeczy.pl/opinie/421474/czarnecki-chiny-chca-oderwac-od-rosji-swoje-dawne-ziemie.html>

<sup>77</sup> <https://wnet.fm/2018/11/21/ryszard-czarnecki-delegacja-ue-w-chinach-pokazala-ze-pomimo-zaawansowanej-integracji-panstwa-walcza-o-narodowy-interes/>

<sup>78</sup> <https://businessinsider.com.pl/wiadomosci/nie-tylko-ryszard-czarnecki-lista-politykow-ktorzy-mogli-naciagac-podatnikow-jest/fkz3bff>

<sup>79</sup> <https://oko.press/europosel-czarnecki-od-lat-wspiera-indie-czy-wie-ze-uczestniczy-w-operacji-dezinformacyjnej>

<sup>80</sup> <https://www.disinfo.eu/publications/indian-chronicles-deep-dive-into-a-15-year-operation-targeting-the-eu-and-un-to-serve-indian-interests>

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*

Party (Group, MEPs)	CAI score (%)	Distribution of votes (%)			
		for	against	abstentions	did not vote
PiS (ECR, 25)	83	1754	95	286	149
PR (ECR, 1)	83	44	1	7	7

All (or almost all) Polish ECR voting MEPs voted ‘against’ four proposals; namely, the situation of Ethiopian migrants in Saudi Arabia, the Colombian peace agreement, the POWs of the Azeri-Armenian war and the decriminalization of homosexuality in Uganda. In the case of the first decision, EPP-affiliated MEPs were also against. More than a dozen of times, Polish ECR MEPs abstained as a group, several times together with EPP’s Polish MEPs; for instance in case of the human rights situation in Egypt. S&D MEPs together with Sylwia Spurek (Greens/EFA) voted ‘against’ as a block in two cases and abstained in three, all concerning Cuba, Bolivia and Venezuela.

Again, two MEPs with the lowest scores are PiS members with a high number of absences from voting, Ryszard Legutko (72%) and Karol Karski (78%). Izabela-Helena Kloc from the PiS is next with an 80% CAI score.

Polish ECR members who achieved the worst results in the ranking saw some of the votes in the EP as an opportunity to amplify their message regarding issues discussed in national politics, such as their fight against the LGBTQI+ community and ‘gender ideology’ (‘gender’ was mentioned for instance in the resolution on Ethiopian migrants). Polish ECR members have used the EP to criticize liberal democracy, human rights (especially minority rights), or the rule of law. They claim that the EU has no right to claim it is a defender of universal values, as it protects only interests of the mainstream parties, promotes a leftist agenda, discriminates against conservative merits and haunts right-wing leaders in member states.

Numerous statements support these assertions. Ryszard Legutko claimed in a debate that “Western European countries are outdoing each other in ideological campaigns. From the nursery onwards, they are already feeding ‘gender’ and gender fluidity to infants. Ideological officers do not leave schools, the media and corporations. You obstruct scientific research; you impose censorship on these topics.”<sup>82</sup> Legutko. Again, in a debate about the rule of law in Poland, stated that “We have serious problems with the rule of law within the European Union, but not in the member states. The treaties are being violated, and this practice is accepted by the EU institutions and the political forces that hold sway over these institutions. (...) People feel that the treaties are being over-interpreted, and this serves the ruling majority, which wants to maintain its hegemony.” Beata Szydło claimed that “The European Commission takes decisions in violation of the Community Treaties, constantly accusing Poland of violating the rule of law. It is not in Poland but in the EU itself that we have a big problem with the rule of law today.”<sup>83</sup> Patryk Jaki said in one debate that “The rule of law is just a tool and a pretext to hit us [PiS government].”<sup>84</sup>

The PiS’s strategy of dehumanizing LGBTQI+ people was highly visible. Ryszard Czarnecki called Pride-goers “extreme circles,”<sup>85</sup> and Beata Kempa talked about an “aggressive ideology.”<sup>86</sup> The PiS was criticized in Poland for its objection against the *Resolution on the universal decriminalization of homosexuality in the*

<sup>82</sup> [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2021-03-10-INT-3-198-0000\\_PL.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2021-03-10-INT-3-198-0000_PL.html)

<sup>83</sup> <https://jedynka.polskieradio.pl/artykul/3203638,Beata-Szyd%C5%82o-to-nie-Polska-ale-Bruksela-ma-dzi%C5%9B-wielki-problem-z-praworz%C4%85dno%C5%9Bci%C4%85>

<sup>84</sup> <https://polskieradio24.pl/artykul/2991999,jaki-praworzadnosc-to-dla-ue-tylko-pretekst-i-narzedzie-by-uderzyc-w-polske>

<sup>85</sup> <https://oko.press/homofobia-pis-jak-rozbudzali-nienawisc-do-lgbt-prezydent-prezes-ministrowie-poslowie-33-cytaty>

<sup>86</sup> <https://oko.press/homofobia-pis-jak-rozbudzali-nienawisc-do-lgbt-prezydent-prezes-ministrowie-poslowie-33-cytaty>

*light of recent developments in Uganda*, but PiS MEPs defended their decision. Zbigniew Krasnodębski wrote on Twitter that PiS was not only ‘against’ but ‘firmly against’ such a decision. Anna Fotyga explained that PiS could not support the text due to the “historical presence of Poland in Uganda” and the “presence of Polish missionaries and business” in this African country.<sup>87</sup> Witold Waszczykowski added that the PE should not support ‘LGBT ideology’ nor sponsor ‘LGBT organizations.’<sup>88</sup>

It can be concluded that all Polish MEPs from the ECR oppose open democracy and foster some form of authoritarianism, translating their views on sovereignty, role of the EU and the political situation in Poland into votes and words in the EP. Among the United Right’s MEPs, some are particularly vocal in this area, namely those who want to play a role in national politics in Poland, like Joachim Brudziński, Ryszard Czarnecki, Anna Fotyga, Patryk Jaki, Beata Kempa, Ryszard Legutko, Jacek Saryusz-Wolski, Witold Waszczykowski.

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<sup>87</sup> <https://oko.press/europoslowie-pis-nie-zaprotestowali-przeciwko-zabijaniu-osob-lbgt-w-ugandzie>

<sup>88</sup> <https://oko.press/europoslowie-pis-nie-zaprotestowali-przeciwko-zabijaniu-osob-lbgt-w-ugandzie>

## 7. Country chapter on Romania: Strong critics of authoritarians in the European arena but not the same at home

The key conclusions for the work of Romanian MEPs in the 9th EP parliamentary cycle (2019-2024) are the following:

1. **Not the same at home.** Romanian parties have generally represented more centrist views in EU institutions than they do at home. Therefore a disconnect exists between the rhetoric Romanian parties practice during political campaigns and the actions of Romanian officials on the EU level.
2. **Kremlin-critical radicals.** Romanian right-wing radicals could never be openly pro-Moscow, even when they are staunchly anti-Western, a delicate balancing act which has deep historical roots. This is true for the extremist parties that will contest the 2024 EP election. Therefore, it is unlikely to see a Romanian MEP with a friendly attitude towards the Kremlin when it comes to voting or taking other concrete political action.
3. **Missing votes.** Altogether, Romanian MEPs missed about 11.4% of votes, which ended up being the main reason for dropping lower on the three indices evaluated in this study. Members of the Social Democratic Party were the worst offenders in this case, missing more than 20% of the votes related to the Kremlin or China. Some key MEPs of the Romanian socialists missed a very high percentage of votes, likely due to their focus on Romanian domestic politics.
4. **Curious positions on the Balkans.** The one-person show of Cristian Terheş, the UDMR and the PMP – parties that have lower index scores in general – have a tendency to abstain or vote against resolutions touching upon the situation in the Western Balkans (e.g., regarding Chinese or Russian influence in the region). Since Romania does not recognize the independence of Kosovo, a substantial number of Romanian MEPs voted down a relevant resolution.

### 7.1. Critical votes on issues related to the Kremlin, PRC and authoritarian regimes in general

Since the country acceded into the EU in 2007, the Romanian parties represented in the European parliament have been in general more restrained in rhetoric and more centrist in their views expressed publicly in Brussels (or Strasbourg) compared to what they say at home to the domestic audience. A certain disconnect exists between the campaign discourse, which may be inflammatory, and the subsequent political action of Romanian officials, especially in supra-national settings.

Even before 2014, when the most vocal and notorious right-wing extremist the country had, the late Vadim Tudor, who was a member of the European Parliament, failed to leave much of an impression, or indeed to attend sessions, and was not really interested in the works of the institution, being focused more on the audience back home. This international irrelevance of Romanian radicals became all the more obvious during the last two political cycles, when no Romanian parties which may be officially described as extremist had representatives in the EP. This pattern of behavior has mirrored somewhat the position of the Bucharest authorities, which with a few passing exceptions have always avoided open clashes with the EU's institutions or to express strong views on controversial issues on the European stage; staying below the radar was the norm.

Additional causes make the Romanian parties appear rather centrist on the issues analyzed in this report. The extreme-right in Romania has always tended to be Russophobic, at least in its public displays vis-à-vis Moscow, a fact which has deep historical roots. This is true for the older generations of nationalists but the statement also holds true for the new, post-modern radicals running in the 2024 elections. Therefore, at least on Kremlin-critical issues, it is unlikely to find Romanian MEPs voting explicitly in support of Russia.

**KCI SCORE AND VOTE DISTRIBUTION OF ROMANIAN PARTIES IN THE EP FROM THE TOTAL VOTES POSSIBLE ON KREMLIN-RELATED ISSUES. NUMBERS ROUNDED, SO THE TOTAL MIGHT BE LOWER OR HIGHER THAN 100%.**

Party (Group, MEPs)	KCI score (%)	Distribution of votes (%)			
		for	against	abstentions	did not vote
REPER-PLUS (Renew, 5)	98	189	0	0	6
USR (Renew, 3)	96	160	0	2	10
PNL (EPP, 10)	92	406	5	8	51
UDMR (EPP, 2)	92	83	3	2	6
PSD (S&D, 8)	84	259	0	11	106

In fact, an analysis of the average scores of all the Romanian MEPs with a mandate between 2019 and 2024 shows that the sum of votes against and abstention was 2.55% on Kremlin-related, 3.37% on China-related and 3.22% on authoritarian issues, which is in line with the comments above: there is no visible support for authoritarianism, especially not for the Kremlin.

Nevertheless, the stronger explanatory factor by far for not voting in support of democratic positions seems to be absenteeism: the Romanian MPs missed 11.4% of the votes included in this analysis (in case of KCIs, 12.4%; and less on CCI, 9.5%). Thus, Romanian officials seem to have failed to support democracy not due to their convictions but as a consequence of not taking a vested interest in the work of European Parliament. To show the effect of this absenteeism, we – in some cases – calculated the proportion of votes against cast by an MEP and the number of their abstentions compared to the total number of opportunities they had to cast a vote related to one specific issue or another.

The parties with the highest rate of absenteeism on the votes analyzed in this report are the “fake” ones: those made of one or two representatives contesting the 2019 EP elections on the joint center-left (ProRomania, PUSL/Humanist – see their profiles in the Appendix). They are followed by the sizable group of the Social Democratic Party (PSD), which on average missed 28% of the votes on KCI, 23% of those on CCI and 22% on CAI. The members of the Popular Party family (PNL, PMP) missed around 10-11% of the relevant votes on average, while those of the Renew family (USR, Reper) were absent only in 4-5% of the cases on average.

In terms of individual MPs, the champions of absenteeism are all members of PSD and people with real influence in the party, exerted largely through informal channels, which means that even when they are present in Brussels, they may be preoccupied more with the power games back home:

- Claudiu Manda (47%), husband of PSD mayor of a large city who was member of extreme right PRM in the past and right hand of the late extremist leader Vadim Tudor;
- Dan Nica (37%), investigated for corruption in high profile cases from the time he was a minister;
- Mihai Tudose (26%), former PSD prime-minister, who left the party and then rejoined it; today he is the PSD campaign manager for the June 2024 elections.

All three have links with the intelligence services and serve as case studies for the infiltration and clientelization of the Romanian politics by the intelligence apparatus of the state in the last decade or decade-and-a-half. Their professional profile is rather technocratic, with ideology and values playing no role in their options: none of them voted explicitly pro-Kremlin or pro-China on the issues included in analysis, but it is no coincidence that they score the lowest numbers on all three domains analyzed: it is largely a statistical artefact. All three push down the average score of their party, PSD.



<i>Total score %</i>	<i>KCI</i>	<i>CCI</i>	<i>CAI</i>
Claudiu Manda	68	76	77
Dan Nica	78	79	82
Mihai Tudose	85	85	84

Two Romanian MPs can be flagged for their consistently high support for authoritarian positions: Cristian Terheş (independent) and Loránt Vincze (UDMR). In their case, the explanation is not absenteeism but most likely personal values, or contrarianism in order to become more visible (Terheş) so they are the exception among the Romanian representatives in the EP.

<i>Votes against + abstentions, % of total opportunities</i>	<i>Kremlin- related</i>	<i>China- related</i>	<i>Authoritarianism- related</i>
Cristian Terheş	12.8	22.7	10.0
Loránt Vincze	8.5	13.6	8.6

## 7.2 Not voting on Russia's ally, Serbia

The one-person party of Cristian Terheş abstained or voted against in 12.8% of total cases included in the KCI, followed by Loránt Vincze from UDMR and Traian Băsescu from PMP, with 8.5% each. Together they lower the pro-democratic score of the Romanian group of Popular Party affiliates.

The issues on which these MPs abstained or to which they objected are mainly related to the Western Balkans, in particular Serbia, which is directly or indirectly singled out for its connections with the Kremlin. They also voted against or abstained on texts about the involvement of Russia and China in the Balkans. Security guarantees for Ukraine and the gender-based violence perpetrated by Russian military are also topics to which at least one of the MPs mentioned objected once. A special mention must be made for the Report on Kosovo: the independence of this country is not recognized by Bucharest and hence 18 of the 33 Romanian representatives, from various political families, voted against or abstained.

## 7.3. Two outliers on China

On votes related to China, the situation is more clear-cut than in the other two categories. There are two parties which are outliers compared with the rest of the Romanian delegation when it comes to expressing support for the Beijing regime: the one-person party of Cristian Terheş (22.7% of his total votes are against or abstention) and UDMR (9%, largely due to Loránt Vincze). In addition, the PNL member Daniel Buda also leans towards China (9.1%).

The issues which did not meet approval from these Romanian MPs are, like in the Kremlin-critical section, those criticizing the involvement of Beijing in Western Balkans, as a partner of Serbia or entities associated with it, and designating the PRC as a source of detrimental influence in the region. A handful of PNL leaders from Cluj area (Transylvania) have been tempted by good relations with Beijing: the Cluj mayor (and former prime-minister) Emil Boc has hosted official delegations from China, visited Beijing and intended to forge an academic partnership with China at the local UBB university; Daniel Buda is a close friend of Boc, from the same city, and in a way tried to mimic his political career. In the case of UDMR, their close cooperation and political alignment with FIDESZ may explain the pro-China and pro-Vucic stance.

**CCI SCORE AND VOTE DISTRIBUTION OF ROMANIAN PARTIES IN THE EP FROM THE TOTAL VOTES POSSIBLE ON CHINA-RELATED ISSUES. NUMBERS ROUNDED, SO THE TOTAL MIGHT BE LOWER OR HIGHER THAN 100%.**

Party (Group, MEPs)	KCI score (%)	Distribution of votes (%)			
		for	against	abstentions	did not vote
REPER-PLUS (Renew, 5)	99	85	0	0	2
USR (Renew, 3)	97	81	0	2	2
PNL (EPP, 10)	92	190	3	5	22
UDMR (EPP, 2)	90	39	3	1	1
PSD (S&D, 8)	87	132	0	5	39

## 8. Country chapter on Slovakia: A divided country against authoritarians

The key conclusions for the work of Slovak MEPs in the 9<sup>th</sup> EP parliamentary cycle (2019-2024) are the following:

- 1. Three distinct groups.** Based on their voting patterns, Slovak MEPs can be categorized into three distinct groups. The group of “critics” have CAI scores of 88% or over, with their results on the two other indices being close to this number. The “balancers” have CAI scores between 68 and 83 due to the fact that they abstain or miss votes more often than critics and sometimes even vote against certain proposals condemning authoritarian regimes. Finally, “authoritarian friends” have a CAI score of under 38, as they openly defend authoritarian regimes consistently.
- 2. (Not always) Following party lines.** Most Slovak MEPs followed the political stances of their domestic parties when it came to voting. However, there are some exceptions: Katarína Roth Nevedálová, unlike her colleagues elected from the current ruling SMER-SD party’s list, never voted “against” pro-democracy resolutions that increased her score compared to other MEPs in this group.
- 3. MEPs among the most Kremlin-friendly group.** Miroslav Radačovský and Milan Uhrík were both openly supportive of the Kremlin, China and most other authoritarian regimes. They are among the lowest-scoring MEPs in all three indices.

### 8.1. Slovakia’s representation in the EP: Changes and current status

In the 9<sup>th</sup> EP term, there were multiple changes in the personal composition, EP parliamentary group and national political affiliation of members of the Slovak delegation.

In the 2019 EP elections, 13 MEPs were elected from Slovakia. After Brexit, their number increased to 14. These were MEPs elected for the coalition PS-Spolu (4), Smer-SD (3), SaS (2), ĽSNS (2), KDH (1 at first, 2 after Brexit) and OĽaNO (1).

#### Personal changes

Three changes occurred in the personal composition of Slovakia’s representation.

After Brexit, Miriam Lexmann (KDH) became an MEP. Miroslav Číž, elected for Smer-SD (died in December 2022), was replaced by Katarína Roth Nevedálová (Smer-SD).

Instead of Michal Šimečka, elected for PS-Spolu (he represented PS), who left the EP in October 2023 after being elected as a member of the national parliament, Jozef Mihál (non-party member) joined the EP.

#### Changes in party groups

During their term of office, four Slovak MEPs changed their affiliation to party groups in the EP that changed the overall proportion in membership in these groups: the number of Slovak MEPs sitting in the S&D, ECR and EPP groups became lower, while Slovak representation in the RE group became stronger (see table 1 below).

In May 2021, Lucia Ďuriš Nicholsonová left the ECR group and subsequently joined the Renew Europe group. In December 2021, Michal Wiezik, elected for PS-Spolu (originally, F he was a Spolu party member), left the EPP group and joined the Renew Europe group.

In October 2023, Monika Beňová and Katarína Roth Nevedálová were expelled from the S&D group after the Party of European Socialists suspended the membership of their national party Smer-SD. Both MEPs became non-attached.

Jozef Mihál (who replaced Michal Šimečka in November 2023), who represented Spolu party (EPP) on the candidate list of electoral coalition PS-Spolu in the 2019 EP elections, joined the Renew Europe group after he entered the EP.

**SLOVAK MEPS' MEMBERSHIP IN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT'S PARLIAMENTARY GROUPS. \*BEFORE/AFTER BREXIT**

<b>Party groups in EP</b>	<b>2019/2020*</b>	<b>2024</b>
S&D	3	1
EPP	4/5*	4
Renew Europe	2	4
ECR	2	1
Non-attached	2	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>13/14*</b>	<b>14</b>

**Changes of membership in national parties**

The changes in the Slovak representation also concerned the membership of MEPs in national parties. These changes were consequences of moves on the domestic political scene as well as an embodiment of the political ambitions of particular MEPs.

In total, 5 Slovak MEPs changed their party affiliation and as a result, three Slovak national parties appeared on the list of entities whose representatives sat in the EP. Two parties lost their formal representation in the EP (see table 2).

There was a complete change in the party affiliation of the MEPs elected for the ĽSNS. The first, Milan Uhrík, left this party in January 2021 and became a founding member (leader) of the Republika party. The second, Miroslav Radačovský, elected for the ĽSNS as a non-party member, became the leader of the newly established Slovak Patriot party in 2021.

In 2021, Michal Wiezik left Spolu party and joined PS. Lucia Ďuriš Nicholsonová left SaS in February 2021. In 2023, she founded the Jablko (Apple) party and in the 2023 parliamentary elections, as a member of this party, she ran on the candidate list of the Demokrati party. Since the parliamentary elections, Jablko has not been active, and Lucia Ďuriš Nicholsonová is considered in the EP as an independent. Vladimír Bilčík, formerly a member of Spolu, became a member of the Demokrati party in 2023.

**SLOVAK MEPS' NATIONAL PARTY MEMBERSHIP IN THE BEGINNING AND END OF THE CYCLE. \*BEFORE/AFTER BREXIT.**

<b>National parties</b>	<b>2019/2020*</b>	<b>2024</b>
Smer-SD	2	2
PS	2	2
Spolu	2	0
KDH	1/2*	2
SaS	2	1
ĽSNS	2	0
OĽaNO	1	1
Republika	0	1

<b>National parties</b>	<b>2019/2020*</b>	<b>2024</b>
Slovak Patriot	0	1
Demokrati	0	1
Independent	1	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>13/14*</b>	<b>14</b>

## 8.2. Voting patterns

The voting patterns of Slovak MEPs in the years 2019-2024 on issues of democracy, resistance to authoritarianism and criticism of authoritarian powers depended primarily on the positions and ideological profiles of their national parties or the parties who supported them in the EP elections. The personal experiences of MEPs and their long-term ideological and political preferences also influenced their stances.

### Typology of voting patterns

Based on the evaluation of the voting behavior of Slovak MEPs, three basic patterns can be defined.

The first pattern (“critics”) is depicted by an unequivocal support for democratic development in Europe and the world, solidarity with the struggle of democratic forces against authoritarian regimes, and a sharply critical attitude towards the policies of authoritarian states. Such positions were held by the Slovak members of three groups in the EP: Renew Europe, the EPP and the ECR. MEPs in these groups are the members of the Slovak parties PS, Spolu, KDH, OĽaNO, SaS (at the end of the election period, also the Democrats and the Modrá koalícia/Blue Coalition).

The second pattern (“balancing act”) is to certain extent a hybrid attitude. Although critical stances towards authoritarianism in this pattern prevailed, abstentions in the relevant votes were more frequent (or non-participation), and exceptionally, MEPs following this approach even voted “against” pro-democratic resolutions. This voting pattern was applied by three MPs elected for Smer-SD, initially the members of the S&D group, in which only one MEP remained at the end of the tenure, Jozef Hajšel, formally a non-member of the Smer-SD party.

The third pattern (“authoritarian friends”) is described by the acceptance (often de facto support) of anti-democratic steps by authoritarian regimes, the direct or indirect approval of their geopolitical actions. Such attitudes were manifested by the two representatives of right-wing extremist politics, elected on the candidate list of the ĽSNS. At the end of their term of office these MPs, Milan Uhrík and Miroslav Radačovský, were members of the nationalist parties Republika and Slovak Patriot, respectively (in the EP, both MEPs were independent throughout their term). The mentioned far-right reactionary parties took pro-Russian positions in foreign policy, attacked the EU and NATO (ĽSNS even initiated a petition in favor of a referendum on withdrawal from both organizations), they proposed such steps and measures that were clearly in contradiction with the norms of liberal democracy and were marked by xenophobia and homophobia.

### Individual voting

The Table below shows the individual voting results of Slovak MEPs. It shows the three above-mentioned groups of MEPs, each with the same pattern of voting. MEPs with CAI scores from 88 to 100 are placed at the top of the ranking. MEPs with CAI scores from 68 to 83 are in the second group, MPs with scores from 16 to 38 are in the third group.

Within the two first groups, certain deviations from the average score were encountered in cases of some MEPs. However, these deviations were less related (or not related at all) to the voting itself, but had a procedural explanation.

For example, Michal Šimečka’s lower score compared to other MEPs belonging to the group of unequivocal supporters of democracy was not related to his voting, but to the fact of his frequent absences during the voting. These absences were due to the fact that after being elected in May 2022 as chairman of PS, he had to spend a significant part of his working time in Slovakia. In all the votes Šimečka took part in, he voted always “for” the pro-democracy and anti-authoritarian resolutions; he never abstained and never voted “against” them. However, his absence from voting lowered his overall score. Jozef Mihál, Šimečka’s replacement, had the highest score in CAI among all Slovak MEPs, however he participated only in three votes, in which he always voted critically of authoritarian regimes.

Martin Hojsik has also shown similar voting pattern as Šimečka and Mihál (he always voted “for”), but his occasional absences from voting lowered his overall score by several points.

Four other Slovak MEPs – Michal Wiezik, Lucia Ďuriš Nicholsonová, Vladimír Bilčík and Ivan Štefanec – never voted “against” pro-democracy resolutions, but they abstained in voting about small number of resolutions that also lowered their scores by several points.

Due to a serious illness, Miroslav Číž (eventually died in December 2022) had the opportunity to participate in a smaller number of votes during his term of office that lowered his overall score. Katarína Roth Nevedálová, Číž’s replacement, had the opportunity to participate in a significantly smaller number of votes, but unlike her colleagues elected from the Smer-SD candidate list, she never voted “against” pro-democracy resolutions that increased her score compared to other MEPs in this group.

The votes of the MEPs elected for the right-wing extremist ĽSNS – Miroslav Radačovský and Milan Uhrík – were quite telling. Both had a score far below the average of all other Slovak MEPs. Neither hid their pro-Russian stances, often voted against resolutions critical of Russia, often abstained or did not participate in the votes. They both supported a Kremlin-critical resolution only once. Uhrík voted for a resolution approved by the EP on 28 November 2019 about Russia’s illegitimate prosecution of Lithuanian judges who were dealing with the case of Lithuanian civilians killed by Soviet troops in Vilnius on 13 January 1991. Uhrík did not explain why he voted for this resolution; therefore, the motives of his unusual decision remain unclear. Radačovský voted for the resolution condemning Russia’s aggression against Ukraine approved on 1 March 2022. He did not explain either why he decided that way despite being known as an MEP advocating for Russia’s policies before. We can speculate that due to the fact that the full-scale Russian invasion to Ukraine was so spectacular and brutal, Radačovský could not show himself as a Russia’s advocate in this particular case.

Uhrík and Radačovský demonstrated a similar pattern when voting on resolutions critical of China. They mostly voted against (Uhrík did so more often), and only exceptionally (Uhrík once and Radačovský three times) did they support such resolutions. Radačovský’s slightly higher CAI score compared to Uhrík was a result of his votes on issues related to countries other than Russia and China, in which he was in certain degree more critical towards the practices of their authoritarian regimes.

**INDIVIDUAL RESULTS OF SLOVAK MEPs. \*MEP RESIGNED IN 2023 \*\*MEP DIED IN 2022**

MEPs	CAI	KCI	CCI
Jozef Mihál	100	100	-
Michal Wiezik	96	99	100
Lucia Ďuriš Nicholsonová	95	96	93

<b>MEPs</b>	<b>CAI</b>	<b>KCI</b>	<b>CCI</b>
Vladimír Bilčík	94	97	98
Martin Hojsík	94	93	93
Ivan Štefanec	93	95	100
Miriám Lexmann	93	90	83
Eugen Jurzyca	92	94	90
Peter Pollák	90	90	91
Michal Šimečka *	88	85	91
Katarína Roth Neved'alová	83	81	85
Robert Hajšel	82	67	80
Monika Beňová	77	68	80
Miroslav Číž**	68	52	59
Miroslav Radačovský	38	18	26
Milan Uhrík	16	10	7

The Table below shows the voting scores according to the national party affiliation of Slovak MEPs. We see here three similar clusters as in the table above – a group of representatives of the centrist and center-right parties (PS, SaS, Spolu, KDH, OĽaNO, Demokrati, Modrá koalícia), representatives of Smer-SD and members of the right-wing extremist formations (ĽSNS, Republika, Slovak Patriot).

It is not helpful to discuss political parties with a very short stint in the EP, such as the Modrá Koalícia, which was present due to the change in the formal party affiliation of Vladimír Bilčík (initially elected for Spolu party), when Spolu was engaged in negotiations on the creation of a joint electoral formation with other center-right parties before the 2023 national elections. In the end, these negotiations were unsuccessful, and Spolu transformed into the Demokrati party, which Bilčík joined.

#### VOTING ACCORDING TO NATIONAL PARTY AFFILIATION

<b>Parties</b>	<b>CAI</b>	<b>KCI</b>	<b>CCI</b>
Spolu	96	100	100
SaS	93	95	91
KDH	93	92	91
PS	92	91	94
OĽaNO	90	90	91
Demokrati	88	89	90
Smer-SD	75	65	72
Slovak Patriot	38	18	14
ĽSNS	22	21	25
Republika	15	9	3

### 8.3. Telling signs in debates

In the case of Slovak MEPs' voting, we could observe a high degree of compliance of their stances in issues of democracy, rule of law, human rights and resistance to authoritarianism with the positions of national parties they represent in the EP. This behavior was typical for the group of Slovak politicians belonging to the centrist and center-right parties. They took consistent positions, known from their political career even before they were elected to the EP. These MEPs demonstrated the integrity of their views and steps

during the debates or when they justified their vote. MEPs elected on the party list of Smer-SD were less consistent.

One illustrative example was a debate about an EP resolution on foreign electoral interference and disinformation in national and European democratic processes in September 2019.

Lucia Ďuriš Nicholsonová, elected for SaS, in the debate about the mentioned resolution stated that “it is right to identify who is the aggressor that repeatedly resorts to disinformation campaigns that weaken democracies in our nation states, but also within the European Union. And we all know that these disinformation anti-campaigns did not emerge on Mars, neither in Bolivia nor in India, so I think we should stick to the facts and the facts say clearly that behind these disinformation campaigns is clearly Putin’s administration, Russia under the Putin administration. (...) That is why I call on all of you to put aside the political correctness and to make it very clear that in this case in terms of disinformation Putin’s administration is the aggressor.”

In the same debate Michal Šimečka, elected for PS-Spolu, pointed out that interference of foreign actors in elections and disinformation campaigns “polarize and influence voter preferences” and it is “something that threatens the very essence of democracy.” He added that “the real risk is not only a few conspiratorial sites or Russian money, but also politicians who work with disinformation, exploit these tactics, and this emotion, publicly repeat conspiracies, work with them and attack political opponents or minorities, or the European Union, and this is even more toxic for democracy.”

Robert Hajšel, an independent MEP elected on the Smer-SD list, abstained in the voting on the mentioned resolution. He justified his voting saying that the problem is more complex, that the introduction of censorship should be avoided, that the term ‘disinformation’ must first be defined, and that disinformation can also come from within the EU and from many world powers. Hajšel said: “Spreading misinformation from various sources can result in interference into democratic processes, excessively affecting what is happening in society and becoming a security threat. However, without questioning the importance of combating the dissemination of disinformation, it must be recalled that in order to find an effective mechanism, it is necessary to define the concepts and rules whereby information or source is considered misinformation and consequently fairly apply criteria to any cases of suspicion about any entity. (...) The EU must focus on preventive measures, not just on the subsequent fight against the spread of misinformation and propaganda of third parties, which can be entities from the EU member states as well as from powers such as China, Russia, USA. In this struggle, we must focus on misinformation no matter where it comes from”.

In September 2021, the EP discussed the Report on the direction of EU-Russia political relations. All three MEPs elected for Smer-SD voted “against” it. Miroslav Číž and Robert Hajšel did not explain their vote, while Monika Beňová did so. She stated: “Relations between the EU and Russia continue to deteriorate, and the rhetoric of today’s resolution once again exceeds the constructive diplomatic effort to resolve existing disputes. It is necessary to mention that Russia continues to commit a number of violations of minority rights, persecutes the opposition or becomes increasingly assertive in its military operations. However, the European Parliament demands the adoption of measures that will lead to further escalation and disruption of diplomatic relations. I fully support the efforts and adequate pressure on the Russian Federation in solving the relevant problems. However, in my opinion, it is inappropriate to continue to escalate the rhetoric towards Russia to the extent that important geopolitical elements and aspects related to security are neglected. In addition, it is inappropriate to call for increased efforts to destabilize the Russian Federation and for further intensification of aggression against this country.”

We can assume that in her explanation Beňová described the motives that can be applied also to the two other MEPs elected for Smer-SD. At that time (the second half of 2021), Smer-SD was in opposition in the



national parliament and fiercely attacked the center-right government of Eduard Heger, which was critical of Russia. On the domestic political scene representatives of Smer-SD criticized Western sanctions against Russia, pleaded for continued cooperation with Moscow. They portrayed the Russian Federation as a reliable international partner and friendly state. Beňová's vote on the Report on the direction of EU-Russia political relations (as well as Číž's and Hajšel's vote) was in compliance with Smer-SD's general political line.

## 9. Conclusion: A beacon against authoritarianism

Overall, the Central and Eastern European region's delegations in the European Parliament are highly critical of the Kremlin, China and other authoritarian regimes, although there are differences between them. This CEE "bulwark" against authoritarian steps is propped up mainly by Polish and Romanian MEPs, who were the toughest on authoritarianism in the 9<sup>th</sup> EP term from this region, with only one of these MEPs finishing with a KCI, CCI or CAI score under 80%.

On the other end of the scale, we can find Hungary and Bulgaria, where fairly large delegations (Fidesz, SMER and BSP) achieved fairly low KCI scores: 57, 65 and 65%, respectively. Fidesz's score fell remarkably after the war as well. The importance of these delegations is heightened by the fact that two of them (Fidesz and SMER) are currently leading the Hungarian and Slovak national governments. Thus, the Kremlin's, China's or other malign regimes' influence has a better chance to be reflected in EU policies via Fidesz and SMER through their work in the Council of the EU.

Authoritarian influence seems to be fairly strong within parts of the Austrian, Czech and Slovak EP delegations via parties such as the FPÖ, SPD or Slovak Patriot. The KCI, CCI and CAI scores of these countries tend to be even lower than those of far-right and far-left EP groups, indicating that there might be some additional incentives for them to protect authoritarian interests compared to their other extremist colleagues.

Finally, it must be noted that the upcoming 2024 EP elections could end up weakening this CEE bulwark in the EP, as several extremist parties (e.g., the FPÖ) are polling very well, and new ones (e.g., Mi Hazánk in Hungary) could earn a set in the European Parliament.

## 10. Appendix

### Party summaries

#### Austria

- **Austrian People's Party (Österreichische Volkspartei, ÖVP).** The ÖVP has been founded in 1945. It is Austria's main conservative party, a member of the EPP and has been in government for the last 37 years. In the 2019 European elections, the ÖVP was by far the most popular party with 34.55% of the vote. This resulted in seven seats in the European Parliament. The European delegation was led by [Othmar Karas](#), with second-runner Karoline Edtstadler garnering more than 100.000 preferred votes. Edtstadler left the EP after a brief stint to become Minister for European affairs in the new government between ÖVP and the Green party formed in the beginning of 2020. The ÖVP now is led by chancellor Karl Nehammer, after its political superstar Sebastian Kurz had to resign due to corruption investigations.
- **Social Democrats (Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs, SPÖ).** The social democratic party is Austria's oldest and historically most successful party, leading the most governments since 1945. In the EP, it is a member of the S&D Group. The SPÖ got 23.89% of the votes in the 2019 European elections and held its five seats in Parliament. Domestically, the SPÖ has been in a political crisis for the last seven years, which resulted in the appointment of Andreas Babler, mayor of Austrian town Traiskirchen, as new party leader in 2023.
- **Freedom Party (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs, FPÖ).** The FPÖ is Austria's third important party, occupying a small line between populism and far right politics. Shortly before the 2019 European elections, the FPÖ was hit by a severe scandal: The party leader and vice chancellor at the time, Heinz Christian Strache, had been filmed negotiating corrupt deals with a woman pretending to be a Russian oligarch's niece. The scandal became known as the "Ibiza-Video", because the meeting happened in a finca there, and led to the dissolution of government only a few days before the European Elections. The FPÖ managed to get 17.20% of votes, mitigating their losses – but surveys conducted before the "Ibiza"-scandal predicted a far better result. With this result, the party gained 3 seats. In the European parliament, the FPÖ is a member of the Identity and Democracy (ID) group. The FPÖ is now led by former interior minister Herbert Kickl.
- **Green party (Die Grünen).** In the European Election 2019, the Green party sort of fought for its political survival. The party had been founded in 1986 and been voted into the Austrian parliament ever since – until 2017. The European Election campaign 2019 was therefore carried out under difficult circumstances, as the party had lost much of its infrastructure. Under top candidate Werner Kogler, a former member of parliament, the Green party garnered a sensational 14 percent of votes and made their political comeback. Due to early elections caused by the Ibiza-video-scandal, Kogler never took his seat in the EP to campaign domestically. He is now the Austrian vice-chancellor. The Greens held two seats in the EP and gained one more seat after Brexit. They are a member of the Greens/EFA group.
- **The new Austria and liberal forum (Das Neue Österreich und Liberales Forum; Neos).** Neos are a relatively new party which was founded in 2012 with the aim of establishing a liberal party in Austria. In the 2014 European elections, Neos won one seat in parliament. In 2019 scored a stable 8.20% of the votes and held their seat. They are a member of the liberal Renew Group.
- It's biggest breakthrough yet was securing the position of vice-deputy of the City of Vienna in 2020 by forming a coalition with the Social democrats. The Austrian Neos party is led by Beate Meinl-Reisinger, a former member of the Viennese city chamber and now a member of parliament.

#### Bulgaria

- **Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (Граждани за европейско развитие на България, GERB).** GERB is a member of the European People's Party (EPP) in the EP and is represented by its 5 MEPs: Andrey Kovatchev, Eva Maydell, Andrey Novakov, Emil Radev and Asim Adamov. GERB entered into a coalition with the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) ahead of the 2019 EP elections and UDF's member, Alexander Yordanov, was elected MEP as part of the joint ticket. GERB held the reins of power in Bulgaria for twelve years between 2009 and 2021 and has sent mixed signals in relation to Russia over the years. On the one hand, GERB has been consistently in favor of Bulgaria's Euro-Atlantic strategic orientation. On

the other hand, the party has occupied pro-Russian positions, particularly in the sphere of energy (gas and nuclear projects, most notably in enabling the construction of the Turkish Stream pipeline) and economic ties (tourism and arms industry). Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, GERB has occupied a strong stance in support of weapons exports to Ukraine and has pursued a strategy of rhetorical self-enhancement that presents the party as staunchly Euro-Atlanticist.

- **Bulgarian Socialist Party (Българска социалистическа партия, BSP).** The BSP is a member of the Progressive Alliance of the Socialists and Democrats (S&D) and is represented by 5 MEPs: Sergei Stanishev, Elena Yoncheva, Petar Vitanov, Tsvetelina Penkova, Ivo Hristov. Since the end of communism, the party gradually came to accept Bulgaria's Euro-Atlantic integration (embracing the EU but more grudgingly acquiescing into NATO membership). It traditionally favors close political, economic and cultural ties with Russia and has refused to back sanctions on the Kremlin or military aid for Kyiv.
- **Movement for Rights and Freedoms (Движение за права и свободи, MRF).** The MRF is a member of the Renew Europe Group and is represented by 3 MEPs, including Ilhan Kyuchyuk, Iskra Mihaylova and Atidzhe Alieva-Veli. The Movement for Rights and Freedoms represents and draws its support primarily from the ethnic Turkish constituency. It has been consistently present on the Bulgarian political scene for the last three decades and has been alleged to maintain ties with Russian groups and interests. Nevertheless, the MRF has traditionally portrayed itself as a supporter of Sofia's Euro-Atlantic orientation and has supported weapons exports to Kyiv.
- **Bulgarian National Movement (Българско Национално Движение, VMRO).** VMRO belongs to the European Conservatives and Reformists Group and is represented by two MEPs: Angel Dzhambazki and Andrey Slabakov. The party claims its origins to the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization, active especially at the beginning of the 20th century. VMRO generally espouses nationalist, occasionally anti-Russian positions, and often occupies anti-EU stances as well (railing against liberal values and deeper European integration).
- **Democrats for strong Bulgaria (Демократи за силна България; part of Democratic Bulgaria).** Democrats for a strong Bulgaria is a constituent party of Democratic Bulgaria, a coalition of pro-European political parties. It is a member of the European People's Party and is represented by its only MEP, Radan Kanev. DSB originated as a splinter group that left the Union of Democratic Forces – the erstwhile democratic opposition that emerged in the wake of the collapse of communism. DSB and Democratic Bulgaria as a whole have consistently followed a pro-Western line. They are critical of Moscow's authoritarianism, condemn the Kremlin's military aggression and are strongly supportive of Bulgarian military assistance to Ukraine.

## Czechia

- **ANO - Action of Dissatisfied Citizens (ANO - Akce nespokojených občanů).** ANO is a political movement and currently the main opposition party in the Czech Republic. While some sources characterize it as centrist, others place it in the centre-right, although there was a significant [shift](#) of the party from a central liberal movement to a populist and nationalist grouping, roughly from COVID-19. With 21.18% of the votes in the 2019 EP elections, ANO is a part of the Renew Europe group with five MEPs ([Dita Charanzová](#), [Martina Dlabajová](#) – they disagreed with the shift and left the party, both are independent since 29/11/2023; [Martin Hlaváček](#), [Ondřej Knotek](#), and [Ondřej Kovařík](#)), boasting the highest number of MEPs among the represented parties (originally six, but [Radka Maxová](#) joined ČSSD in October 2020). The party is led by entrepreneur Andrej Babiš, who served as Prime Minister in 2017–2021. Babiš was also a candidate in the 2023 Czech presidential election and lost in the second round to the current president Petr Pavel. In the 2021 parliamentary elections, ANO gained 27.12% of the votes, the second highest number. The genesis of ANO as a political force can be traced back to Babiš's criticisms of systemic corruption. ANO 2011 started as an association in November 2011, and on 11 May 2012, ANO became an official political party in the Czech Republic. ANO generally opposes economic liberalism, differently from its main rival, the Civic Democratic Party (ODS). ANO originally adopted Eurosceptic stances prior to the 2017 national election such as opposition to the Euro, deeper European integration and immigration quotas.
- **Civic Democratic Party (Občanská demokratická strana, ODS).** ODS is a liberal-conservative and Eurosceptic political party situated predominantly within the centre-right to right-wing spectrum and

leading the current government coalition. It stands as the only political party in the Czech Republic to maintain an uninterrupted presence in the Chamber of Deputies. Established in 1991 as the pro-free market faction of the Civic Forum by Václav Klaus, and drawing inspiration from the British Conservative Party, ODS secured victory in the 1992 legislative election and has remained in government for most of the Czech Republic's independence. With the exception of the 2013 election, ODS consistently emerges as one of the two dominant parties in each parliamentary election. Václav Klaus, the party's co-founder, assumed the role of the Czech Republic's first PM following the partition of Czechoslovakia, serving from 1993 to 1997. Currently, ODS is under the leadership of the current PM Petr Fiala, who has held the position since the party convention of 2014. In the 2021 parliamentary elections, ODS secured victory in a coalition called TOGETHER (with TOP 09 and KDU-ČSL), receiving 27.79% of the votes, subsequently forming a coalition government with KDU-ČSL, TOP 09, STAN and the Pirates, leading to Petr Fiala assuming the role of the new PM. The ODS, gaining 14.54% of the votes in last European elections, was between 2007 and 2009 actively involved in the co-founding (together with the British Conservatives) the Eurosceptic European Conservatives and Reformists Party (ECR Party) and the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR group) in the EP. ODS has 4 MEPs in total, all in the ECR faction ([Jan Zahradil](#), [Alexandr Vondra](#), [Evžen Tošenovský](#), and [Veronika Vrećionová](#)). Despite being in power during the ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon in the Czech Republic, ODS supports maintaining Czech sovereignty and integrity against the European Union, calls for a fundamental reform of the EU and strongly opposes any federalization of Europe in the form of the EU becoming a quasi-state entity. However, in the government they hold pro-European stances, and they are rather divided into factions, such as conservative Tea Party.

- **Czech Pirate Party (Česká pirátská strana - Piráti).** The Czech Pirate Party is a liberal progressive political force within the Czech Republic currently in the coalition government, originating in 2009. The party was founded as a student-driven grassroots movement campaigning for political transparency, civil rights and direct democracy. While its inception drew inspiration from the Swedish Pirate Party, renowned for its focus on internet freedom, the Czech Pirate Party has evolved into a political entity. With a platform geared towards protecting civil liberties from both state and corporate influence, the party prioritizes initiatives such as government transparency and enhanced public involvement in democratic decision-making processes. In the 2021 Czech parliamentary elections, the Czech Pirate Party allied with the Mayors and Independents party under the banner of Pirates and Mayors, gaining 15.62%. In the 2019 European elections, with 13.95% of the votes, the party gained three seats ([Markéta Gregorová](#), [Mikuláš Peksa](#), and [Marcel Kolaja](#)), and joined the Greens/EFA parliamentary group. The party's campaign leader Marcel Kolaja was elected as one of fourteen Vice-Presidents of the EP. Embracing a pro-European stance, the Czech Pirate Party supports both EU integration and the Eurozone.
- **Social Democracy (Sociální demokracie, SOCDEM, formerly Czech Social Democratic Party - Česká strana sociálně demokratická, ČSSD).** SOCDEM is a social-democratic party, situated on the centre-left of the political spectrum, advocating for progressive policies and embracing pro-European ideals. With its affiliation to the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D), SOCDEM has one MEP, [Radka Maxová](#), who transitioned from ANO to join the party in 2021. However, within the official alignment she acts as independent (since 2020). Since the dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1993, SOCDEM has maintained a significant presence as one of the major political parties in the Czech Republic. Until October 2017, it consistently ranked among the two parties with the highest number of seats in the Chamber of Deputies. However, in the latest parliamentary elections in 2021, the party only gained 4.65% of the votes (as part of the overall retreat of the Czech left into the background), while in the 2019 European elections it was 3.95% of the votes. In terms of foreign policy, SOCDEM supports EU integration and the Eurozone.
- **Mayors and Independents (Starostové a nezávislí - STAN).** STAN is a liberal political movement that emerged from the Independent Mayors for the Region, established in 2004, and part of the current coalition government. Until 2016, the party cooperated with another liberal-conservative party, TOP 09. In the 2021 Czech parliamentary election, STAN joined forces with the Czech Pirate Party under the coalition banner of Pirates and Mayors, gaining 15.62% of the votes. In promoting the principle of subsidiarity, STAN encourages localism, decentralisation, reduced bureaucracy and anti-corruption measures. The party also emphasizes its commitment to European integration, highlighting the importance of education enhancements and investments in scientific endeavors. In coalition with TOP 09 and regional partners,

gaining 11.65% of the votes, STAN has one MEP in the EP, aligning with the European People's Party (EPP) group ([Stanislav Polčák](#)).

- **TOP 09 - Tradition Responsibility Prosperity (TOP 09 - Tradice Odpovědnost Prosperita).** TOP 09 is a liberal-conservative political party in the current coalition government, led by Markéta Pekarová Adamová, the current President of the Chamber of Deputies. Established on June 11, 2009, by Miroslav Kalousek, who departed from the Christian and Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party, TOP 09 is characterized primarily by its fiscal conservatism and pro-Europeanism. In coalition with STAN and regional allies, TOP 09 holds representation in the European Parliament through two MEPs aligned with the European People's Party (EPP) group ([Luděk Niedermayer](#), and [Jiří Pospíšil](#)), gaining 11.65% together. In the 2021 parliamentary elections, the party was part of a coalition with TOGETHER (with ODS and KDU-ČSL), achieving victory with 27.79% of the votes.
- **Freedom and Direct Democracy (Svoboda a přímá demokracie - SPD).** SPD is a right-wing to far-right political party, led by Tomio Okamura. Founded in May 2015 by Tomio Okamura and Radim Fiala, SPD emerged from a split within the Dawn of Direct Democracy parliamentary group. The name "Freedom and Direct Democracy" is a nod to the Eurosceptic political group "Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy" in the EP. Additionally, the party maintains links with Marine Le Pen's National Front. SPD opposes Czech membership in the EU and advocates for a more restrictive immigration policy, particularly targeting immigration from Islamic nations. It rejects multiculturalism and illegal immigration, while also condemning the EU's policy of migrant quotas. In the 2021 parliamentary elections, the party gained 9.56% of the votes. In the 2019 EP elections, with 9.14% of the votes, SPD secured representation with two MEPs, originally aligning with the Identity and Democracy group within the EP ([Ivan David](#) and [Hynek Blaško](#)). However, Hynek Blaško left the party and the ID group in 2022 and became independent in the EP. In the upcoming EP elections, Blaško is the election leader of the left-wing Eurosceptic Alliance of National Forces.
- **Christian and Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party (Křesťanská a demokratická unie – Československá strana lidová, KDU-ČSL).** KDU-ČSL is a Christian-democratic party currently in the coalition government, with a history dating back to its formation as the Czechoslovak People's Party (ČSL) in January 1919 in Prague, which united various Catholic factions. Following the Velvet Revolution in 1989, ČSL embarked on a mission to distance itself from past controversies and policies, leading to a rebranding in 1992 through a merger with the Christian and Democratic Union. This transformation culminated in the official renaming of the party to KDU-ČSL in March 2019. Despite maintaining a relatively modest voter base of around 6 to 10 percent of the population, KDU-ČSL exhibits stability and resilience, particularly in the traditionally Catholic rural regions of Moravia. Leveraging the fragmented nature of the Czech political party system, the party has positioned itself as an important part of coalition governments, whether left-wing or right-wing. Within the EU, KDU-ČSL aligns with the European People's Party (EPP) and holds two MEPs ([Tomáš Zdechovský](#) and [Michaela Šojdrotová](#)), gaining 7.24% of the votes in last European elections. In the 2021 parliamentary elections, the party was part of a coalition with TOGETHER (with ODS and TOP 09), achieving victory with 27.79% of the votes.
- **Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy, KSČM).** KSČM is a far-left party established in 1989 as the successor to the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ). Given the federal structure of Czechoslovakia at that time KSČM was created to represent the territories of Bohemia and Moravia, including Czech Silesia, which would later form the Czech Republic. Following the reorganization of KSČ in 1990, KSČM became a part of the federation alongside the Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS). Unlike some former ruling parties in post-Communist Central Eastern Europe, KSČM has retained the Communist title in its name, though it has adapted its party program to conform with laws implemented after 1989. Initially, KSČM faced political isolation and accusations of extremism in the aftermath of the Velvet Revolution, but later it moved closer to the Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD) and provided parliamentary support to Andrej Babiš' Second Cabinet until April 2021. In the 2021 Czech legislative election, KSČM failed to surpass the 5% voting threshold (gaining 3.6%), resulting in its exclusion from parliamentary representation for the first time in its history. Subsequently, on October 23, 2021, MEP [Kateřina Konečná](#) assumed leadership of the party while being the sole MEP representing KSČM and affiliated with the GUE/NGL faction. In the 2019 European elections, the party gained 6.94% of the votes.

## Hungary

- **Fidesz-Hungarian Civic Alliance (Fidesz-Magyar Polgári Szövetség, Fidesz).** Fidesz is the larger incumbent ruling party of Hungary led by PM Viktor Orbán. It currently has 116 MPs in the National Assembly and 12 MEPs in the EP. The party advocates for transferring some EU competencies, mainly concerning migration, back to member states. Its membership in the EPP was suspended on 20 March 2019.
- **Christian Democratic People's Party (Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt, KDNP).** KDNP is the smaller incumbent ruling party of Hungary led by Deputy PM Zsolt Semjén. KDNP's parliamentary group in the National Assembly includes 19 MPs and the party has 1 MEP. KDNP, while being a separate entity, does not act independently of Fidesz. The single KDNP MEP sits in the EPP.
- **Democratic Coalition (Demokratikus Koalíció, DK).** DK is a party led by former Hungarian PM Ferenc Gyurcsány. Democratic Coalition is represented in the Hungarian National Assembly by 15 MPs and in the EP by 4 MEPs. DK wants to see more powers transferred to Brussels and seeks to establish a European Family Allowance, European Minimal Pension, and a European Minimal Wage. The number of MPs the party has might not accurately represent their current popularity, as the seats in the 2022 general election was won from a joint opposition list of DK, MSZP, Jobbik, Momentum, and two parties with no seats in the EP, LMP and Párbeszéd).
- **Momentum.** Momentum is a young Hungarian political party bursting onto the scene with its campaign against Budapest's bid for the 2024 Olympics. It has 10 MPs in the Hungarian National Assembly, and sent 2 MEPs to the EP in 2019, which – at the time – was considered to be a surprise. The party frequently advocates for more cooperation on the European level. The number of MPs the party has might not accurately represent their current popularity, as the seats in the 2022 general election was won from a joint opposition list of DK, MSZP, Jobbik, Momentum, and two parties with no seats in the EP, LMP and Párbeszéd).
- **Hungarian Socialist Party (Magyar Szocialista Párt, MSZP).** MSZP is a Hungarian left-wing party led by MP Bertalan Tóth. It has 10 MPs in the Hungarian National Assembly. The party had one MEP, but he left the party and created his own movement, Esély (see below). The party is strongly pro-EU, advocating for more European cooperation on social matters. The number of MPs the party has might not accurately represent their current popularity, as the seats in the 2022 general election was won from a joint opposition list of DK, MSZP, Jobbik, Momentum, and two parties with no seats in the EP, LMP and Párbeszéd).
- **Chance Community (Esély Közösség, Esély).** Esély is a movement [created](#) by MSZP's former MEP, István Ujhelyi after a failed bid to become MSZP's chairman. It is represented in the EP by its founder, but he will not run for a seat in the 2024 EP elections.
- **Jobbik - Conservatives (Jobbik – Konzervatívok, Jobbik).** Jobbik is a right-wing party led by MP Péter Jakab. It has 8 MPs in the National Assembly and 1 MEP. As part of its strategy to move from the extreme right-wing to the center, the party has gone from advocating for a "HUNexit" to campaigning for the EU to return to the ideas of its founding fathers. The number of MPs the party has might not accurately represent their current popularity, as the seats in the 2022 general election was won from a joint opposition list of DK, MSZP, Jobbik, Momentum, and two parties with no seats in the EP, LMP and Párbeszéd).

## Poland

- **Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS).** PiS is a conservative, nationalist and populist party founded in 2001. Since the beginning it has been led by twin brothers Lech Kaczyński (president of Poland in 2005-2010) and Jarosław Kaczyński (prime minister in 2006-2007). The death of Lech Kaczyński in a plane crash in Smoleńsk (Russia) in 2010 created a new founding myth for the party, equipping it with a strong anti-Russian and anti-liberal agenda. PiS led a coalition government in 2005-2007, with ultra-conservative and populist agrarian partners. In 2015, PiS's candidate Andrzej Duda won presidential elections and the United Right block lead by PiS won absolute majority in both chambers of the parliament which led to the formation of Beata Szydło's government. After 2017, the PiS government was headed by Mateusz Morawiecki's. Both PiS governments were characterized by controversial reforms of, among others, the judiciary, public media, education system, which were a source of a conflict with European institutions. In 2019, PiS won the EP elections with 45,38% of the vote, which translated into 27 seats; 24 seats went to

PiS itself, and 3 to its small allies. After Brexit, Poland gained another seat, which went to PiS. In 2023, PiS became the most popular party in the parliamentary elections (35,38%), but was not able to form a coalition and ceded power to the coalition lead by Donald Tusk.

- **Sovereign Poland (Suwerenna Polska; formerly Solidarity Poland, Solidarna Polska, SP).** SP is a conservative, Eurosceptic party created in 2012 as a splinter party from PiS. The party founder and leader is Zbigniew Ziobro (justice minister in 2005-2007 and 2015-2023). In 2014, SP signed an agreement with PiS and Poland Together to create the United Right. SP has been the hard-right component of the block, known for its strong anti-EU stands and support for the so-called traditional family values. In the 2015-2019 term of the Sejm, SP had 18 MPs, which made them a necessary part of the ruling majority. The party distanced itself from the PiS-led government from on many occasions. Personal aversion between Mateusz Morawiecki and Zbigniew Ziobro is known, and both have been competing to succeed Jarosław Kaczyński. In 2011, SP-affiliated MEPs switched from the EFDD European family to the ECR. Since the 2019 EP elections, SP has had two MEPs.
- **Alliance (Porozumienie).** Alliance is a conservative-liberal party created in 2017 as a result of the transformation of the Poland Together party. Both were created by Jarosław Gowin, former member of the Civic Platform and justice minister in Tusk's government (2011-2013). In 2014, Gowin switched sides and signed an agreement with PiS becoming one of three members of the United Right. The Alliance was supposed give the block a more pro-European face and attract conservative intellectuals and entrepreneurs. In 2015-2020, Gowin was a deputy prime minister. In 2021, as a result of a conflict within the ruling coalition about the postal elections, tax reform and media reform the Alliance left the government. PiS, trying to save their majority in the Sejm, convinced some Alliance members to create the Republican Party and stay in the coalition. In 2022, Magdalena Sroka was elected the new president of the party and decided to start close cooperation with the PSL. Alliance members ran in 2023 general elections on the Third Way lists. Adam Bielan has been the only MEP representing the party, but in 2021, he became the leader of the Republican Party.
- **Republican Party (Partia Republikańska).** The Republican Party is a conservative party created in 2021 as a result of division within the Alliance party. Once the Alliance's leader Jarosław Gowin decided to leave the government, PiS convinced some of its members to form a new party and save the government's majority in the Sejm. The party is led by Adam Bielan, its only MEP. There are no differences between PiS and the Republican Party; the latter seems to be a branch of the former.
- **Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska, PO).** Civic Platform is a centrist, pro-European party created in 2001. Since the beginning, it has been an umbrella party with liberal, conservative and progressive wings, but in recent years it moved more to the liberal-progressive side of the political spectrum (with many conservative members moving to the Third Way). It was the most popular party in the 2007 and 2011 general elections, and a senior partner in the coalition government with PSL, led by Donald Tusk (2007-2015) and Ewa Kopacz (2015). PO lost power in 2015, and was the biggest opposition party for 8 years. Since 2014, PO has been the main actor within the Civic Coalition, a block formed together with Modern, the Greens and the Polish Initiative. Civic Coalition won 30,7% of the vote in the 2023 elections and became the biggest coalition partner in the new Tusk government created with the Left and the Third Way. In the EP, PO belongs to EPP. Donald Tusk was the president of the European Council (2014-2019) and president of the EPP (2019-2022). In 2019 EP elections, PO organized a wide block of democratic (anti-PiS) parties, including PSL and SLD known as the European Coalition. It won 38,47% of the vote which translated into 22 seats. 14 of them went to candidates supported by PO (members and independents). In 2023, 2 MEPs were elected to the Sejm and one became the foreign minister. Among the new MEPs, there was Włodzimierz Karpiński who took the mandate after eight months in prison for allegedly taking a bribe.
- **Polish People's Party (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe, PSL).** Polish People's Party is a conservative, agrarian party founded in 1990, but referring to the historic People's Party established in 1895 and de facto continuing the work of the United People's Party (1949-1989), a satellite party of the communist party. PSL is a pro-European, pragmatic party known for its flexibility in choosing coalition partners. PSL seems to be the most stable element of Polish politics. It has been a part of coalition government with SLD in 1993-1997, 2001-2003, and with PO in 2007-2015. Currently under the leadership of Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz (deputy prime minister), PSL is in the PO-Left-Third Way government. Third Way is an electoral alliance created by PSL and Poland 2050 for the 2023 elections to attract moderately conservative voters. It



succeeded (14,4%) and it was announced the alliance will be continued. PSL belongs to EPP, and has 2 MEPs elected from the European Coalition's lists.

- **Poland 2050 (Polska 2050).** Poland 2050 is a centrist party founded in 2021 (association in 2020). It was created by TV celebrity Szymon Hołownia (currently speaker of the Sejm) on the wave of popularity after his good performance in the presidential elections of 2019. The party is a conglomerate of ideas without any clear ideological characteristic, but the leader's views push it to the moderate right. Together with PSL it formed the Third Way alliance before the 2023 general elections. It succeeded (14,4%) and it was announced the alliance will be continued. Poland 2050 is strongly pro-European; it has no European party affiliation, but it has one MEP (previously PO/EPP) who joined Renew Europe.
- **New Left (Nowa Lewica).** New Left is a social democratic party founded in 2021 as a merger of SLD (traditional left-wing party with roots in the communist party) and Spring (progressive party founded in 2019). New Left has two chairmen, Włodzimierz Czarzasty (currently deputy speaker of the Sejm) and Robert Biedroń MEP. In the 2023 elections, the New Left formed a pre-election alliance with the Together party and a number of smaller parties; it won 8,61%. The alliance and the common parliamentary group is called the Left. The New Left joined Tusk's government and Krzysztof Gawkowski became a deputy prime minister. The New Left is strongly pro-European and belongs to PES; it has 7 MEPs (S&D).

## Romania

- **The Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat, PSD).** PSD is widely regarded as the successor of the Communist Party of the 1980s. After the elimination of the Ceaușescu couple and some hardliners associated with it, a more reformist wing took over the state and party bureaucracy, becoming gradually more moderate and pro-Western. It is a member of the European Socialists & Democrats group, although in national politics it often uses nationalist and anti-globalist rhetoric, supporting traditional values and the church, being closer to the profile of a populist-agrarian movement. During the last three decades it was the dominant political actor and the "natural party of governance", spending more time in power than in opposition. In the 2019 European elections PSD scored unusually low, taking only 22.5% of the votes and 9 mandates; their score rebounded later in national elections. In 2020 they recruited another MEP from the splinter party PRO Romania ([Mihai TUDOSE](#)), but lost two when opportunist candidates from their list defected back to where they had come from: Maria GRAPINI to PUSL and Cristian TERHEȘ to the nationalist right; more about them below. Today PSD has formally eight mandates in the European parliament, though for all practical purposes Grapini is still part of their group. The newcomer Tudose, in fact a former PSD prime-minister, estranged from the party and then returned, is their campaign manager for the 2024 elections. In Romania the party currently forms the ruling coalition with PNL, its president being the Prime-Minister, and is widely expected to come first in the local elections (held simultaneously with the European ones) and win the parliamentary elections scheduled for the end of 2024.
- **The National Liberal Party (Partidul Național Liberal, PNL).** Historic party established in the 19th century and revived after 1989, it used to be the political platform representing the national capital and pro-industrial development before Communism. In the last ten years it was the main rival of PSD and a member of the European Popular Party. However, as its electoral basis has gradually enlarged, it lost its ideological edge and became a catch-all organization with solid representation in the local administration, first and foremost in Transylvania (NE), and almost indistinguishable in terms of cadres and discourse from PSD. In 2021 they formed a coalition government with PSD based on a super-majority in parliament, and are expected to continue the same arrangement after the 2024 national elections. In the 2019 European elections PNL came first with 27% and obtained 10 mandates which they hold currently.
- **The Union Save Romania (Uniunea Salvați România) / The Alliance 2020 USR+PLUS, USR).** USR is a relatively new party created in 2016 by the current mayor of Bucharest, Nicușor Dan, with a modern, progressive liberal doctrine. It came third in the national elections that year and in 2020 won a majority in the city council of Bucharest. In the 2019 European elections ran in coalition with Plus, an even fresher upstart of the same orientation, under the label Alliance 2020, and again came third, with 22.36%, their best score ever, obtaining 8 mandates. The merger between USR and Plus attempted in 2021 failed and the Alliance split, with five mandates left to Plus, one to USR ([Vlad-Marius BOTOȘ](#)), and two Euro-MPs declaring themselves independent ([Nicolae ȘTEFĂNUTĂ](#) and [Vlad GHEORGHE](#)). Seven of them remained until today members of the Renew Europe family; the eight became member of ALDE/Greens. In 2024 they

will run separately, both for the European Parliament and in the national elections: USR under the same label, as part of a three-party alliance; and Plus alone, under its new name Reper. The odds are in inverse proportion with the current share of mandates in the EP: USR and the alliance it leads is likely to get somewhere between 15 and 20% of the votes, while Reper is unlikely to pass the 5% threshold.

- **The Popular Movement Party (Partidul Mișcarea Populară, PMP).** This is a center-right party created in 2013 by the former Romanian president [Traian Băsescu](#), to support his agenda and a number of close associates. It barely passed the threshold in national elections in 2016, but failed to do so in 2020. Again, with luck, it got 5.76% in the 2019 European elections, which gave them two mandates; president Băsescu became one of the current MEPs of the PMP. They are members of the European Popular Party. In June 2024 PMP will run again, but as part of a common list with USR (see above) and Forța Dreptei, a splinter of PNL. The current president of PMP, [Eugen Tomac](#), is the only member of the party with a chance to make it again into the European parliament.
- **The Democratic Union of Hungarians from Romania (Uniunea Democratică a Maghiarilor din România, UDMR).** UDMR is the political party which has represented the Hungarian minority in Romania since 1990, being permanently present in the national parliament and, after 1996, joining various coalition governments, following an unspoken consociational agreement with the other mainstream parties. It is an umbrella movement trying to maintain the unity of the community and avoid splitting the ethnic vote, since the size of the Hungarian minority in the total population (6.1%) is barely above the electoral threshold of 5%. Their last presence in government was between 2020 and 2023. UDMR is considered a center-right movement and they are members of the European Popular Party. In the 2019 European elections they scored 5.25% and obtained two mandates; the situation is likely to be repeated in 2024.
- **PRO Romania party (PRO România, PRO).** Upstart platform of the former PSD prime-minister Victor Ponta, after he was expelled from the party in 2017. PRO never entered the national parliament but obtained 6.44% in the European elections of 2019, and therefore got two mandates in the EP. Like Ponta himself, both MEPs are estranged PSD members – one was prime-minister, the other European Commissioner – and joined the European Socialists & Democrats group. As mentioned above, one of them already returned to PSD in 2020, while Victor Ponta became adviser to the Prime Minister (and PSD president) Ciolacu in 2023. For all practical purposes PRO Romania has become an annex of PSD and is unlikely to gain something as an independent actor in June 2024.
- **The Humanist Social Liberal Party (Partidul Umanist Social Liberal, PUSL).** Fictive party led by the media mogul and former Securitate operator Dan Voiculescu, a remnant of the Ceaușescu regime, who uses his successful TV station to blackmail PSD in electoral years and place people on common election lists or in the executive. In 2019 they ran on a common list with PSD and currently have one mandate in the European parliament, but the [person](#), Maria GRAPINI, is irrelevant politically.
- **The Alliance for the Unity of Romanians (Alianța pentru Unitatea Românilor, AUR).** Nationalist, extreme-right party established in 2019 which got 9% in the national elections of 2020. It has been very active and visible in the last years and is currently polling between 15% and 20%. It did not participate in the 2019 European elections but managed to recruit one MEP who had run on the Social Democratic list: [Cristian Terheș](#), a Greek-Catholic priest who was first part of the Socialist team, but after being elected became Christian Democrat and joined the European Conservative & Reformists group, and then created his own fictitious National Conservative party. In 2022 Terheș officially joined AUR and will run again for the European Parliament in June 2024 on AUR's list.

## Slovakia

- **Christian Democratic Movement (Kresťanskodemokratické hnutie, KDH).** KDH is a moderately conservative formation. It was founded in 1990 and is a member of the EPP. They received 9.69% of the votes in the 2019 European elections, winning one seat. After Brexit Slovakia gained another another seat in the European Parliament (from 13 to 14), which went to KDH. As a result, since January 2, 2020 they have two MEPs. KDH's chairman is Milan Majerský, the governor of the Prešov region. In the 2016 and 2020 parliamentary elections, KDH failed to reach the 5% threshold necessary to enter parliament. In the 2023 early parliamentary elections, KDH received nearly 7% of the vote and was able to enter parliament as an opposition party.

- **Freedom and Solidarity (Sloboda a Solidarita, SaS).** SaS is a libertarian party founded in 2009. In the EP, the party joined the ALDE group in 2014, but left it soon after (2/10/2014) and joined the ECR group. In 2019, the party received 9.62% of the votes, earning two seats in the EP. However, one MEP [Lucia Ďuriš Nicholsonová](#) left the party in February 2021 and joined the Renew group in May of that same year. SaS party leader, Richard Sulík, was the speaker of Slovakia's Parliament from 2010-2012. SaS was member of the ruling coalition in 2020-2022, but due to unresolvable intra-coalition conflicts, especially between SaS and OĽaNO, SaS left the ruling coalition in September 2022. In the 2023 early elections SaS managed to obtain 6% of the vote and entered parliament as an opposition party.
- **Kotleba - People's Party Our Slovakia (Kotleba - Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko, ĽSNS).** ĽSNS is a right-wing extremist and neo-fascist party led by Marián Kotleba. It was founded in 2010. ĽSNS is an illiberal, racist, anti-Roma and anti-Semitic revisionist formation that openly supports Putin's Russia. The party was in opposition in Parliament following the 2016 and 2020 parliamentary elections. In the 2023 early elections ĽSNS suffered a major defeat after having received less than 1% of the total vote. Both MEPs elected in 2019 (with 12.07% of the total votes) represent nowadays in the interests of other far-right, pro-Russian formations. One of the MEPs is [Milan Uhrík](#), a leader of the Republika party, which splintered off from ĽSNS and likewise failed to pass the threshold required to enter parliament in 2023. The other MEP is [Miroslav Radačovský](#); a formal leader of the politically irrelevant Patriot party. In 2023 he run in early parliamentary elections 2023 on the Slovak National Party (SNS) list, but was not elected in the first scrutiny, rejected to be a substitute and decided to remain in the EP. After the 2023 elections, SNS became a part of the ruling coalition alongside Smer-SD and Hlas-SD. Both MEPs are non-attached members since the beginning of this term.
- **Movement Slovakia (Hnutie Slovensko), former Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (Obyčajní ľudia a nezávislé osobnosti, OĽaNO).** Movement Slovakia is predominantly conservative formation without standard organizational structures and is led by Igor Matovič. The party was founded in 2011 and operated as a political one-man-show in its early years. It received 5.25% of the votes in 2019, gaining [one seat](#) in the EP, who sits in the EPP group. In the 2020 parliamentary election, OĽaNO achieved an overwhelming victory and became the leading force of the new ruling coalition with Matovič as the prime minister. However, due to serious internal conflicts within the ruling coalition and chaotic political actions taken by OĽaNO's leader, he lost his position as prime minister in 2021. Following the 2023 elections, OĽaNO gained nearly 9% of the total vote and entered parliament as an opposition party, subsequently renaming itself as Hnutie Slovensko (Movement Slovakia).
- **Progressive Slovakia (Progresívne Slovensko, PS).** PS was formed in 2018 and is a social-liberal, progressive movement and a member of the Renew Europe Group. The current party leader is Michal Šimečka, the vice-speaker of European parliament in 2019-2023. Incumbent Slovak President Zuzana Čaputová had been a vice-chair of PS before her victory in the 2019 presidential election. In the 2020 parliamentary election, PS ran in coalition with centre-right Spolu-OD. The coalition failed to reach the 7% threshold required for coalitions and thus remained outside of parliament. In the 2023 early elections, PS encountered remarkable success. Having gained 18% of the votes, PS became the strongest opposition party in the Slovak Parliament. In the 2019 European elections, PS, in coalition with Spolu, received 20.11% of the votes, which resulted in two MEP seats for PS and Spolu each. In December 2021, a Spolu MEP, [Michal Wiezik](#), left the party and joined PS. The party had three MEPs until October 2023, when [Šimečka](#) left the EP to run in the national parliamentary elections.
- **Smer Social Democracy (Smer-Sociálna demokracia, Smer-SD).** Smer-SD is a party founded in 1999 by Robert Fico, a former member of the post-communist Party of the Democratic Left (SDĽ). While it is formally a "social democratic" party, Smer-SD is in reality a nationalist-populist formation with left-leaning rhetoric. Robert Fico had to resign in March 2018 after massive civic protests erupted in reaction to the murder of investigative journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancée Martina Kušnírová. In the 2020 parliamentary elections, Smer-SD was defeated by the centre-right opposition, which emphasized Smer-SD's responsibility for wide-spread corruption in Slovakia. Subsequently, a group of prominent Smer-SD's members, including the former PM Peter Pellegrini, left the party and founded their own "social democratic" formation Hlas-SD (Voice-SD). Despite an initial decline in its rating after internal conflict, using social demagoguery and fierce populist rhetoric in its mobilization campaign in the contexts of the

social consequences of COVID-19, energy crisis, high rate of inflation and Russia's war against Ukraine, Smer-SD succeeded to get 23% of the votes in the 2023 early elections 2023 and formed the ruling coalition with Hlas-SD and radical nationalist Slovak National Party (SNS). Robert Fico was subsequently appointed as prime minister. In the 2019 European elections Smer-SD received 15.72% of the votes resulting in the party receiving three seats in the EP, where they joined the S&D group. In December 2022, one of Smer-SD MEPs, Miroslav Čiž, died and his position was filled by [Katarína Neved'alová](#). In October 2023, the Party of European Socialists (PES) suspended Smer-SD's membership in this grouping due to "deviation from PES' values" as a result of Smer-SD's coalescing with radical right. Subsequently, two Smer-SD MEPs, [Monika Beňova](#) and Katarína Neved'alová were expelled from the S&D faction. The third MEP elected on Smer-SD's list, [Robert Hajšel](#), who is not a member of the party, remained in the S&D faction.

- **Demokrati (Democrats), former Spolu (Together) - Civic Democracy (Spolu - občianska demokracia, Spolu-OD).** Spolu-OD was a centre-right formation that promoted values of civic democracy. It was founded in 2018 and was a member of EPP. In parliamentary elections 2020, it ran in coalition with Progressive Slovakia, which failed to reach the 7% threshold required for coalitions, and the party failed to enter parliament. In 2023, a group of individual centre-right politicians, mostly splinters from OĽaNO, including Prime Minister Eduard Heger, joined Spolu-OD which was subsequently renamed into Demokrati (Democrats). With less than 3% of the votes, however, Demokrati failed to enter parliament after the 2023 elections. Since October 2023, Jaroslav Naď, a former Minister of Defence, is the party's chairman. In the 2019 European elections, Spolu received 20.11% of the votes (in coalition with PS) which resulted in two MEP seats for PS and SPOLU each. In December 2021, one Spolu MEP, [Michal Wiezik](#), left the party and joined PS. The other, [Vladimír Bilčík](#), switched his national party three times in 2023, ending up as independent since December 2023.