

AUTHORITARIAN SHADOWS

in the European Union

Influence of authoritarian
third countries
on EU institutions



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- raise awareness about political issues that have an impact on citizen's everyday life even if indirectly, and
- contribute to and develop a critical public discourse and policy making that is based on knowledge and evidence.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This paper is the summary of the results of an over a year-long research project covering the foreign policy-related votes of members of the European Parliament in the current 9th European parliamentary cycle (2019-2024) with a special focus of seven Central and Southeastern European countries (V4: Chechia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia; Austria, Romania, Bulgaria) to establish their vulnerability to authoritarian influences. Political Capital has already published extensively on how authoritarian states, particularly Russia, try to influence national and European political processes and elections.¹ This time, we developed a novel methodology to quantify the authoritarian influence exerted by the Russian Federation and other authoritarian states such as China. We hope our results will help understand European foreign policy decision-making and pinpoint the pathways through which European policies can be influenced from outside with the “cutting edge of sharp power.”² While this research focuses on influence in the European Union, and especially the European Parliament, the patterns are very similar in other international institutions as well. For more information on the project, please see our thematic website:

https://politicalcapital.hu/authoritarian_shadows_in_the_eu/

This summary is based on the votes cast by a total of 783 (due to changes throughout the term and Brexit) members of the European Parliament since the start of the 9th European parliamentary cycle on 2 July 2019. The assessment of votes was aided by our local partners from Czechia, Slovakia, Poland, Austria, Romania and Bulgaria. The seven country case studies help understand the votes of MEPs from the focus countries in their national contexts. We are grateful to the authors listed below. We are also grateful to the National Endowment for Democracy for partnering us and supporting this research project. All errors and omissions are our own.

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¹ You can access our collection of relevant publications at: https://politicalcapital.hu/library.php?category_list=1&category_id=6&category_gb=Authoritarian%20Influence

² Christopher Walker, “What Is ‘Sharp Power’?,” *Journal of Democracy* 29, no. 3 (2018): 9–23; Christopher Walker, Santhi Kalathil, and Jessica Ludwig, “The Cutting Edge of Sharp Power,” *Journal of Democracy* 31, no. 1 (2020): 124–37.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The resistance of EU institutions

- **Generally, we found that authoritarian third countries such as Russia and China usually have a more challenging time influencing European institutions than national institutions.** A superpower with a clear chain of command (especially Russia with its “vertical of power”) do not necessarily find it easy dealing with a hybrid organization such as the EU, where power is distributed among several institutions, following a completely different logic than nation-states. The authoritarian logic is incompatible with the Union’s formal and complicated bureaucracy, often regarded as inconsistent, too complex, non-predictable, and hard to access.
- **Authoritarian pressure within the European Union is traditionally best applied through member states via bilateral connections and less through the European Union.** Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov openly admitted that when he said that “I would appreciate and prefer a situation where each EU member country would be guided by its national interests.”³
- **Based on our results, the EP is the most hawkish European institution. Directly elected MEPs generally critical of authoritarian regimes, including the Kremlin, have a confident majority in the European Parliament.** This majority is only threatened if mainstream parliamentary groups are divided. Authoritarian powers have an easier task in the Council of the European Union, where foreign policy decisions are made with unanimity, meaning that a single member state can block any initiative. Still, influencing decisions prove difficult there as well, as the sanctions against Russia show: it is kept in place despite the reluctance of many member states in the

EU, such as Hungary, Slovakia, Greece, Italy, and so on. It also shows the strength of EU institutions in general in exerting normative pressure on its members.

- **The European Parliament has practically become the “conscience” of EU foreign policy, articulating positions that are based on the core values of the EU.** And while conscience does not always drive behavior, it does so in many cases – and prompts guilt when it cannot

Where you sit is where you stand: more malign influence on the fringes

- **Fringe parliamentary groups, the far-right Identity and Democracy (ID) and the far-left European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL) are the most supportive of authoritarian regimes, as well as most non-attached MEPs.** This is a significant minority of 20% of the MEPs, although it is insufficient to block important decisions if there is a broad consensus among mainstream forces. The majority of these fringe groups would be happy to see an EU rapprochement with Russia and the lifting sanctions on third countries. If the electoral results of these parties improve as a result of the pandemic and the crisis in its wake, it would undoubtedly give authoritarian powers more influence over European (and national) policy-making.
- **The largest mainstream EP groups (European People’s Party, Renew Europe, Socialists & Democrats) are generally highly critical of autocratic practices,** and they place more substantial normative pressure on its members, resulting in more consistent voting.

³ “Spain: Russia Sanctions ‘Beneficial for No One,’” EUobserver, accessed September 1, 2020, <https://euobserver.com/foreign/127940>.

- **Far-right MEPs from the ID group (e.g., from the Italian Lega or the Belgian Vlaams Belang) are often incredibly supportive of the Kremlin, but more critical on communist and leftist regimes (e.g., China, Venezuela).** A combination of three factors might explain this discrepancy: (1) ideology: genuine admiration for Russian policies built on alleged national sovereignty and pride, (2) media: the influence of official and unofficial pro-Russian media and the coverage they provide, and (3) direct outreach: potential support from the Kremlin for these parties financially, diplomatically, and via networks. Moreover, far-right MEPs often advocate for policies to “Make the EU Weak Again,” arguing for a foreign policy driven by nation-states instead of the EU institutions.
- **The radical right GUE/NGL’s members are the sharpest critics of the United States and the Trump administration in the European Parliament,** advocating for the EU to stop “blindly following” Washington. **They are highly protective of the policies of not only the Kremlin but Beijing and Caracas as well.**
- **The seven countries where we found the most MEPs supportive of authoritarian practices is a diverse club of Western and Southern member states (Germany, France, UK, Ireland, Greece and Italy, Cyprus).** These national delegations are prone to supporting authoritarian states due to having large populist right-wing and left-wing parties in their ranks.
- **There are numerous national parties very supportive of authoritarians that are either members of the ruling coalition of an EU member state (e.g., PODEMOS) or support ruling coalitions externally (e.g., Portuguese Communist Party, Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia).** Therefore, they can be essential pathways for authoritarian regimes to influence European policies.

More hawkish parliamentarians in Central and Southeastern Europe

- **Central and Eastern European states (V4 + Austria, Romania, Bulgaria) are generally tougher on Russia and other authoritarian powers than the average EU member state.** In this group, the national delegation of Czechia and Bulgaria are the least critical nations, but they are still considerably more likely to condemn autocrats, including the Kremlin, than the above-mentioned group of seven, mostly older member states.
- **MEPs with open support for the Kremlin and other authoritarian regimes are present in Czechia, Slovakia, Austria, and Bulgaria.** Bulgaria is home to a mainstream party with a very lenient stance against repressive governments, the Bulgarian Socialist Party. MEPs from the Hungarian ruling party Fidesz generally voted in line with the European People’s Party (EPP) – sometimes in contradiction with the preferred policies of Budapest, as PM Viktor Orbán has called on lifting sanctions against Russia repeatedly and blocked EU statements critical of China.

EU foreign policy and transatlantic relations

- European foreign policy will be one of the critical factors in the discussions on the future of the Union. **The European parliament has a clear, very ambitious foreign policy vision for the EU, but it is being hindered by unanimous decision-making in the Council of the EU.**
- EU institutions, particularly the Parliament, are generally more supportive of several policies advocated by the United States (e.g., pushing back against Huawei) than most member states. Therefore, **the EU in general and European Parliament in particular can be crucial in maintaining and rebuilding Transatlantic cooperation and coordination in foreign policy at times when the benefits of such cooperation are repeatedly questioned both in Washington and European capitals.**

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Towards a more democratic and more efficient EU foreign policy

- **The European Parliament is currently not a key player in EU foreign policy – but it should be.** A larger say for parliamentarians in foreign policy decisions could help the Union become a stronger player on the international scene, which is one of the key declared goals of EU leaders. **Moreover, increasing the role of the European Parliament, the only directly elected body in the Union, would make EU foreign policy more value-driven and, also, more democratic.** The European Parliament and specifically its Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET) should always have a role when drafting both EU strategic documents and statements.

- **When it comes to the Council of the EU, the principle of unanimity in decisions should be changed to qualified majority** – which would mean that one member state could not shipwreck EU decisions in this field. EU institutions, especially the Council, could already find ways to circumnavigate obstructionist policies.⁴⁵ These changes and practices could help the EU react quicker to global events rhetorically. Additionally, longer Council presidency terms (than the current six months) could help make the foreign policy agenda of the EU more ambitious under current institutional settings.

- **As long as the institutional framework remains unchanged, the European Parliament must be more active in communicating the results of foreign policy preferences,** since these are not always mirrored entirely in the statements of other EU institutions, let alone in those of national governments. The MEPS and the information offices of the European Parliament

in the capitals of member states must play a more active role in the direct communication of foreign policy priorities within the member states. The EU should support journalists in member states to incentivize broader covering of EU foreign policy issues.

- **The Conference on the Future of the European Union must address the issues surrounding EU foreign policy-making.** This includes the introduction of qualified majority voting in the Foreign Affairs Council, an increased role for the European Parliament in the area of foreign affairs and developing a more effective framework for military and civilian EU missions.

Call Brussels and Strasbourg

- **The diplomatic efforts of western, non-EU states such as the United States should have a stronger focus on the European Union in general, and the European Parliament in particular than solely on bilateral ties** – as European institutions seem more willing to step up against authoritarian influence than most member states.

Policies to push back authoritarian influence

- **The EU must implement an effective investment screening program** to avoid the acquisition of important European companies by actors from hostile third countries. This is especially important in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent economic crisis that opens the door wide for blackmailing practices. Moreover, the EU should close any possible loopholes that allow member states to award large contracts to companies from authoritarian third countries without a transparent public procurement tender.

4 For instance when Finnish UN representative to the UN Kai Sauer excluded Hungary as he read out the names of EU countries he would be speaking for in a statement criticizing Israel's conduct towards Palestinians.

5 "Hungary Accuses EU of Ignoring Its Veto over Israel Criticism," euronews, May 2, 2019, <https://www.euronews.com/2019/05/02/eu-ignores-hungary-s-last-minute-veto-on-statement-criticising-israel>.

- **The European Parliament should improve the vetting of the MEPs as well as the lobbying rules on MEPs.** A public personal meeting tracker for Parliamentarians, indicating the meetings of the MEPs with representatives of political and economic organizations from third countries would increase transparency by giving more information to experts, journalists, and citizens on who is trying to influence European decisions
- The cybersecurity of European institutions must be continuously improved, as well as the cybersecurity knowledge of European officials. This would help avoid any incidents where authoritarian propaganda efforts use (falsified or authentic) leaked documents to manipulate public opinion. **Thus, the European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA) should consistently monitor the capabilities of the European Parliament and individual MEPs to avoid cyberattacks.** MEPs and their assistants should receive basic cybersecurity training to be able to identify potential threats easily, e.g., phishing e-mails.

INTRODUCTION

The European Communities, the predecessor of the European Union, was described by former Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs Mark Eyskens as an “economic giant, a political dwarf, and a military worm” a few days before the start of the Gulf War after the bloc failed to respond to the Gulf crisis adequately.⁶ The European Union’s opportunities to conduct its foreign policy have been expanded since then. The Maastricht Treaty (1992) made the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) the second pillar of EU cooperation.⁷ The Treaty of Amsterdam introduced, among others, the rarely used “constructive abstention,” allowing member states not to apply a foreign policy decision, while still accepting that it commits the European Union.⁸ The Treaty also created the post of the “High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy.”⁹ The Lisbon Treaty bolstered the position of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR/VP) and created the European External Action Service, which is under the authority of the HR/VP.¹⁰ The treaty also strengthened the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP), notably by allowing a group of EU members to deepen defense cooperation if they are willing to within the EU framework. As a result, 25 member states are currently participating in various projects agreed by the Council of the European Union (Council), focusing on training and facilities, maritime affairs, land forces, air systems, or cyberspace.¹¹

These changes have certainly made the EU more visible on the international scene. At the same time, the European Union’s weight in international affairs is lagging behind its economic weight. **Unquestionably, some promising steps have been taken. Several EU agreements signed with third countries have included human rights clauses, leading to the suspension of economic cooperation with some states.**¹² Most recently, the Commission has decided to partially withdraw Cambodia’s preferential access to the EU due to the country’s deteriorating record on fundamental rights.¹³ Moreover, EU foreign ministers have decided to impose sanctions on a variety of third countries, including Russia, Belarus, Turkey and Iran.¹⁴ The European Union is also running six military missions or operations, and eleven civilian missions in the frames of the CSDP (e.g., Ukraine, Mediterranean Sea, Somalia, Central African Republic, etc.).

These developments do not mean that the European Union has become a remarkably effective actor on the international scene. In our opinion, there are two main reasons for this. First, the Foreign Affairs Council still votes unanimously on the external policies of the Union. **Thus, even a single member state can hinder the effectiveness of EU-level decisions or veto them altogether.** Discussions on introducing qualified majority voting (QMV) in this area have been ongoing but remain

6 Craig R. Whitney, “WAR IN THE GULF: EUROPE; Gulf Fighting Shatters Europeans’ Fragile Unity,” *The New York Times*, January 25, 1991, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/1991/01/25/world/war-in-the-gulf-europe-gulf-fighting-shatters-europeans-fragile-unity.html>.

7 Tamás Kende and Tamás Szűcs, *Bevezetés Az Európai Unió Politikáiba*, First (Budapest: Comply Kiadó Jogi és Üzleti Tartalomszolgáltató Kft, 2011).

8 “Article 31, Treaty of the European Union,” accessed August 13, 2020, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:12016M031&from=EN>.

9 “Shaping of a Common Security and Defence Policy,” Text, European External Action Service, accessed August 13, 2020, https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/common-security-and-defence-policy-csdp/5388/shaping-common-security-and-defence-policy_en.

10 Jana Puglierin, “Priorities for the EU’s New Foreign Policy Agenda up to 2024” (German Council on Foreign Affairs, 2019), https://dgap.org/sites/default/files/article_pdfs/dgap_analysis_nr1-nov2019_web_0.pdf.

11 “PESCO | Member States Driven,” accessed August 13, 2020, <https://pesco.europa.eu/>.

12 “REPORT Report on the Human Rights and Democracy Clause in European Union Agreements - A6-0004/2006,” accessed August 13, 2020, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+REPORT+A6-2006-0004+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN>.

13 “Commission Decides to Partially Withdraw Cambodia’s Preferential Access to the EU Market,” European Commission, accessed August 13, 2020, <https://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/press/index.cfm?id=2113>.

14 “EU Sanctions Map,” accessed August 13, 2020, <https://www.sanctionsmap.eu/#/main>.

unsuccessful. However, several, typically smaller member states are against QMV because they feel like it would hinder their ability to represent their interests in Europe and limit their sovereignty.

Second, the role of the European Parliament (EP), the only directly elected body of the EU, remains limited. It is entitled to be kept informed on foreign policy decisions, and it can address recommendations to the Council. Moreover, it needs to be consulted on the general guidelines of the CFSP. The HR/VP must ensure that the Parliament's views are taken into consideration in this policy field.¹⁵ **Increasing the influence of the European Parliament on foreign policy decisions would also make external policies of the European Union more democratic and more principled.**

PATHWAYS OF INFLUENCE

BY AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES



PATHWAYS OF INFLUENCE BY AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES

As the European Union became a more prevalent actor on the international scene, influencing EU decisions became more important for third countries. Taking into account the decision-making methods of the Union, there are several (sometimes overlapping) paths third countries can take to advocate for their interests. All these practices can be well described with the umbrella terms “sharp power.”¹⁶ The term refers to the practices of closed authoritarian superpowers to manipulate democratic institutions (often with the help of ‘allies’ within), and exploit the weaknesses of open democratic systems to change decisions, spread confusion and undermine the integrity of democratic institutions.

First, they can exploit the connections between businessmen, lobbyists and European officials.

According to investigative journalists, Klaus Mangold, a businessman with close connections to the Russian administration, the Hungarian government and former European Commissioner Guenther Oettinger, was influential in both striking a deal between Hungary and Rosatom for the construction of the Paks II Nuclear Power Plant, and in helping the EU greenlight the project.¹⁷ Oettinger was energy commissioner when Hungary announced the construction of the new nuclear power plant, but he had moved on to another portfolio by the time the EU launched an infringement procedure against Budapest. Oettinger likely possessed insider information that could have helped the Orbán regime, but he denied talking about the Paks project with PM Orbán when he visited Hungary in May 2016 on Klaus Mangold’s plane.¹⁸ Euractiv, in contrast, reported that the Commission’s Director-General for



1. Photo Klaus Mangold, Guenther Oettinger and PM Orbán in 2016. Photo: Koszticsák Szilárd, MTI/MTVA

¹⁶ Walker, “What Is ‘Sharp Power’?”; Walker, Kalathil, and Ludwig, “The Cutting Edge of Sharp Power.”

¹⁷ Eva S. Balogh, “The Men behind Paks II: Günther Oettinger and Klaus Mangold,” *Hungarian Spectrum* (blog), November 18, 2016, <https://hungarianspectrum.org/2016/11/17/the-men-behind-paks-ii-gunther-oettinger-and-klaus-mangold/>.

¹⁸ András Szabó, “The Mysterious German behind Orban’s Russian Deals,” *EUobserver*, accessed August 13, 2020, <https://euobserver.com/political/139492>.

Energy Dominique Ristori, who briefly worked under Oettinger when he was energy commissioner, fed former Hungarian Secretary of State Balázs Sonkodi arguments that could be used to justify a lack of public procurement in the Paks case.¹⁹

The second possible pathway to authoritarian lobbying efforts is influencing national governments, whose representatives sit and vote in the Council and the European Council (EUCO).

This is especially effective in the case of areas that require unanimous decisions, such as foreign policy. The EU failed to adopt a statement calling on China to abide by an arbitral tribunal ruling on the South China Sea because of vetoes (allegedly) by Greece, Hungary and Croatia.²⁰ Greece blocked an EU statement at the United Nations, criticizing China's human rights record.²¹ Italy, under its former MS-Lega coalition government, blocked adding the name of then-Duma Deputy Olga Leonidovna Timofeeva to the list of sanctioned Russian individuals.²² The relative "successes" of influencing EU policy via the Council is among the reasons prompting authoritarian regimes, particularly Russia, to interfere with elections throughout Europe.

A further possible option is going through the Commission. Authoritarian countries might hope that EU member states that are friendly towards them nominate commissioners who would be more willing to represent their interests in the European Commission (EC) due to (a) sympathy or (b) political

and business ties. However, this, so far, has proven to be a challenging task, as the commissioner-designates go through thorough parliamentary scrutiny before they are confirmed.²³ Furthermore, leading a portfolio is not a one-(wo)man show, the staff and the leaders of the DGs, the bureaucracy of the Commission might successfully undermine initiatives of Commissioners that diverge from the mainstream.²⁴

Fourth, national parties can be a key gateway for authoritarian governments to the member states and the EU alike.

There have already been earlier examples of such successes. For instance, the Slovak National Party (SNS), a coalition member in the former SMER-led Slovak government, managed to block pro-Western foreign and security policy documents in the national parliament. The SNS could also efficiently block the Defense and Cooperation Agreement between the US and Slovakia. Former SNS-nominated Speaker of the Slovak House Andrej Danko is known to have had close contacts with Kremlin officials.²⁵ Other national officials, such as the openly pro-Kremlin Czech President Milos Zeman and the Bulgarian Socialist Party-nominated Bulgarian President Rumen Radev can also be targeted by lobbying efforts. The representatives of parties holding favorable views on Russia have consistently supported the Kremlin or China on the European level as well, both in statements²⁶ and with their votes.²⁷

19 Jorge Valero, "Commission Notes Cast Doubt over Approval of Russian-Backed Nuclear Project," *Www.Euractiv.Com* (blog), January 9, 2017, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy/news/commission-notes-cast-doubt-over-approval-of-russian-backed-nuclear-project/>.

20 Georgi Gotev, "EU Unable to Adopt Statement Upholding South China Sea Ruling," *Www.Euractiv.Com* (blog), July 14, 2016, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/eu-unable-to-adopt-statement-upholding-south-china-sea-ruling/>.

21 Robin Emmott and Koutantou Angeliki, "Greece Blocks EU Statement on China Human Rights at U.N.," *Reuters*, June 19, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-eu-un-rights-idUSKBN1990FP>.

22 Jacopo Barigazzi, "Italy Blocks Adding Name to Russia Sanctions List," *POLITICO*, September 13, 2018, <https://www.politico.eu/article/italy-blocks-adding-name-to-russia-sanctions-list-ukraine/>.

23 The Parliament's Legal Affairs Committee blocked the nomination of Hungarian commissioner-designate László Trócsányi in 2019, partially because of concerns about his connections to Russia; e.g., the involvement of the Nagy and Trócsányi law firm in a contract concerning the Paks II project.

24 Florian Eder and Lili Bayer, "Russia Concerns Fueled Rejection of Hungary's Commission Nominee," *POLITICO*, September 27, 2019, <https://www.politico.eu/article/laszlo-trocsanyi-russia-concerns-fueled-rejection-of-hungary-commission-nominee-romania-rovana-plumb/>.

25 Patrik Szicherle et al., *Doors Wide Shut: Russian, Chinese and Turkish Authoritarian Influence in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia*, n.d.

26 "The Kremlin connections of the European far-right," *Political Capital*, December 22, 2015, https://politicalcapital.hu/library.php?article_id=68.

27 "European Parliament: the primary source of immunity to foreign authoritarian influence?," *Political Capital*, February 19, 2020, https://politicalcapital.hu/library.php?article_id=2496.

Last but not least, influencing the decisions of the European Parliament might also be a possibility that many authoritarian regimes, especially Russia, try to exploit. The EP has co-decision powers in multiple areas of interest to third countries (e.g., international trade, EU accession of potential new members, Internal Market, etc.), where earning favorable results could have a direct impact. In the case of foreign policy, the EP's powers are more limited, but a – for instance – pro-Russian EP majority could go a long way in convincing some member states to veto sanctions against Russia in the Council. The possibilities of having such a majority are evident in the policy proposals submitted by the far-right Identity and Democracy ID and the far-left Confederal Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL) groups in the European Parliament:

The European far-right ID

- wanted to present cooperation with Russia as a “political, economic and strategic interest;”²⁸
- claimed that there is no “irrefutable evidence of Russian interference in European elections;
- blamed EU institutions for spreading pro-EU propaganda.²⁹

The radical left GUE/NGL:

- submitted a proposal for a resolution calling for “solidarity” with third countries, which would materialize in the “immediate end of sanctions and economic blockages applied to third countries that compromise the health and wellbeing of people during this pandemic,”³⁰ including Russia;³¹
- and the far-left group would have deemed the national security law for the Hong Kong SAR necessary.³²



2. Photo Former Italian Minister of Interior Matteo Salvini (Lega) with a “No sanctions against Russia” shirt in Moscow. Source: <http://radiolemborg.com/ua-articles/ua-allarticles/matteo-salvini-backs-russia-and-attacks-ukraine-and-undermines-italy-s-place-in-eu>

28 Julie Lechanteux, “MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION Pursuant to Rule 143 of the Rules of Procedure on Russia’s Participation in the G7 Summit,” 2020, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/B-9-2020-0201_EN.pdf.

29 Christine Andersen, Nicolaus Fest, and Lars Patrik Berg, “MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION to Wind up the Debate on the Statements by the Council and the Commission Pursuant to Rule 132(2) of the Rules of Procedure on Foreign Electoral Interference and Disinformation in National and European Democratic Processes,” 2019, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/B-9-2019-0111_EN.html.

30 Manon Aubry and Martin Schirdewan, “MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION on EU Coordinated Action to Combat the COVID-19 Pandemic and Its Consequences,” accessed August 25, 2020, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/B-9-2020-0148_EN.html.

31 Katerina Konecna, “ZRUŠME SANKCE,” April 16, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/konecna.k/posts/10157394190298507>

32 Idoia Villaneuva Ruiiz, “MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION on the PRC National Security Law for Hong Kong and the Need for the EU to Defend Hong Kong’s High Degree of Autonomy,” accessed August 25, 2020, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/B-9-2020-0193_EN.html.

In terms of Russian efforts to influence the EP, one of the most notable events has so far been the revelation that the daughter of Russian President Vladimir Putin's spokesman, Yelizaveta Peskova, became an intern of then-MEP Aymeric Chauprade, who gained his seat as a member of the National Front but quit the party in 2015. Peskova had access to the intranet of the European Parliament, EP buildings in Brussels and Strasbourg, and all committee and other meetings.³³ The other particularly worrying case is that Béla Kovács, a former Jobbik-affiliated and later independent MEP, was charged with espionage for Moscow by the Hungarian authorities in 2014, and he behaved as a lobbyist for the Kremlin with the financial help of Russia.³⁴ While the Kremlin indeed focuses more on interfering in national elections, the European Parliament elections have also become a target of the Putin regime, and will possibly be in the focus of attention of other authoritarian countries as well.

Representing the Kremlin's interests on the national and European levels can be a beneficial business. Marine Le Pen's party, then called National Front, secured a USD 11.7 million loan from a Russian bank to help finance her campaigns in 2014³⁵ after she openly supported the annexation of Crimea. Russia and Lega-affiliated personnel discussed ways to funnel funding to the party that wanted to renew Europe, which "has to be close to Russia."³⁶ These offers certainly would not have materialized without open support for the Kremlin's policies. Moreover, these parties receive highly favorable coverage by a wide variety of official and unofficial pro-Kremlin media both internationally and domestically.³⁷

China, meanwhile, is using a carrot and stick approach, but it has so far been based mainly on its vast economic resources. Beijing promises considerable economic investments to EU member states, particularly the less prosperous ones. When promising these projects, China prefers to invest or sells the perception that it prefers to invest in countries that do not follow policies against its interests or step over its red lines concerning Taiwan, Hong Kong, or human rights issues.³⁸ China is regularly strengthening this perception: when Greece blocked the aforementioned EU statement in the UN, a Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson thanked the "relevant EU country for upholding the correct position."³⁹ Moreover, media rumors suggest that Beijing has successfully lobbied for moderating the language on an EEAS report on COVID-related disinformation.⁴⁰ The Chinese regime might start exploring more ways and new methods to influence EU decision-making in the future, as the relationship between Brussels and Beijing might become gradually more conflictual due to the latter's human rights abuses and treatment of Hong Kong, as well as disagreements concerning economic and trade ties.

33 Rikard Jozwiak, Gjerajina Tuhina, and Gregory Zhygalow, "Exclusive: Daughter Of Putin's Spokesman Working In European Parliament," RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, accessed August 13, 2020, <https://www.rferl.org/a/daughter-of-putin-s-spokesman-working-in-european-parliament/29789851.html>.

34 "The Kremlin connections of the European far-right."

35 Suzanne Daley and Maïa de la Baume, "French Far Right Gets Helping Hand With Russian Loan," *The New York Times*, December 1, 2014, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/02/world/europe/french-far-right-gets-helping-hand-with-russian-loan.html>.

36 Alberto Nardelli, "Revealed: The Explosive Secret Recording That Shows How Russia Tried To Funnel Millions To The 'European Trump,'" BuzzFeed News, accessed August 13, 2020, <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/albertonardelli/salvini-russia-oil-deal-secret-recording>.

37 Patrik Szicherle et al., *Investigating Russia's Role and the Kremlin's Interference in the 2019 EP Elections* (Budapest: Political Capital, 2019), https://www.politicalcapital.hu/pc-admin/source/documents/pc_russian_meddling_ep2019_eng_web_20190520.pdf.

38 Szicherle et al., *Doors Wide Shut: Russian, Chinese and Turkish Authoritarian Influence in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia*.

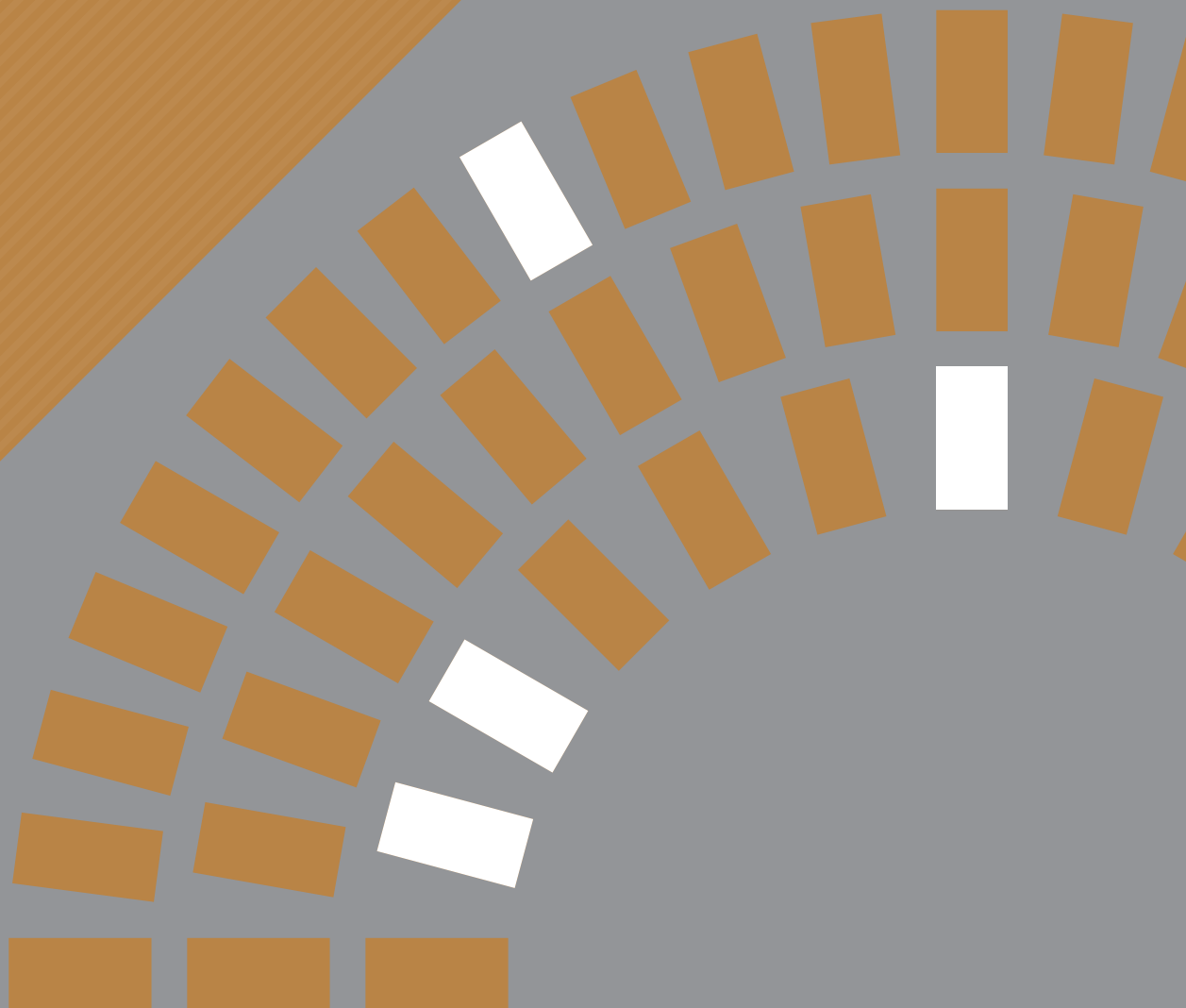
39 Emmott and Angeliki, "Greece Blocks EU Statement on China Human Rights at U.N."

40 Matt Apuzzo, "Pressured by China, E.U. Softens Report on Covid-19 Disinformation - The New York Times," accessed August 18, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/24/world/europe/disinformation-china-eu-coronavirus.html>.

PROJECT RATIONALE

Measuring authoritarian influence in the European Union is not an easy task. The decisions of the Council, particularly on foreign policy matters, are not always public, and we only have information on vetoes in this field from leaks from European diplomats. Consequently, the European Parliament, despite its limited role in foreign policy, is a much better target for such a project, as the votes of MEPs can be tracked if a resolution is decided by a roll-call vote (RCV).⁴¹ Thus, we decided to develop a method to quantify authoritarian and – in particular – the Kremlin’s influence in the EU by focusing on the EP, mainly on the level of individual MEPs, national parties, and parliamentary groups. This is still a valid approach because, as we discussed above, (1) there are several areas of interests to authoritarian regimes where the EP is a co-legislator, (2) the EP can offer input to the Council and the HR/VP on EU foreign policy and (3) the voting patterns exhibited by national parties in the EP could give us an estimate on how they would act if they had a meaningful influence on policies on the national level. **Focusing on the EP can help measure the vulnerability of parliamentary groups, national parties and individuals to foreign authoritarian influence.** To measure their vulnerability to authoritarian influence, we created two indexes, the Counter-authoritarian Index (CAI) and the Kremlin-critical Index (KCI). These indexes are scores ranging from 0 to 100, where 0 indicates the highest possible support for authoritarian regimes (CAI) and the Kremlin (KCI), respectively, and 100 shows the most critical approach to them.⁴²

**A SMALL FAN BASE
FOR AUTHORITARIANS:
VOTES IN THE
EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT**



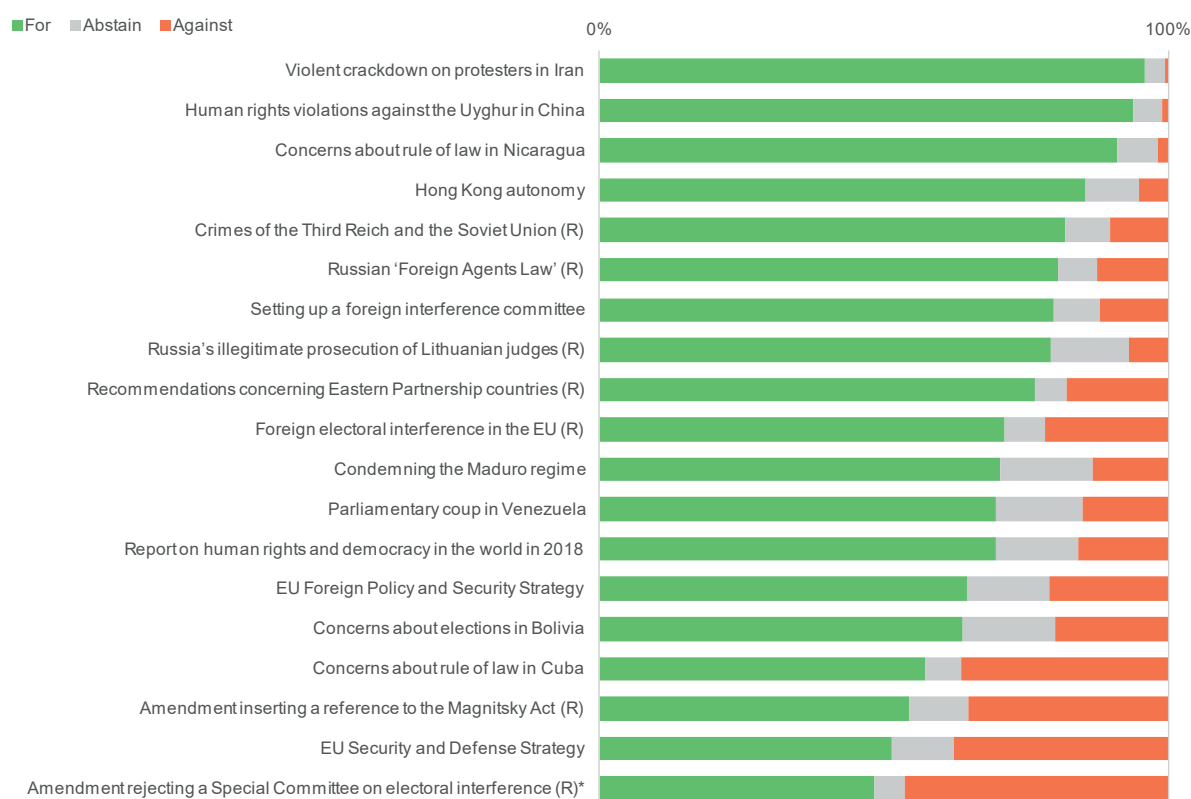
A SMALL FAN BASE FOR AUTHORITARIANS: VOTES IN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

HOW DOES THE PARLIAMENT VOTE?

The results of the votes show that there is a considerable majority in the European Parliament for stepping up against repressive governments, including the Putin regime.⁴³ The vast majority of the resolutions passed with around or over two-thirds of the vote. Several Kremlin-critical resolutions passed with even higher than two-thirds of support: 71% of MEPs approved the resolution condemning Russia for its efforts to interfere with European internal affairs, 79% condemned the illegal prosecution of Lithuanian judges by Moscow, and 81% agreed that sanctions against Russia could only be lifted if the country complied with all its obligations.

controversial. An amendment inserting a reference to the Magnitsky Act in the context of human rights violations to the resolution on political prisoners in Russia only gained the support of 51% of MEPs.

The only amendment approved by the EP that was beneficial to authoritarian regimes also concerned the Kremlin. Parliamentarians voted for an amendment that deleted a paragraph from the Russia-focused text on foreign electoral interference, which suggested setting up a special parliamentary committee dealing specifically with this issue. In this case, mainstream parliamentary groups were divided, and – thus – the amendment passed with the help of Putin’s supporters. Mainstream backers of the



1. Figure The results of the 19 votes included in the study. *This amendment is the only case where an 'against' vote (red) was considered to be critical of authoritarian regimes because it deleted a part of the original text on foreign electoral interference. (R in parentheses marks votes predominantly concerning Russia).

Some Russia-related votes proved to be more controversial. An amendment argued that other committees, such

as LIBE, were already dealing with this specific problem. However, the European Parliament approved the establishment of a special committee on foreign interference only a few months later with 80% of support. This committee will help (1) keep authoritarian influencing attempts, mainly from Russia and China, in the spotlight of attention, (2) develop expertise on the topic among MEPs, and (3) as a result, help formulate more effective and faster policy responses to the threat.

Other more tightly contested votes included the reports on the implementation of the EU's Foreign and Security Policy and the Common Security and Defense Policy, as well as resolutions concerning Bolivia and condemning Cuba for rule of law deficiencies. The only other text with a rejection rate of over 20% was the above-mentioned resolution on foreign electoral interference, which was disapproved by 22% of parliamentarians.

Most MEPs are highly critical of authoritarian regimes and practices. The average Counter-authoritarian Index (CAI) of 783 MEPs (including British parliamentarians, MEPs who were replaced, etc.) is 74.57, and the average Kremlin-critical Index (KCI) score is 71.6. The results indicate that, in general, MEPs, while relatively critical of all authoritarian third countries, were more willing to support steps against regimes other than the Kremlin.

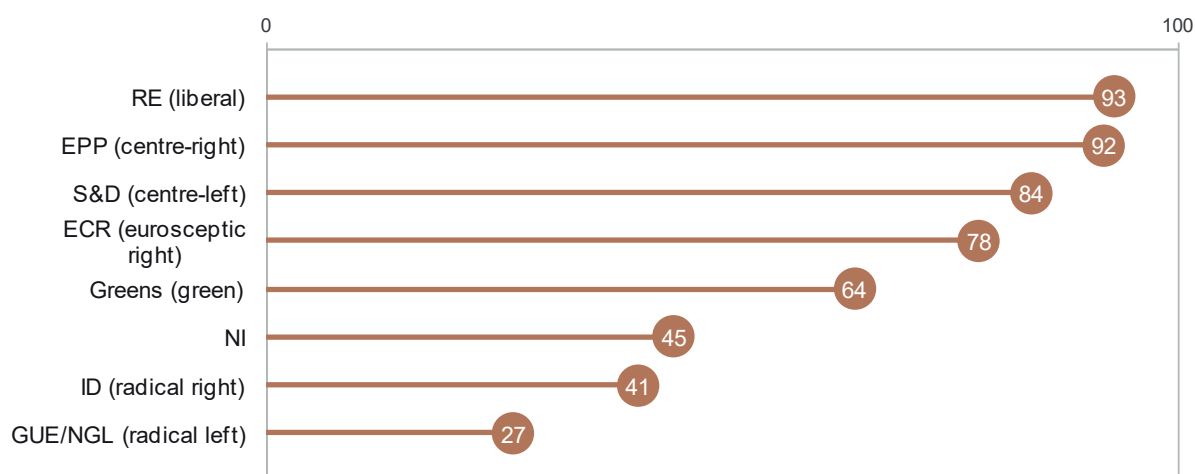
On the Counter-authoritarian Index (CAI), most MEPs have a score of over 80. The situation is very similar in the case of Kremlin-Critical Index (KCI) scores as

well; they are rather hawkish on Russia, indicated by a score of over 80 for the majority of representatives, while there is a much smaller number of MEPs with a very low number of points.

HOW DO POLITICAL GROUPS VOTE?

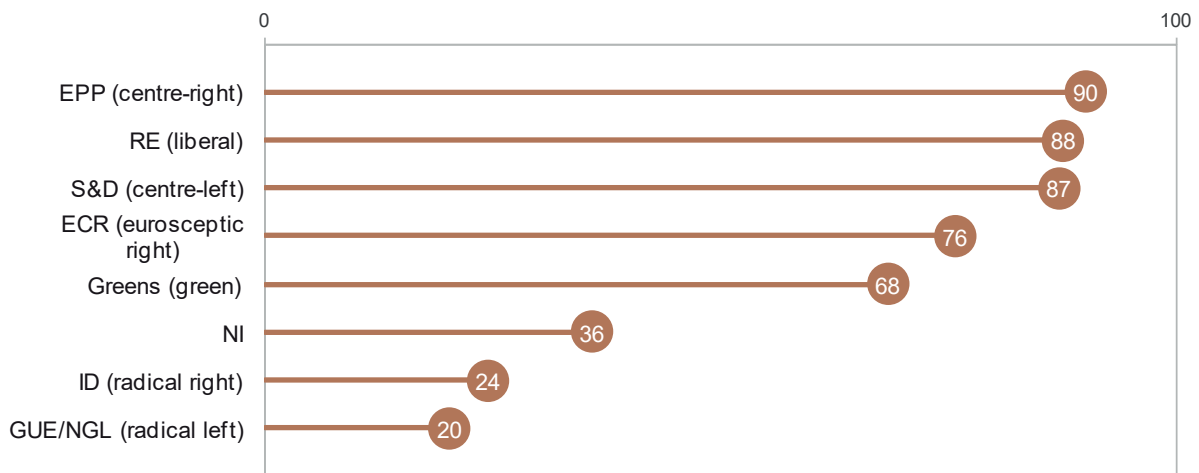
The Renew Europe Group (RE) is the most critical of authoritarian regimes in general, but the European People's Party (EPP) is not far behind them. The EPP is followed by the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament (S&D) with considerably lower support for countering authoritarian influence.- The European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) still have an above-average score on this index, while the rest of the parliamentary groups are below that, albeit the Greens only slightly. The Identity and Democracy Group (ID) and the Confederal Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL) are the most supportive of repressive administrations. The rankings are almost the same in the KCI's case, but **the EPP is more stringent when it comes to the Kremlin than RE.**

ID and GUE/NGL were almost entirely unwilling to support several decisions related to authoritarian regimes and practices. Less than 5% of ID MEPs approved the decision to set up a foreign interference committee, reports on the EU Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), Security and Defense Policy (CSDP), and human rights and democracy in the world in 2018, the recommendations concerning Eastern Partnership (EAP) countries, the resolution

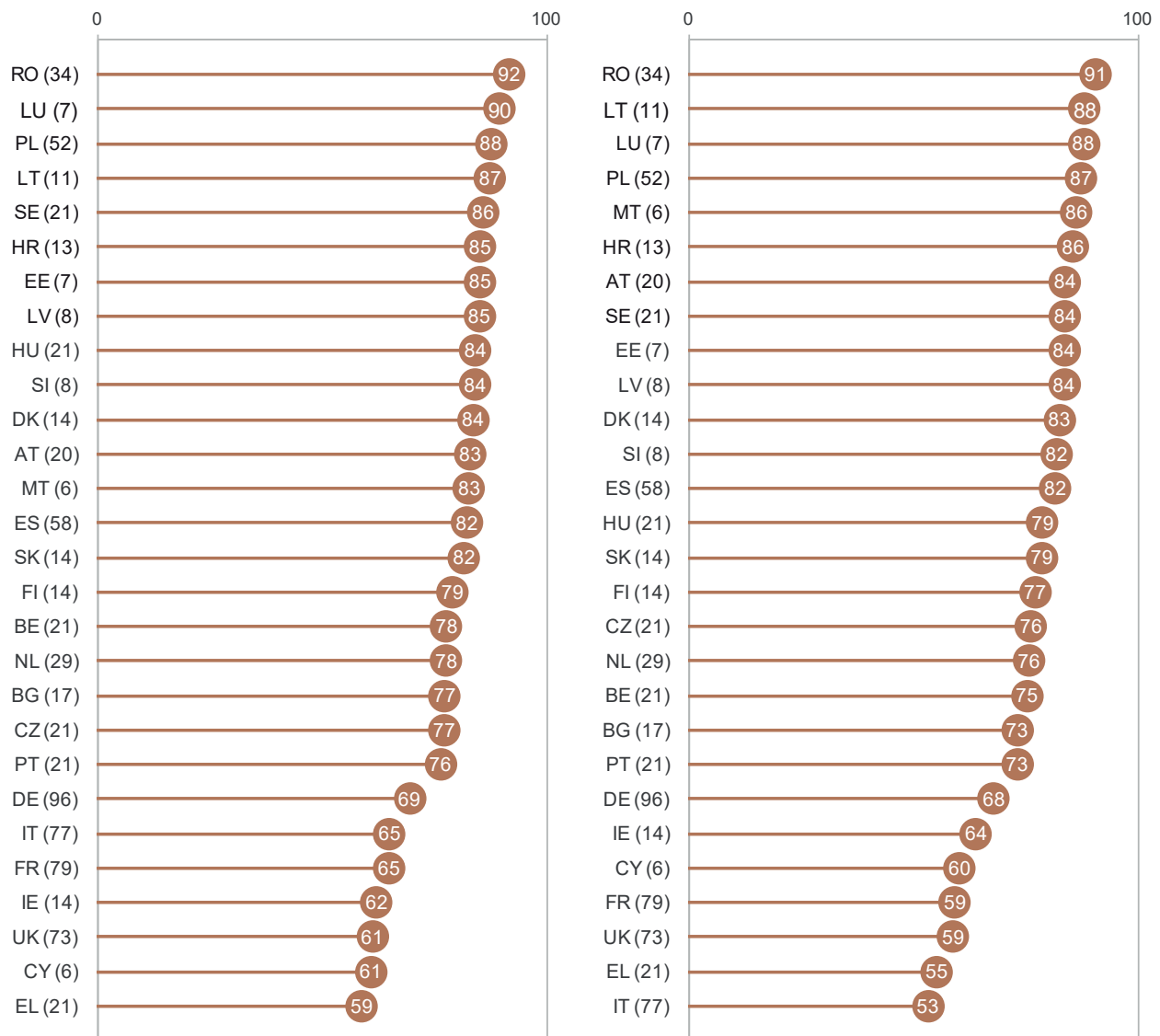


2. Figure European parliamentary groups ranked based on their attitudes towards authoritarian regimes (average per MEP from a given group). The higher number represents a more critical stance of authoritarian practices.

A SMALL FAN BASE FOR AUTHORITARIANS: VOTES IN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT



3. Figure European parliamentary groups ranked based on their attitudes towards the Kremlin (average per MEP from a given group). The higher number represents a more critical stance concerning the Kremlin.



4&5 Figures: Member states ranked based on their attitudes toward authoritarian regimes (average per MEP from given member state). The higher number represents a more critical stance on authoritarian practices in general (left) and towards the Kremlin specifically (right). (Number of MEPs in parentheses).

on foreign electoral interference, concerns about Bolivia, and the amendment on the Magnitsky Act.

No GUE/NGL MEPs approved the decision on setting up a foreign electoral interference committee, the reports on the CSFP and CSDP, recommendations on EAP countries, and the resolutions condemning the Maduro regime, crimes of the Third Reich and the USSR, foreign electoral interference, and rule of law in Cuba. Less than 5% of approved the amendment on the Magnitsky Act and the resolution on Bolivia.

Mainstream parliamentary groups were less likely to show such little support for proposals. Less than 5% of the ECR approved the three strategic reports (CFSP, CSDP, human rights), and few green MEPs supported the CSDP report and the resolution on Bolivia. The latter group was also very hesitant in supporting resolutions condemning the Maduro regime.

HOW NATIONAL DELEGATIONS VOTE?

Looking at the rankings of member states' delegations, **Romania, Luxembourg, Poland, Lithuania and Croatia are the most hawkish.** In contrast, Germany, Italy, France, Ireland, the UK, Cyprus and Greece are among the worst performers in both cases. **The worst performers are generally countries with relatively large Eurosceptic delegations,** such as the AfD from Germany, the M5S and Lega from Italy, National Rally from France, the Brexit Party from the UK, or Syriza from Greece. **Germany, Cyprus, France, Ireland, the UK,**

Greece and Italy have a significant gap behind other member states in terms of pushing back against authoritarian practices. Italy's EP delegation, on average, is much more lenient on Russia than on other regimes or general issues.

HAWKS AND DOVES AMONG NATIONAL DELEGATIONS

Radical left and radical right parties from nation states are the most "dovish" when it comes to authoritarian influence. Our list of worst performers (with at least 5 MEPs) consists of radical right parties such as the Italian Lega, Brexit Party, and Golden Dawn. They are accompanied by smaller nationalist and far-left parties; most importantly, PODEMOS, a member of the current ruling government coalition of Spain. Some external supporters of ruling coalitions, such as the Portuguese Communist Party and the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia, also have very low scores on both indexes.

Table 1 also shows that several of the bottom seven parties are much less critical of the Kremlin than of other regimes or general issues, especially Lega. Among the parties outside of the top seven, the Belgian Vlaams Belang (CAI: 51.15, KCI: 32.06) can be highlighted as a delegation that is considerably more critical of other third countries than Russia. Member parties of the EPP, Renew, and S&D fill the top half of the table based on their attitude towards authoritarian regimes (Table 2), including a member of the ruling German coalition, the

| Party Name | Group | Country | CAI per MEP | KCI per MEP |
|------------------------------|---------|---------|-------------|-------------|
| Die Linke (5) | GUE/NGL | Germany | 14.44 | 3.05 |
| France Unbowed (5) | GUE/NGL | France | 29.28 | 15.24 |
| National Rally (23) | ID | France | 30.70 | 20.08 |
| Alternative for Germany (11) | ID | Germany | 33.74 | 21.39 |
| Syriza (6) | ID | Greece | 37.07 | 31.75 |
| Brexit Party (28) | GUE/NGL | UK | 37.13 | 25.04 |
| Lega (29) | ID | Italy | 49.32 | 23.28 |

1. Table The Worst performers: national parties least critical of authoritarian regimes. (Number of MEPs in parentheses).⁴⁴

⁴⁴ We only disclose the rankings of parties with at least 5 MEPs in this particular case, as they have more influence on the outcome of EP votes than smaller groups.

| Party Name | Group | Country | CAI per MEP | KCI per MEP |
|--|-------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Austrian People's Party | EPP | Austria | 100 | 100 |
| En Marche | RE | France | 96.99 | 92.06 |
| People's Party for Freedom and Democracy | RE | Netherlands | 96.33 | 91.43 |
| Civil Platform | EPP | Poland | 96.15 | 95.00 |
| Social Democratic Party | S&D | Portugal | 95.30 | 95.56 |
| Social Democratic Party | S&D | Sweden | 94.87 | 93.33 |
| Christian Social Union | EPP | Germany | 94.87 | 92.22 |

2. Table The best performers: national parties most critical of authoritarian regimes (with at least 5 MEPs)

Christian Social Union (CSU). The largest German ruling party, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), is not far behind its smaller coalition partner, and the CDU is more critical of the Kremlin than the CSU – but the differences are minimal in both cases. The highest-ranked party from any other group is the New Flemish Alliance (ECR, 66th overall), while the Swedish Greens (110th overall) are the most hawkish

in the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance. 88 individual MEPs are entirely critical of authoritarian regimes and the Kremlin (maximum CAI and KCI score), and more than that are entirely critical of the Kremlin (140). 267 MEPs out of the 783 overall have a CAI score of over 90, and 262 of them have a KCI value of over 90.

| MEP Name | Country | Party | CAI | KCI |
|-------------------------|-------------|----------------------------|-------|-----|
| Vincenzo Sofo* | Italy | Lega | 50.43 | 0 |
| Chris MacManus* | Ireland | Sinn Féin | 34.19 | 0 |
| Dorien Rookmaker* | Netherlands | GO Realisme & Daadkracht | 33.33 | 0 |
| Eugenia Rodríguez Palop | Spain | PODEMOS | 18.62 | 0 |
| Marc Botenga | Belgium | Belgian Workers' Party | 18.62 | 0 |
| Jean-Lin Lacapelle* | France | National Rally | 17.09 | 0 |
| Cornelia Ernst | Germany | Die Linke | 15.92 | 0 |
| Martin Schirdewan | Germany | Die Linke | 13.50 | 0 |
| Helmut Scholz | Germany | Die Linke | 13.23 | 0 |
| Martina Michels | Germany | Die Linke | 10.66 | 0 |
| Sandra Pereira | Portugal | Portuguese Communist Party | 10.53 | 0 |
| Marcel de Graaff* | Netherlands | Party for Freedom | 0 | 0 |

3. Table List of MEPs with a KCI score of 0, meaning that they did not even criticize the Kremlin a single time. We indicated all MEPs who gained their seat after Brexit with a * symbol.

The number of MEPs with a CAI score of less than 10, who are refraining from criticizing authoritarian regimes in basically all cases, is two: Kostas Papadakis from Greece and Marcel de Graaf⁴⁵ from the Netherlands, with the latter achieving a score of zero. The number of MEPs with a KCI of under 10 is 19, 13 of whom have a score of zero. This, in practice, means that there is a small group of representatives who are entirely unwilling to condemn the Kremlin in practically any case, standing up for its perceived interests every time. The latter group includes two MEPs whose parties were recently or currently are in government, Vincenzo Sofo* (Lega) and Eugenia Rodríguez Palop (Podemos). 312 MEPs have a below-average CAI score, and 288 of them are under the

average in terms of the KCI, who are making up the group of MEPs most more vulnerable to authoritarian influences.

European parliamentary groups are nowhere near close to being united, mainly due to the differences among their national party delegations. There is usually no strict caucus discipline in the EP, so representatives can freely vote against the party line. However, among mainstream EP groups, we see stronger coherence and consistency than among fringe groups. Nevertheless, there are “reluctants” in the ranks of the mainstream as well.

| Name of Group | National Party | CAI Score |
|----------------------|---|-----------|
| EPP | Several (e.g., ÖVP, KDH, etc.) | 100 |
| | Fidesz ⁴⁶ | 80.86 |
| RE | Reform Movement (FR), For Progress (LV) | 100 |
| | Estonian Centre Party | 74.22 |
| S&D | Luxembourgish Socialist Workers Party | 100 |
| | Bulgarian Socialist Party | 51.85 |
| ECR | New Flemish Alliance | 91.42 |
| | Forum for Democracy (NL) | 43.68 |
| Greens | Green Party (SWE) | 84.26 |
| | Latvian Russian Union | 29.15 |
| ID | Estonian Conservative People's Party | 58.43 |
| | Freedom Party (NL) | 0 |
| GUE/NGL | Left Party (FI) | 66.26 |
| | Independents 4 change (IR) | 10.53 |
| Non-attached members | Jobbik (HU) | 82.05 |
| | Communist Party of Greece | 8.03 |

4. Table Best and worst performers in EP groups: Attitudes of national parties with the most critical (top) and most supportive (bottom) attitudes towards authoritarian regimes within EP groups

45 We indicated all MEPs who gained their seat after Brexit with a * symbol.

46 Since we are following the official information present on the website of the European Parliament, Fidesz, in our case, has only 12 MEPs. The 13th MEP from the Hungarian ruling parties, György Hölvényi, sits in the EPP as a member of the Christian Democratic People's Party (KDNP), the smaller coalition partner of Fidesz, even though the two entities are separate only on paper. His Index scores are similar to the Fidesz average.

| Name of Group | National Party | CAI Score |
|----------------------|---|-----------|
| EPP | Several (e.g., ÖVP, KDH, etc.) | 100 |
| | Slovenian People's Party | 72.38 |
| RE | Reform Movement (FR), For Progress (LV) | 100 |
| | Labour Party (LT) | 53.33 |
| S&D | Luxembourgish Socialist Workers Party | 100 |
| | Bulgarian Socialist Party | 43.81 |
| ECR | New Flemish Alliance | 86.03 |
| | Forum for Democracy (NL) | 37.14 |
| Greens | Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union | 85.71 |
| | Latvian Russian Union | 7.62 |
| ID | Estonian Conservative People's Party | 66.67 |
| | Freedom Party (NL) | 0 |
| GUE/NGL | Left Party (FI) | 65.71 |
| | Belgian Workers Party | 0 |
| Non-attached members | Jobbik (HU) | 93.33 |
| | GO Realisme & Daadkracht (NL) | 0 |

5. Table Best and worst performers in EP groups: Attitudes of national parties with the most critical (top) and most supportive (bottom) attitudes towards the Kremlin within EP groups

As Table 5 shows, there are considerable differences between the national parties with the most and least pro-authoritarian attitudes within individual EP groups, ranging from 19.14 in the EPP to over 58 in ID's case. The fact that non-attached members are not an organized group is shown by the massive, 74.02-point difference between the best-performing independent party delegation, the Hungarian Jobbik, and the Communist Party of Greece.

Fringe groups and independents are much more diverse in terms of their hawkishness than mainstream groups. Intra-group differences in member parties' support for the Kremlin and authoritarian regimes are enormous on the extremes, with a massive, 93.33-point difference among non-attached members, and differences of over 66 and 65 points in the case of ID and GUE/NGL, respectively.

CENTRAL EASTERN EUROPE:
A SOURCE OF RESISTANCE
TO MALIGN INFLUENCE?



CENTRAL EASTERN EUROPE: A SOURCE OF RESISTANCE TO MALIGN INFLUENCE?

MEPs in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE, from now on used to describe a group of states including the V4, Austria, Romania and Bulgaria) are more supportive of a strong stance against authoritarian regimes than the average European representative (74.57), and especially than their peers from the other 21 member states (71.54). All seven countries are above the EU average on both indexes. CEE countries, in general, just like the EU28, are more lenient on Russia than on other repressive regimes.

Looking at all 19 votes included in this study, Romania has a score of over 90, while Poland, Hungary, Austria and Slovakia are between 80-90. Bulgaria and Czechia are more dovish when it comes to authoritarian regimes in general. Focusing solely on Kremlin-related resolutions, we can see that Romania is the EU-wide leader in this category, too, and Poland and Austria remain among the most critical nations. However, in this case, Hungary also

scores below 80 and well below the CEE average. Bulgaria proved to be the most pro-Kremlin member state in CEE with a score of 73.05, but it is still almost 20 points over the lowest EU28 score of Italy (53.20).

We can find radical left, radical right and mainstream parties as well in CEE within the national party delegations. The Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM) is by far the most supportive of authoritarian regimes in general and the Kremlin in particular, which is a party that props up the ruling coalition in the Czech Parliament.⁴⁷ The KSČM is followed by the Slovak neo-Nazi People's Party – Our Slovakia (LSNS) and the Czech Freedom and Direct Democracy Party (SPD). The Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) and the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) are fourth and fifth in both cases; their score is especially weak on Kremlin-related issues. **The BSP is by far the worst-performing party from the mainstream S&D Group.**



6. Figure The average Counter-authoritarian Index score of the seven CEE countries (V4, Austria, Romania, Bulgaria), the EU28 and the 21 countries outside of CEE nations (per MEP). The higher score represents a more critical attitude towards authoritarian regimes.



7. Figure The average Kremlin-critical score of the seven CEE countries (V4, Austria, Romania, Bulgaria), the EU28 and the 21 countries outside of CEE nations (per MEP). The higher score represents a more critical attitude towards the Kremlin.

47 "Czech Communists Return to Government as Power Brokers," the Guardian, July 12, 2018, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jul/12/czech-communists-return-to-government-as-power-brokers>.

| Party Name (Number of MEPs) | Group | Country | CAI per MEP | KCI per MEP |
|--|---------|----------|-------------|-------------|
| Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (1) | GUE/NGL | Czechia | 16.19 | 22.86 |
| Freedom and Direct Democracy (2) | ID | Czechia | 24.02 | 25.24 |
| People's Party – Our Slovakia (1) | NI | Slovakia | 29.28 | 28.57 |
| Bulgarian Socialist Party (5) | S&D | Bulgaria | 51.58 | 43.81 |
| Freedom Party of Austria (3) | ID | Austria | 53.71 | 41.27 |

6. Table Worst performing national party delegations in the EP when it comes to pushing back against authoritarian influence. (Number of MEPs in parentheses).⁴⁸

| Party Name (Number of MEPs) | Group | Country | CAI per MEP | KCI per MEP |
|--|-------|----------|-------------|-------------|
| Christian Democratic Movement (2) | EPP | Slovakia | 100 | 100 |
| Democrats for Strong Bulgaria (1) | EPP | Bulgaria | 100 | 100 |
| Austrian People's Party (8) | EPP | Austria | 100 | 100 |
| SPOLU (2) | EPP | Slovakia | 100 | 100 |
| Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (2) | EPP | Romania | 97.44 | 100 |

7. Table National parties most critical of authoritarian regimes from Austria, Bulgaria and Romania. (Number of MEPs in parentheses).⁴⁹

Several national parties from CEE have a maximum or near-maximum track record (CAI of 100) when it comes to supporting measures and resolutions countering authoritarian influence. **Members of the ruling coalitions (not including external supporters) in these seven states are typically more hawkish, but there are a couple of exceptions. The Austrian Die Grünen (Greens) have a slightly below-average CAI score, but they seem to be more critical when a vote is focused almost solely on Russia. The situation is the same in the case of the Bulgarian VMRO (ECR). In Bulgaria, the incumbent president was nominated by the BSP, among others.**

The MEPs with the worst scores are exclusively from Slovakia and the Czech Republic, namely, politicians representing these countries from the Czech far-left KSČM, the Slovak far-right L'SNS, and the Czech far-right SPD.

31 MEPs from Central Europe out of the 177 from the seven countries this study focuses on have a maximum track record against both authoritarian regimes in general and the Kremlin in particular. The top performers are from national parties with the highest scores, such as the Austrian ÖPP (EPP, leading a coalition government in Austria), the Romanian PNL (EPP, leading a minority government in Romania, supporting the incumbent Romanian president), the Slovak KDĽ (EPP, no parliamentary representation in Slovakia) and SPOLU (EPP, no parliamentary representation in Slovakia), the Polish PiS (ECR, leading a coalition government in Poland), PSL (EPP, in opposition in Poland) and PO (EPP, in opposition in Poland), the Hungarian Momentum (RE, in opposition in Hungary) and DK (S&D, in opposition in Hungary), or the Czech KDU-ČSL (EPP, in opposition in Czechia) and STAN (EPP, in opposition in Czechia).

48 No MEP number limit was used here, as delegations from these nations are usually smaller.

49 No MEP number limit was used here, as delegations from these nations are usually smaller.

| MEP Name | Country | Party | CAI | KCI |
|---------------------|----------|--|-------|-------|
| Kateřina Konečná | Czechia | Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (GUE/NGL) | 16.19 | 22.86 |
| Hynek Blaško | Czechia | Party of Freedom and Direct Democracy (ID) | 21.32 | 28.57 |
| Ivan David | Czechia | Party of Freedom and Direct Democracy (ID) | 26.72 | 21.90 |
| Milan Uhrík | Slovakia | People's Party – Our Slovakia (NI) | 29.28 | 28.57 |
| Miroslav Radačovský | Slovakia | No party affiliation (formerly L'SNS, NI) | 37.25 | 37.14 |

8. Table Worst performing Individual MEPs from Central Europe (V4, Austria, Bulgaria and Romania.)

IN DEFENSE
OF AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES



IN DEFENSE OF AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES

To complement statistical data, we were also following the European plenary debates on the resolutions in question, as well as the statements, media appearances of MEPs from the seven countries in the focus of our attention. **Monitoring their rhetorical activities provides us with a broader picture on their views on authoritarian regimes, particularly in the case of MEPs who strongly support repressive countries.** The debate on two reports, namely the implementation of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the Common Security and Defense Strategy (CSDP), is a good starting point considering that they address various geopolitical issues and how the EU should approach them. Most arguments supporting authoritarian actions came from members of ID, GUE/NGL and independent MEPs without any affiliation to an EP caucus, and from some non-attached (NI) representatives.

Anna Bonfrisco (Lega), ID's speaker in the debate on the two above-mentioned reports, argued that **the resources allocated to European policies to build strategic autonomy do not have a real impact on the security of European citizens**, proven by the EU's failure to stop the crises on its borders (North Africa, Middle East). **Another ID member, Jérôme Rivière (National Rally), mainly criticized the reports for "federalist ideas,"** primarily the call for introducing qualified majority voting in foreign affairs. **GUE/NGL's speaker, Idoia Villanueva Ruiz (PODEMOS), railed against coups orchestrated from the White House and warned Europe not to follow Donald Trump's initiatives.**

GUE/NGL's Mick Wallace (Independents for change, GUE/NGL) **criticized the CSDP's effect of "militarizing" EU administration,** which goes against the neutrality of some member states. Other GUE/NGL members also argued against the militarization of Europe in other debates.⁵⁰ Wallace



3. Photo MEPs Marine Le Pen (National Rally, FR) and Gerolf Annemans (Vlaams Belang, BE) take a selfie after a press conference announcing the formation of the ID Group. Photo credit: AP.

50 "Debates - Foreign Policy Consequences of the COVID-19 Crisis - The PRC National Security Law for Hong Kong and the Need for the EU to Defend Hong Kong's High Degree of Autonomy - The EU's Response to the Possible Israeli Annexation in the West Bank - Mick Wallace," accessed August 13, 2020, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2020-06-18-INT-2-038-0000_EN.html.

is particularly vocal on foreign policy issues, **often accusing the EU of being a “lapdog to a lawless US government”⁵¹ or propaganda against Russia and China.**⁵² Wallace also disseminated claims that China and Cuba helped Italy more than Europe and condemned the EU for not challenging US sanctions against Iran and Venezuela.⁵³

Foreign electoral interference, particularly from Russia, was the topic of a couple of debates in the European Parliament. ID’s Marco Campomenosi (Lega), for instance, **accused the European Union’s institutions of spreading fake news and influencing elections.** Mick Wallace said that the **center-right and left are focused on talking “endlessly” of Russian electoral interference rather than addressing their failings.**⁵⁴ Slovak MEP Miroslav Radačovský (independent, NI) noted he felt like “we are all supposed to dress in uniforms, get on planes and attack Moscow.”⁵⁵ In a similar debate held later, Jordan Bardella (National Front, ID) claimed that **mainstream forces only imagine the presence of the invisible Russian hand behind the rise of sovereignist parties.**⁵⁶

ID was dismayed to see that the resolution on the Russian ‘Foreign Agents’ law called for maintaining sanctions against the country, once again noting that mainstream forces are paranoid about “Russian agents.” **Thierry Mariani (National Front, ID) compared the Foreign Agents Law to the so-called FARA in the US.** Miroslav Radačovský called the report a “biased fake,” saying that the law is

an internal affair of Russia.⁵⁷ Claire Fox (Brexit Party, NI) agreed with criticizing the Putin administration but claimed that the EU “itself shows little regard for press freedom and popular democracy,” so it needs to “clean its own house” before condemning others. Clare Daly (Independents for change, GUE/NGL) claimed that **Russia is only “copying” what the West is doing with its laws,** noting that the US forced RT and Sputnik to register as foreign agents in 2017.⁵⁸

ID, GUE/NGL and some non-attached members defended the policies of the current Russian administration in the European Parliament consistently, arguing that the country should be treated as a partner rather than an enemy. Slovak MEP Miroslav Radačovský noted that the hostility between Russia and others could lead to another conflict like the Second World War, adding it was the Munich Agreement that caused WWII and led to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact,⁵⁹ making the latter seem like a simple necessity for the Soviet Union. Robert Hajšel, an independent MEP sitting in the S&D group and elected from the list of the former Slovak ruling Smer-SD party, presented very similar views in an opinion piece published in 2019.⁶⁰

Human rights and European values were topics of debates not related to Russia as well. The votes and statements of ID, GUE/NGL and non-attached members were not always as rejective in these cases as in those regarding the Kremlin. The group’s speaker, Simona Baldassarre (Lega), noted in the

51 “Debates - Foreign Policy Consequences of the COVID-19 Crisis - The PRC National Security Law for Hong Kong and the Need for the EU to Defend Hong Kong’s High Degree of Autonomy - The EU’s Response to the Possible Israeli Annexation in the West Bank - Mick Wallace.”

52 “Debates - EU Coordinated Action to Combat the COVID-19 Pandemic and Its Consequences - Mick Wallace,” accessed August 13, 2020, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2020-04-16-INT-1-070-0000_EN.html.

53 “Debates - European Coordinated Response to the COVID-19 Outbreak - Mick Wallace,” accessed August 13, 2020, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2020-03-26-INT-1-057-0000_EN.html.

54 “Debates - Foreign Electoral Interference and Disinformation in National and European Democratic Processes - 17 September 2019,” accessed August 14, 2020, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2019-09-17-ITM-011_EN.html.

55 “Profile - Miroslav Radačovský,” accessed August 14, 2020, https://politicalcapital.hu/authoritarian_shadows_in_the_eu/meps.php?mep_id=52

56 “Debates - Interference from Other Countries in Our Democracies and Elections - Wednesday, 27 November 2019,” accessed August 14, 2020, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2019-11-27-ITM-015_EN.html.

57 “Profile - Miroslav Radačovský.”

58 “Debates - The Russian ‘Foreign Agents’ Law,” accessed August 14, 2020, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2019-12-19-ITM-002-03_EN.html.

59 “Debates - Importance of European Remembrance for the Future of Europe,” accessed August 14, 2020, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2019-09-18-ITM-017_EN.html.

60 Robert Hajšel, “75. Výročie Oslobodenia,” Robert Hajšel, May 8, 2020, <https://www.roberthajsel.sk/75-vyrocie-oslobodenia/>.

debate of the report on human rights in the world that the European Union, in her view, must do more to protect women and children from exploitation by Western businesses. GUE/NGL, based on the words of its speaker Miguel Urbán Crespo (Anticapitalistas), seemingly rejected the report because it did not deal with Europe, emphasizing that **the EU cannot demand other countries to guarantee human rights, while there are – for instance – some refugee camps in European territory that look like “European Guantanamos.”**⁶¹

The Chinese regime was mainly defended by far-left politicians in the European Parliament, while many in the populist right-wing ID group were fairly critical of Beijing. Anna Bonfrisco noted that the big data surveillance practices and technologies of China pose a threat to fundamental freedoms in the world, calling it unacceptable.⁶² In a debate on various issues – including Hong Kong – Mara Bizzotto (Lega, ID) called China an evil empire, condemning the Italian ruling parties for not acting against

it.⁶³ Fabio Massimo Castaldo (M5S, NI) called for targeted EU sanctions for those responsible for the violations in Xinjiang and the revision of legislation on Chinese technologies used for mass surveillance. Mick Wallace, using his usual practice of putting an equality sign between authoritarian and Western actions, claimed that **Western governments only highlight the plight of persecuted Muslims if there are geopolitical reasons for it.** The MEP noted that **the Belt and Road Initiative, which Xinjiang is crucial for, has become the target of Americans, seeking to prevent it from materializing.**⁶⁴

The situation was largely the same in the case of Venezuela. GUE/NGL members defended the regime of Nicolas Maduro. Greek MEP Stelios Kouloglou (Syriza) asked former HR/VP Federica Mongherini if she was in favor of coups and military dictatorships after she “failed to condemn” the “attempted coup” in the country.⁶⁵ Manu Pineda⁶⁶ (Izquierda Unida) claimed that Juan Guaidó lost the support of the



4. Photo Mick Wallace on a meeting with the Chinese delegation at the COP25 climate conference in Madrid in 2019. Source: <https://twitter.com/wallacemick/status/1205436440676569088/photo/1>

61 “Debates - Annual Report 2018 on the Human Rights and Democracy in the World and the European Union’s Policy on the Matter,” accessed August 14, 2020, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2020-01-14-ITM-009_EN.html.

62 “Debates - Situation of the Uyghur in China (China-Cables),” accessed August 14, 2020, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2019-12-18-ITM-019_EN.html.

63 “Debates - Foreign Policy Consequences of the COVID-19 Crisis - The PRC National Security Law for Hong Kong and the Need for the EU to Defend Hong Kong’s High Degree of Autonomy - The EU’s Response to the Possible Israeli Annexation in the West Bank - Mick Wallace.”

64 “Debates - Situation of the Uyghur in China (China-Cables).”

65 “Debates - Situation in Venezuela,” accessed August 14, 2020, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2019-07-16-ITM-014_EN.html.

66 Pineda harshly criticized former Belarussian presidential candidate Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, asking whether she was prepared for the EU to sanction her people and if she was “looking for a bloodbath, as took place in Ukraine.” See: https://www.euronews.com/2020/08/25/are-you-looking-for-a-bloodbath-spanish-mep-manu-pineda-blasts-sviatlana-tsikhanouskaya?fbclid=IwAR3dpDMPK01tVqY84rdREenoIKx-W2OuRflfGEbw_HegSCntaVZWw9IKo

majority of the Venezuelan opposition when another oppositional candidate was elected as the head of the Venezuelan National Assembly. Other members (e.g., Sandra Pereira [Portuguese Communist Party]) of the group noted that **the regime is protecting its sovereignty and that the sanctions are only causing suffering to the Venezuelan people.**⁶⁷

Clare Daly said in a debate on Nicaragua that the EP “denounces” an “elected government in Latin America” every month, who “are battling to raise living standards in the face of vicious interference by the United States.”⁶⁸

MEPs supporting authoritarian regimes made broadly similar comments in the media as well. National parties like the National Rally (France) and the FPÖ (Austria) have been consistent supporters of the Kremlin’s narratives on the annexation of

Crimea or the downing of MH17. Five French MEPs headed by Thierry Mariani, and politicians from Bulgaria, Germany, and Sweden visited Crimea in June 2020 to observe voting in the illegally occupied territory, prompting Ukraine’s EU ambassador to address a letter to EP President David Sassoli, stressing that the institution should not become a part of “Russia’s hybrid attempts to legitimize the attempted annexation of Crimea.”⁶⁹ In July, Mariani was quoted by RIA Novosti, saying that if Europe wants to exist in the 21st century, “sanctions [against Russia] must be lifted, and there must be cooperation with Russia.”⁷⁰ MEPs made similar supportive statements from Central Europe. Czech MEP Kateřina Konečná (Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia, GUE/NGL) has been a regular defender of Russia, saying before the 2019 EP elections that she did not believe the Kremlin would influence it.



5. Photo Thierry Mariani (National Rally, FR) and other members of the visiting delegation in Crimea in 2020

⁶⁷ “Debates - Situation in Venezuela after the Illegal Election of the New National Assembly Presidency and Bureau (Parliamentary Coup),” accessed August 14, 2020, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2020-01-14-ITM-014_EN.html.

⁶⁸ “Debates - Situation of Human Rights and Democracy in Nicaragua,” accessed August 14, 2020, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2019-12-18-ITM-021_EN.html.

⁶⁹ “Far-Right MEPs Visiting Crimea ‘Shameful’, Says Lithuania’s Kubilius,” Irt.lt, July 1, 2020, <https://www.irt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/1193837/far-right-meps-visiting-crimea-shameful-says-lithuania-s-kubilius>.

⁷⁰ “MEP Calls for Lifting Sanctions against Russia,” NEWS.ru, accessed August 25, 2020, <https://news.ru/en/europe/mep-calls-for-lifting-sanctions-against-russia/>.

She has also emphasized that Russia should be a partner for the EU.⁷¹ Another Czech MEP, Hynek Blaško (Party of Freedom and Direct Democracy, ID), wrote in an article that he would appreciate “valid arguments and proof that Russia is the real enemy.” While Miroslav Radačovský has been very active in plenary debates, Milan Uhrík (L’SNS, NI) was more focused on media activities. He was one of the main Slovak actors spreading conspiracy theories and misinformation during the COVID-19 pandemic, claiming that NATO forces are not in Europe to help prevent the virus but to provoke a war with Russia. Uhrík thanked Russia and China for their assistance to EU members regularly. With regards to Venezuela, the MEP noted that – as in Iraq, Iran, Syria and Lybia – the situation is the result of an aggressive US foreign policy.⁷² FPÖ’s MEPs, in line with their parties, openly opposed an EP resolution on the “strategic military situation in the Black Sea Basin following the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia,” saying that it was lopsided and would “only lead to an aggravation of the conflict.” However, the activities of the three FPÖ-affiliated European Parliament representatives were more nuanced in the current cycle. For instance, explaining his abstention on the resolution on the prosecution of Lithuanian judges by Russia, Roman Haider noted that Russia must respect the freedom of justice in Lithuania, but it is essential not to deepen political divides between the EU and Russia.

So far, we have not addressed the statements of politicians belonging to mainstream parliamentary groups (EPP, S&D, RE, Greens, ECR). These MEPs generally supported European foreign policy initiatives strongly, regularly condemning the practices of authoritarian regimes in their statements, and – in some cases – groups’ decisions against specific initiatives are explained simply by different policy preferences. The vast majority of the ECR abstained from the CSFP, CSDP and the human rights reports. In the first two cases, this was seemingly due

to concerns about Europe’s strategic autonomy; they interpreted it as a sign that Europe would go separate ways from the US.⁷³ **However, there were some occasions when mainstream politicians brought up similar arguments to fringe groups.** Hannah Neumann (Greens) said she would reject the report on the CSDP because it is too militaristic, e.g., calls for raising military spending to 2% of the GDP. She also noted that instead of weapons, the emphasis should be on mediation, disarmament and conflict prevention, as well as changing regulations on European arms exports.⁷⁴ The Greens, according to Molly Scott Cato (Green Party of England and Wales), their speaker in the debate on the Maduro regime, rejected the resolution condemning it because they were not convinced that the objective of the Parliament’s proposals concerning Venezuela “was really to resolve the situation to the benefit of most Venezuelan people, but rather to ensure that certain forces in that desperate country could take power from the discredited Maduro government.”⁷⁵ Green MEP Anna Cavazzini (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen) argued regarding Bolivia that while it did experience turmoil, it was on the right path in certain areas. She believes ousted President Evo Morales must be given the right to return, adding that the societal and social achievements of the past few years in the country must not be turned back. **While there are various instances of mainstream MEPs voting against EP resolutions, sometimes against the official stance of their parties, the deviating MEPs rarely expressed their personal views.**

MEPs supportive of authoritarian regimes seem to exhibit very similar patterns when arguing against European foreign policy initiatives in plenaries. **ID’s arguments are generally based on the federalization of EU external affairs, which fits in line with the ‘Europe of strong nation-states’ concept they are regularly advocating for.** However, some member parties of ID (e.g.,

71 “Profile - Kateřina Konečná,” accessed August 14, 2020, https://politicalcapital.hu/authoritarian_shadows_in_the_eu/meps.php?mep_id=24

72 “Profile - Milan Uhrík,” accessed August 14, 2020, https://politicalcapital.hu/authoritarian_shadows_in_the_eu/meps.php?mep_id=54

73 “Debates - Annual Report on the Implementation of the Common Foreign and Security Policy - Annual Report on the Implementation of the Common Security and Defence Policy,” accessed August 14, 2020, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2020-01-14-ITM-010_EN.html.

74 “Debates - Annual Report on the Implementation of the Common Foreign and Security Policy - Annual Report on the Implementation of the Common Security and Defence Policy.”

75 “Debates - Situation in Venezuela.

Legia) hesitate less to support and even calling for EU action against Beijing, Caracas or Havana. The fact that they do not openly rail against what they believe to be the federalization of the Union – namely, joint EU action – when it is directed at leftist authoritarian regimes raises an important question: why are they against such steps directed at the Kremlin? There are three potential reasons, and the truth might be a combination of the three. First, their genuine admiration for the Russian regime's policies, its focus on sovereignty and national pride. Second, they might be influenced by the narratives disseminated by official and unofficial Russian media. Third, they might be hoping for Russian support, not necessarily financial, but in receiving media coverage, organizational help, expertise, etc. in return for their alignment with Moscow's interests.

GUE/NGL's motivations for supporting authoritarian regimes might be similar (e.g., ideological and policy alignment, the influence of pro-Russia, pro-Chinese narratives, support from authoritarian regimes), but the group's arguments are structured differently. Their main issue with EU foreign policy seems to be focused on **"militarization,"** namely that the Union would like to possess hard power as well, and the bloc's arms exports to third countries. The second main concern of GUE is focused on **the European Union's alleged "blind" support to policies of the United States.** Third, they generally condemn

the European Union for double standards; e.g., raising its voice against human rights violations in third countries, while turning a blind eye to problems within its borders. The GUE/NGL is by far the most vocal critics of the United States in general and the Trump administration in particular, together with a few non-attached MEPs, such as Milan Uhrík.

Non-attached members are harder to analyze. There is a pool of extreme nationalist MEPs without a party affiliation who also display strong admiration for Putin and disdain any initiative against authoritarian regimes. They usually use similar arguments to ID and GUE/NGL members. However, NI is a diverse group of people, which also includes parliamentarians fairly or firmly critical of repressive countries.

Several arguments used by the MEPs from fringe groups are in line with those spread by pro-Kremlin or pro-Beijing disinformation portals; such as comparing the Russian Foreign Agent law to FARA, praising Russian and Chinese COVID-aid without mentioning EU efforts, or depicting the United States as an aggressor that consistently seeks to overthrow democratically elected governments. This does not mean that they are paid Russian agents; it is more likely that they are influenced by their views and/or voluntarily follow portals that disseminate stances in line with Russian or Chinese interests or spread Eurosceptic views.



6. Photo Anti-NATO sign on the Banská Bystrica governor's building during the tenure of Marian Kotleba, the head of the L'SNS, Milan Uhrík's party. Source: http://www.wikiwand.com/en/Kotlebists_%E2%80%93_People%27s_Party_Our_Slovakia

COUNTRY CASE STUDIES

FROM CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE



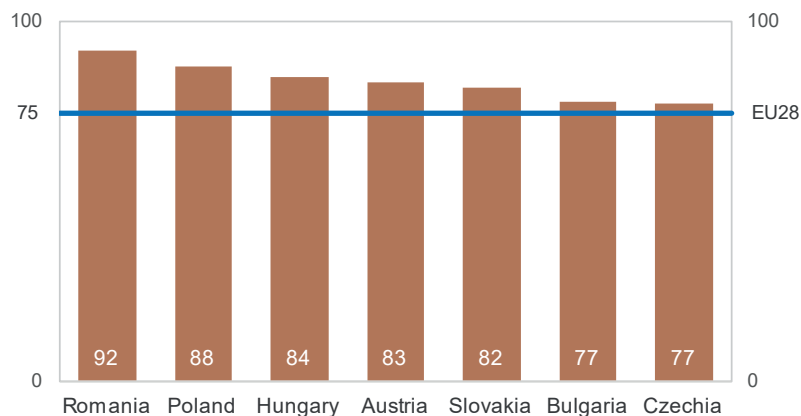
COUNTRY CASE STUDIES FROM CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

The seven Central and Eastern countries our research focuses on can be divided into multiple groups in terms of their hawkishness related to authoritarian powers and the Kremlin, which is measured by our CAI and KCI indexes, respectively.

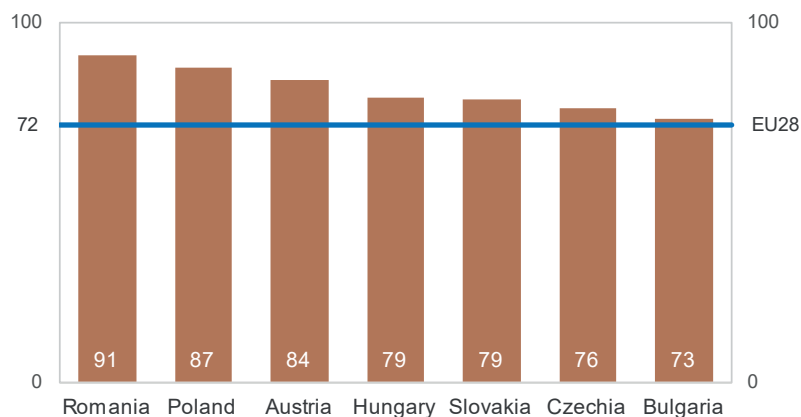
Taking all 19 decisions into account, Romania and Poland are ranked 1st and 3rd among member states with scores of 91.68 and 87.57. Hungary, Austria and Slovakia all scored between 80 and 85 points, ranking 9th, 12th and 15th on our list. Bulgaria (19th) and the Czech Republic (20th) are the least critical of authoritarian practices, scoring 77.34 and 77.15 points. Focusing on the most dovish representatives from these seven countries, Slovakia and Czechia are at the bottom of the table with MEPs scoring 29.28

(Milan Uhrík, L'SNS) and 16.19 (Kateřina Konečná, KSČM) points on the Counter-authoritarian Index, respectively.

Taking into account votes on Kremlin-related issues, the rankings change slightly. Romania and Poland still top the list with Kremlin-critical scores of over 87 (90.54 and 87.34, respectively, ranking 1st and 4th overall). Thus, MEPs representing these countries seem to take the most uncompromising line on Moscow. The only other country from these seven with a score of over 80 is Austria (83.81, ranked 7th). Hungary and Slovakia are 14th and 15th on our list, with scores of 78.78 and 78.57. On Kremlin-related questions, Czechia and Bulgaria proved once again to be the most dovish, ranking 17th and 20th,



8. Figure The average Counter-authoritarian Index scores of the seven CEE countries, marking their attitude towards authoritarian regimes in general. The higher number represents a more critical attitude. The blue line represents the EU28 average. Numbers are rounded to the nearest integer.



9. Figure The average Kremlin-critical Index scores of the seven CEE countries, marking their attitude towards Moscow. The higher number represents a more critical stance. The blue line represents the EU28 average. Numbers are rounded to the nearest integer.

respectively. In terms of individual MEPs who are most supportive of the Kremlin, the Slovak and Czech delegations have the lowest-scoring representatives with scores of 28.58 (Milan Uhrík, L'SNS) and 21.90 (Ivan David, SPD), respectively.

The scores achieved by all the seven member states are over the EU28 average and, naturally, the average of the other 21 EU countries in both cases: these CEE delegations are tougher on both authoritarian regimes and the Kremlin than their average peers. Even the lowest-scoring member states are well-ahead of the abovementioned group of seven with exceptionally low scores (Germany, Ireland, Cyprus, France, UK, Greece and Italy).

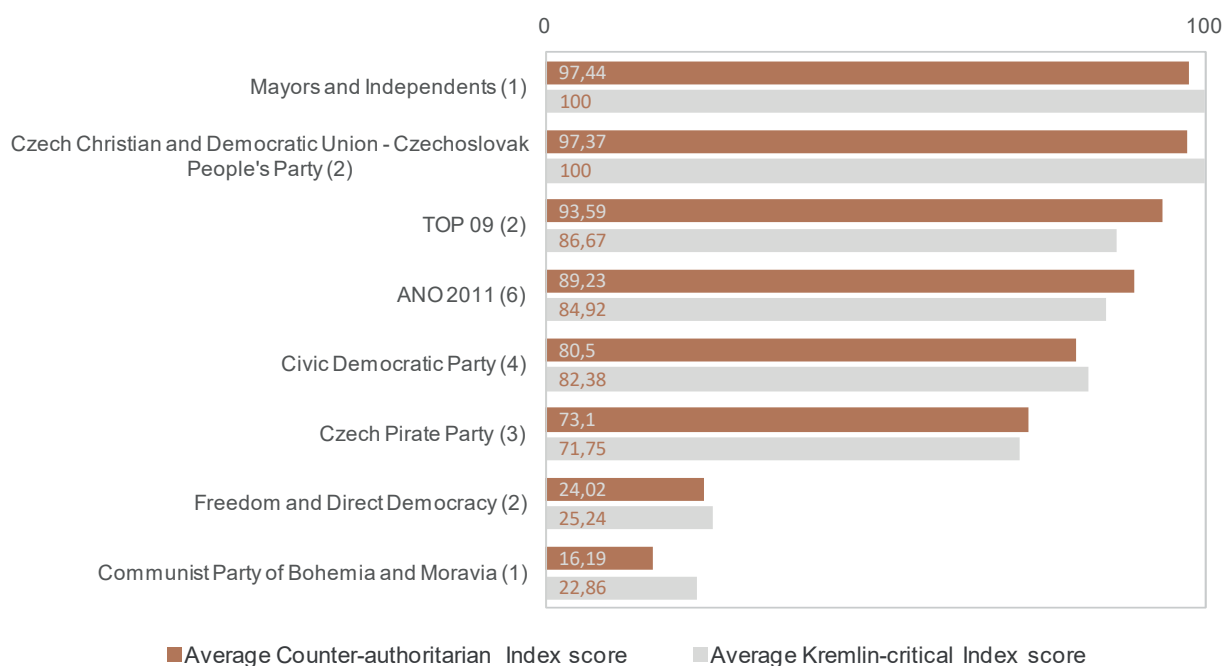
CZECHIA: STRONG FRINGES AGAINST THE MAINSTREAM

There are two political parties in the Czech party system that combine pro-Russian attitudes with a high degree of Euroscepticism. Both ran for the European Parliament and won three seats in total. They belong to parliamentary groups in the EP that are equally pro-Russian and Eurosceptic. These Czech MEPs hold the pro-Kremlin line along with

their domestic colleagues and European party family, and will rarely deviate from this line.

The government of the Czech Republic approved the most recent Concept of the Czech Republic's Foreign Policy in July 2015.⁷⁶ It sets three global goals, namely security, prosperity and sustainable development and human dignity, including human rights, and two national goals, namely, service to citizens and the Czech Republic's reputation. According to the same foreign concept, the basic framework for the implementation of Czech foreign policy is the European Union. The value Czech foreign policy is based on is belonging to the Euro-Atlantic area, the institutional expression of which is primarily the country's membership in the EU and NATO.

Despite these somewhat noble and very pro-European statements, there are two strongly Eurosceptic parties in the Czech party system (the Party of Direct Democracy - SPD, and the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia - KSČM), which have long criticized the EU, questioned Czech membership and called for a national referendum on withdrawal from EU structures. These are the same parties that have long denied the existence of a Russia-led



10. Figure Average Counter-authoritarian and Kremlin-critical Index scores among Czech MEPs, broken down by national party. The higher number represents a more critical attitude towards authoritarian regimes in general and the Kremlin in particular, respectively. (Numbers in parentheses represent the number of MEPs.)

76 "Koncepte zahraniční politiky ČR," accessed August 31, 2020, https://www.mzv.cz/jnp/cz/zahranicni_vztahy/analyzy_a_koncepcce/koncepcce_zahranicni_politiky_cr.html.

hybrid war, actively use the Czech disinformation sites to spread their ideas and opinions so that they look like facts, and almost exclusively side with Russia and China in any confrontation.

The KSČM is a descendant of the former Communist Party. This party ruled the Czech Republic when it was a satellite of the Soviet Union. The party recognizes the Crimean Peninsula as an official part of the Russian Federation (some of its members regularly travel to Crimea and eastern Ukraine).⁷⁷ The only candidate for the KSČM who entered the European Parliament in 2019, Kateřina Konečná, repeatedly rejected proposals that were critical of Russia and, on the contrary, supported pro-Kremlin proposals. In April 2020, she wrote on her Facebook: "LET'S CANCEL SANCTIONS!! Today, I signed a proposal for the immediate abolition of sanctions imposed against third countries, like Russia or Iran."⁷⁸ This is in line with the ideology of the whole party as well as the Confederal Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left fraction (GUE-NGL), which KSČM belongs to.

The SPD is probably the most radical parliamentary movement of the current Czech political scene.⁷⁹ It is a far-right party, one of the most Eurosceptic and anti-immigration parties on the European political spectrum. With its programs and rhetoric, the SPD movement appeals to two of the strongest fears that have resonated across Czech society in recent years: the fear of losing sovereignty due to European integration and the fear of losing identity and nationality due to migration. The SPD has had surprising success and, with 9,14 % of the votes, has two MEPs. The success of the SPD is considered surprising mainly because the party was formed only five years ago and, thus, did not participate in the 2014 EP elections. The SPD is part of the Identity and Democracy Group and, as far as votes on Russia is

concerned, follows the views of the domestic party and the EP group. The only discrepancy since the last elections in May 2019 is the vote of Czech MEP Hynek Blaško. For an unknown reason, he voted in favor of a resolution on foreign electoral interference as the only one from the ID group and in favor of amendment 11, which negates parts of the initially proposed resolution, namely the potential creation of a special parliamentary committee on the issue.

In the Czech environment, strong Euroscepticism goes hand in hand with a pro-Russian attitude. This aids the Russian Federation's efforts to divide the EU from within. Some political parties in the Czech party system identify with the Kremlin's view on the world and are ready to promote it in the European Parliament. These are mainly far-right and far-left parties, which is bittersweet proof that the party's position on the right-left spectrum is not important for Russia: either way, they benefit from good cooperation. In addition to the two political parties described above, which have entered the highest level of politics in Europe and nationally, there are many regional, similarly extreme and often even militant political and other groups in the Czech Republic. Other entities adopting similar attitudes towards both Russia and the EU are emerging (for example, the Trikolóra movement, which was recently founded by Václav Klaus Jr., a son of former Czech President Václav Klaus Sr., and a member of the Czech Parliament).

Apart from the pro-Russian "forces" in the EP, it is also worth mentioning a key pro-Chinese figure, MEP Jan Zahradil from the ODS (Civic Democratic Party), the lead candidate of the ECR Group in the 2019 European Parliamentary elections. Zahradil is a chairman of the Group of Friendship between the EU and China,⁸⁰ which serves as a Chinese tool for asserting influence in the European Parliament.⁸¹

77 "Ondráček na Ukrajině slavil výročí Doněcké republiky. Dělá ostudu, říká Petříček | Aktuálně.cz," *Aktuálně.cz - Víte, co se právě děje*, May 15, 2019, <https://zpravy.aktualne.cz/domaci/ondracek-na-ukrajine-slavil-vyroci-donecke-republiky-dela-os/r~020d1f02770911e993a6ac1f6b220ee8/>.

78 Kateřina Konečná, "Kdyby Chtěla ČSSD Skutečně Systematicky Řešit Problematiku Seniorů, Jejichž Důchody Často Nestačí Ani Na Zaplacení Nájmů, Léků a Základních Životních Potřeb, Tak Otevře Program," accessed August 31, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/konecna.k/>.

79 "Handbook of Storytelling: How to Make a Good Political Story," *European Liberal Forum*, accessed August 31, 2020, https://www.liberalforum.eu/publications/handbook_of_storytelling/.

80 Kateřina Šafaříková, "Zahradilův Nový Kanál," *Týdeník Respekt*, accessed August 31, 2020, <https://www.respekt.cz/tydenik/2019/48/zahradiluv-novy-kanal>.

81 "Český europoslanec na Hedvábné stezce," *Sinopsis*, May 17, 2019, <https://sinopsis.cz/cesky-europoslanec-na-hedvabne-stezce/>.

Its establishment was initiated by Zahradil's EP assistant Gai-Lin, the first official Chinese employee in the European Parliament. Zahradil regularly praises China and its activities on social media,⁸² while he criticizes journalists, think-tanks, politicians who express themselves against the country.⁸³ He is also giving interviews to Chinese media. Zahradil explains his pro-Chinese orientation by saying that he is a proponent of cynical realpolitik and that he is interested in China because it is a growing superpower.⁸⁴ While his party ODS (which is the largest right-wing party in the Czech Republic and the second largest in the Czech Parliament) is generally critical of China, he is not the only one in the party with pro-Chinese views.

The Czech government's unmanaged communication with citizens about the EU and the new threats brought about by modern technology has allowed a party like the SPD to enter the highest level of politics. The KSČM's support is mainly due to local insufficiencies in coping with the communist past and a kind of nostalgia, especially among older voters.

Although the popularity of the two parties is slowly declining due to emerging new entities and mutual "exchange" of voters, the total number of votes for fringe parties is not changing significantly and has the potential to grow.

BULGARIA: PRO-KREMLIN VOICES ON THE CENTER-LEFT

The voting patterns of the Bulgarian MEPs are generally consistent with the stances that their respective national parties espouse in relation to Russia⁸⁵ and China in the Bulgarian political context.

The ruling center-right party in Bulgaria, GERB (Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria), has sent over the years mixed signals in relation to Russia and China. On the one hand, it has been consistently in favor of the country's Euro-Atlantic strategic orientation, both in its public stance and in its actions. On the other hand, GERB and, more specifically, its leader, Prime Minister Boyko Borisov, has been balancing this pro-West orientation with



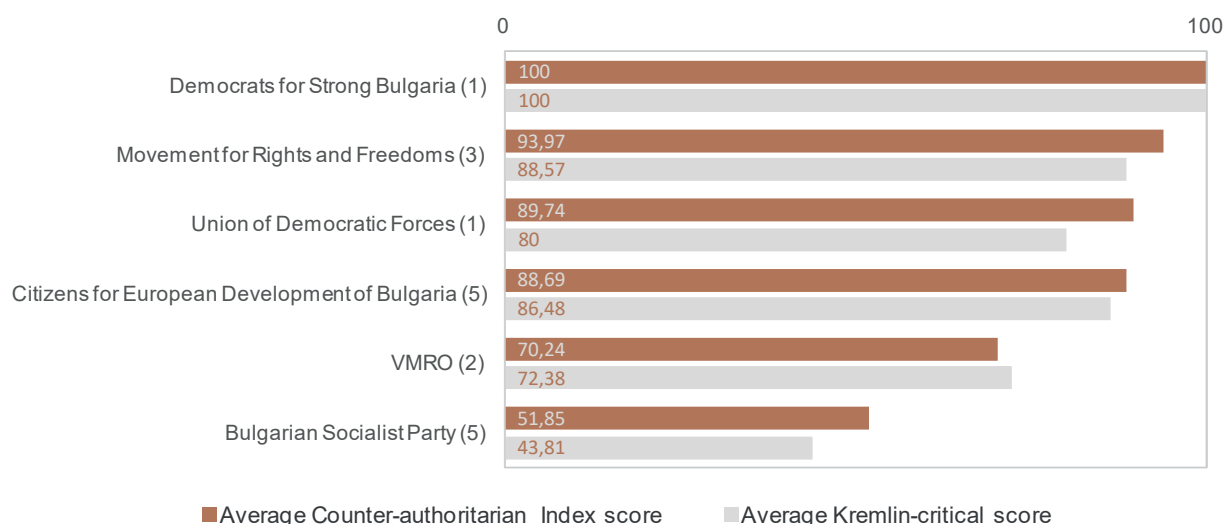
7. Photo Jan Zahradil meeting a Chinese delegation as a member of an EU trade mission to China. Source: <https://twitter.com/ZahradilJan/status/994431555258011648/photo/1>

82 "Čína Právě Letecky Poslala Do Itálie 30 Tun Zdravotnického Materiálu s Devítičlennou Sestavou Expertů.," accessed August 31, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/jzahradil/photos/a.402978413465944/877288199368294/?type=1&theater>

83 "Minulý Týden Se Konal Každoroční Summit EU-Čína (Tentokrát Online). Okomentoval Jsem to pro Čínskou Státní Agenturu Xinhua, Zde Je Český Překlad Anglické Verze.," accessed August 31, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/jzahradil/posts/954640854966361>

84 "Profile - Jan Zahradil," accessed August 30, 2020, https://politicalcapital.hu/authoritarian_shadows_in_the_eu/meps.php?mep_id=22

85 For a more detailed assessment of Bulgarian political parties' stance towards Russia, please see Ruslan Stefanov and Martin Vladimirov, "The Kremlin Playbook in Southeast Europe: Economic Influence and Sharp Power," Center for the Study of Democracy, 2020. The short analysis provided here is based on a review of voting patterns and individual stances of Bulgarian MEPs in the European Parliament and the Center for the Study of Democracy's work on Russian influence in Europe.



11. Figure Average Counter-authoritarian and Kremlin-critical Index scores among Bulgarian MEPs, broken down by national party. The higher number represents a more critical attitude towards authoritarian regimes in general and the Kremlin in particular, respectively. (Numbers in parentheses represent the number of MEPs.)

pro-Russian positions, particularly in the sphere of energy (gas and nuclear projects) and economic ties (tourism, military-industrial complex, etc.). **GERB's MEPs⁸⁶ tend to vote in line with their European family, the European People's Party, on Kremlin-critical resolutions in the European Parliament.** However, there have been exceptions, as one MEP from the ruling party struck down the amendment inserting a reference to the Magnitsky Act into a text, and several GERB MEPs did not partake in votes condemning Russian and Chinese actions (e.g., Foreign Agents Law, Uyghurs, Hong Kong).

GERB's current coalition partner in government, VMRO (Bulgarian National Movement, ECR), generally represent radical nationalist, occasionally anti-Russian positions but often anti-EU stances as well. VMRO's MEPs vote accordingly in the European Parliament. While the parliamentarians representing the party did support several resolutions critical of the Kremlin and Beijing, they abstained on decisions concerning, for instance, the Russian Foreign Agents law and human rights violations against the Uyghurs.

The Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP, S&D) is currently the largest party in opposition in the Bulgarian

Parliament. As the successor of the Bulgarian Communist Party, it has since 1989 gradually come around to grudgingly support Bulgaria's Euro-Atlantic integration (particularly EU, and not so much NATO membership), but has also strongly favored closer political, economic and cultural ties with Russia. As a consequence, **the Bulgarian Socialist Party became the most supportive delegation towards authoritarian regimes in the S&D Group in the European Parliament.** They voted uniformly against the Magnitsky Act amendment, either struck down or abstained in the vote on the crimes of the Third Reich and the USSR, and abstained or did not participate in multiple decisions on issues related to Moscow or Beijing. Two socialist MEPs, however, did condemn China for human rights violations against the Uyghurs.

The most significant ambiguity between a Bulgarian party's rhetoric, ties and behavior in the national and European context can be observed in relation to the **Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF), member of the Renew Group.** The MRF represents and draws its support primarily from the ethnic Turkish constituency in Bulgaria. **Despite the open espousal of pro-Russian positions on the part of its honorary chairman⁸⁷ as well as alleged ties of**

86 Including MEP Alexander Yordanov who has been elected on a GERB ticket although formally from a small GERB coalition partner – Union of Democratic Forces (UDF).

87 Clubz.bg, "Доган: Широката Руска Душа и Голямата Руска Земя Нямат Граници (Dogan: The Big Russian Soul and Expansive Russian Land Know No Boundaries)," 2016.

the party's members with Russian groups and interests,⁸⁸ MRF's MEPs⁸⁹ vote uniformly and consistently in favor of Kremlin-critical positions (other than a few instances of non-participation). Moreover, nationally, the party has consistently tried to portray itself as the staunchest supporter of the country's Euro-Atlantic orientation. The only MEP of Democratic Bulgaria – an electoral alliance that is currently not present in the Bulgarian Parliament – has voted consistently in support of positions rooted in EU values and resolutions condemning Russia and China. This is in line with Democratic Bulgaria's staunch Euro-Atlantic stance. The party is one of the few coherent critics of Russia and China domestically as well.

Overall, the voting patterns of the Bulgarian MEPs show that Democratic Bulgaria and the MRF demonstrate the most categorical support for pro-EU positions and Russia and China-critical stances. MEPs from GERB and VMRO demonstrate somewhat diluted Russia- and China-critical postures (i.e., there is no uniform voting pattern showing a consistent approval of European resolutions condemning Moscow and Beijing). BSP's

MEPs have generally shown pro-Russian and pro-Chinese policy preferences. The representatives of the two largest Bulgarian parties in the European Parliament, GERB and BSP, are distinguished by taking less firm positions on Russia and China compared to the average voting behavior of their respective EP groups – the European People's Party (EPP) and the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D). For instance, while 94% of the socialist EP caucus supported upholding Hong Kong's autonomy, Bulgarian socialist MEPs either abstained or did not participate. Both GERB- and BSP-affiliated MEPs stood out from their respective European groups in the vote on paragraph 13 of the Russian Foreign Agents Law resolution, calling for upholding the sanctions against Russia until the country meets its international obligations.

SLOVAKIA: DISCREPANCY BETWEEN THE EP AND NATIONAL POLICIES

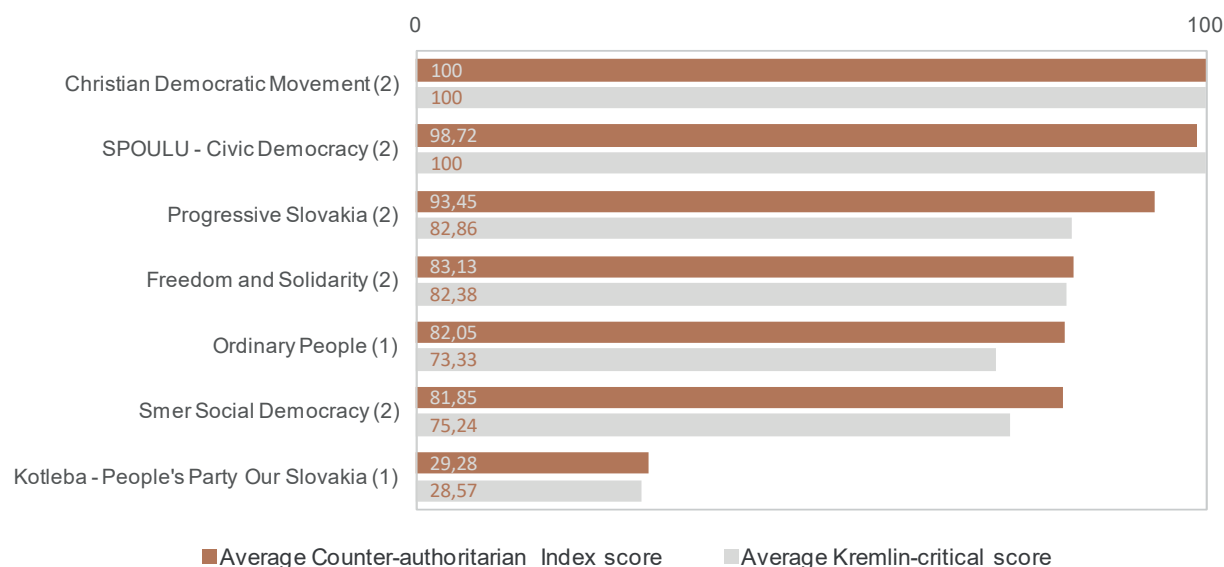
A change of government took place in Slovakia after the 2020 general election in March. A center-right coalition of four parties – Ordinary People (OĽaNO), We are family, SaS, For People – came to power,



8. Photo BSP-nominated Bulgarian President Ruman Radev meeting Vladimir Putin in 2018, praising cultural and energy ties. Source: <https://www.rferl.org/a/putin-bulgarian-president-radev-tout-cultural-ties-plan-energy-project-sochi-black-sea/29244654.html>

88 Bivol.bg, "Как Руските Корпорации Контролират Власт и Медии в България (How Russian Corporations Control Power and Media in Bulgaria)," 2020.

89 For a more detailed overview of the MRF's political stances, please consult Heather Conley et al., *The Kremlin Playbook. Understanding Russian Influence in Central and Eastern Europe* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2016).



12. Figure Average Counter-authoritarian and Kremlin-critical Index scores among Slovak MEPs, broken down by national party. The higher number represents a more critical attitude towards authoritarian regimes in general and the Kremlin in particular, respectively. (Numbers in parentheses represent the number of MEPs.).

replacing the ruling coalition of Smer-SD, SNS and Most-Híd. The new government, led by Igor Matovič (OĽaNO), emphasized in its program manifesto and through the statements of individual representatives its clear intention to strengthen the country's pro-Western foreign policy, external security and defense orientation.

The previous government (led by Robert Fico in 2016 – 2018 and by Peter Pellegrini in 2018 – 2020) also officially followed a pro-Western course, but this declaration often conflicted with its actual foreign policy practices. Both Smer-SD prime ministers called for the lifting of sanctions imposed by the EU on Russia for its aggression in Ukraine. Parliament Speaker Andrej Danko (SNS), who often visited Russia and met with Russian politicians placed on the EU's sanctions list, was a de facto supporter of the pro-Russian line in Slovakia's foreign policy. **Fico's and Pellegrini's governments have not been able to push through an updated Slovak defense and security strategy in parliament in the 2016-2020 cycle due to strong resistance from the pro-Russian SNS.** Slovakia did not join its NATO and EU allies in 2018 in expelling a single Russian diplomat in response to the Russian GRU's attempt to kill emigrant and defector Sergey Skripal in the United Kingdom.

The new ruling coalition, which has a constitutional majority in the national parliament (it has the largest

number of parliamentary seats of any governing coalition in the country since 1990), is composed of four parties, only two of which are represented in the EP – the OĽaNO movement (one MEP in the EPP group) and the SaS party (two MEPs in the ECR group). **The coalition parties thus have a very modest representation in the European Parliament,** as We are Family, whose European partners include Lega and National Rally, failed to make it into the body in 2019, while former Slovak President Andrej Kiska's party did not exist at the time of the European elections.

Five other Slovak political formations are represented in the EP (Smer-SD, KDH, PS, Spolu-OD, and ĽSNS), and two MEPs are formally non-partisan; they are not members of political parties – one was elected on the Smer-SD list and the other on the ĽSNS list. Three of these parties are not represented in the Slovak parliament, PS, Spolu-OD and KDH.

Slovak MEP's voting patterns show there are significant divisions between two groups, non-attached parliamentarians and those representing centrist parties.

The first group consists of two non-attached MEPs, elected on the far-right ĽSNS list – Milan Uhrík, a party member, and Miroslav Radačovský, an independent representative. Both are known for their public expressions of sympathy for Russia's regime and their

unequivocal support for Russia's foreign policy, its domestic political measures and (especially in the case of Radačovský) Russian revisionist historical narratives. Their vote in the EP was entirely in line with such stances, as shown by their extremely low scores on the two indexes.

Uhrík's vote in favor of a resolution condemning the prosecution of Lithuanian judges by Russian judicial authorities for their participation in the court process on the tragic events in Vilnius in January 1991 was certainly a surprise. The MEP did not comment on this decision. In the case of other resolutions concerning Russian policies, Uhrík voted supportively of Moscow consistently. Radačovský's was only slightly less supportive of authoritarian regimes in general and Russia in particular.

Uhrík and Radačovský, both elected from the ĽSNS EP list, voted in the EP in contradiction with the official position of the Slovak government and substantially different than the other twelve Slovak MEPs.

The second, much larger group of Slovak parliamentarians consists of members of the EPP, RE, ECR and S&D groups, who voted in line with the new Slovak government's official pro-Western stances, critically towards Russia and in support of democracy. However, there were some differences between individual MEPs in terms of votes, which, ultimately, were reflected in their index scores (for example, due to the increased number of non-participations in voting or abstaining in some votes). In general, the KDH (EPP), Spolu-OD (EPP), and PS (RE) are the toughest on authoritarian regimes; and the first two are the toughest on the Kremlin specifically. Other centrist parties are slightly more hawkish on authoritarians than the EU average. The Ordinary People (OĽaNO) party is the most lenient on the Kremlin, albeit it is because their sole MEP, Peter Pollák, missed several votes, he never explicitly supported Moscow with his decisions. Smer-SD is the most dovish if we take all 19 votes into account.

None of the 12 deputies from centrist party groups are an outspoken or covert supporter of the Russian regime or a sympathizer of other authoritarian regimes. In contrast, based on the analysis of votes, several Slovak MEPs could be described as fundamental critics of Russia's domestic and foreign policies and unequivocal supporters of freedom and democracy in the world. Some of these MEPs openly expressed their sharply critical views on Russia's activities (spreading misinformation, electoral interference, historical revisionism, hybrid threats) in their speeches in the EP, published articles, interviews and posts in social media. Vladimír Bilčík, Michal Šimečka and Ivan Štefanec did so most often, and Lucia Ďuriš Nicholsonová can also be highlighted as a sharply critical MEP.⁹⁰

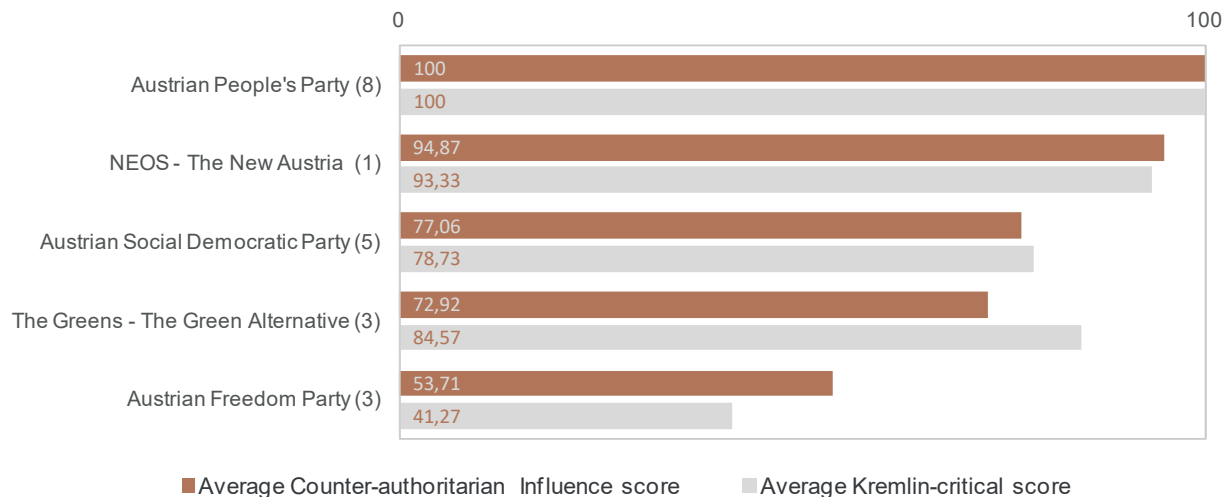
It is worth to note that slightly different views were presented by some MEPs elected on the Smer-SD list, particularly Robert Hajšel, who in 2020 presented a narrative similar to those spread by Russia about the liberation of Europe from Nazism in 1945, criticizing the removal of Marshal Ivan Konev's statue from a public space in Prague.⁹¹

AUSTRIA: TRADITIONALLY STRONG BUSINESS TIES, BUT LITTLE OFFICIAL SUPPORT FOR THE KREMLIN

While it is a member of the EU, Austria is not a member of NATO – a situation fixed in the Constitution of Austria, which stipulates the country's permanent military neutrality. **Austria's neutrality as well as its traditional focus on business relations in international relations determines to a great extent the generally friendly attitudes of Austrian political elites – first and foremost representing two strongest parties, the center-right People's Party (ÖVP) and center-left Social-Democratic Party (SPÖ) – towards Russia.** Since the start of the Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2014, major representatives of the two parties mentioned above have been critical of the EU's sanctions imposed on Russia and have called for lifting them. However, neither under the leadership

90 Ďuriš Nicholsonová's index score, among others, was affected by a technical mistake she made in the vote on a resolution condemning foreign interference in European elections. She mistakenly voted "against," although she wanted to vote "for," as she said in her speech in the debate. Immediately after the vote, she announced that she wanted to vote "for" and asked for a correction, which did not change the official voting results. Thus, this worsened her KCI and CAI scores.

91 Hajšel, "75. Výročie Oslobodenia."



13. Figure Average Counter-authoritarian and Kremlin-critical Index scores among Austrian MEPs, broken down by national party. The higher number represents a more critical attitude towards authoritarian regimes in general and the Kremlin in particular, respectively. (Numbers in parentheses represent the number of MEPs.)

of Social-Democratic Chancellors Werner Faymann (2008-2016) and Christian Kern (2016-2017) nor under the leadership of conservative Chancellor Sebastian Kurz (2017-2019, 2020) has Austria significantly challenged the EU's consensus on these sanctions. Since 1995, when Austria joined the EU, its foreign policy has been largely in line with that of Germany, and the latter's position on the EU's sanctions is the main factor determining Austria's position.

At the same, **the far-right Freedom Party (FPÖ) has been consistently pro-Kremlin.** Members of the FPÖ were part of the Russia-organized "observation mission" monitoring and endorsing the illegitimate referendum in Ukraine's Crimea, followed by its annexation by Russia in 2014. The FPÖ's members also traveled to annexed Crimea to take part in the International Economic Forum organized by the Russian occupation authorities. At the end of 2016, the party signed a cooperation and coordination agreement with the Russian ruling "United Russia" party.⁹²

In 2017-2019, the ÖVP and FPÖ were in a coalition government, but despite the FPÖ's pro-Kremlin positions, the far right were never in a position to challenge Austria's adherence to the EU's general position on Russia in any meaningful or far-reaching manner. In 2019, journalists released a secret footage of the FPÖ's leader trying to secure funds

and other forms of support from allegedly Russian representatives (the so-called Ibiza affair), which led to the collapse of the ÖVP-FPÖ government and a decline of support for the FPÖ in the European and domestic legislative elections. Other Austrian parties represented in the parliament, namely the center-left Greens and the centrist NEOS, are mostly skeptical towards Putin's Russia and other authoritarian regimes.

These viewpoints and alignments are broadly reflected in the Austrian MEPs' votes in the EP.

Conservative Austrian MEPs rarely make comments related to foreign policy and are mostly interested in policies concerning the environment, agriculture, tourism, consumer protection, and entrepreneurship. However, the ÖVP delegation to the EP features two prominent critics of the Kremlin and authoritarian practices, Othmar Karas and Lukas Mandl, who wield major influence on the delegation's approach to foreign policy resolutions. Karas is known for his support for Russian pro-democracy movements and Ukraine in its democratization and resistance to Russian aggression. Mandl criticized the current Russian leadership for whitewashing the crimes of Soviet totalitarianism and is concerned about non-European authoritarian influences in Europe. He is also supportive of Ukraine, its democratization and rapprochement with the EU.

92 "Austrian Far-Right Party Signs Cooperation Pact With United Russia," accessed August 30, 2020, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-austria-freedom-party-pact-putins-party/28185013.html>.



9. Photo Former FPÖ leader Heinz-Christian Strache (left) and Russian MP from United Russia Sergey Zheleznyak after the parties signed a cooperation agreement. Source: <https://www.tango-noir.com/2017/11/23/chapter-6-pictures/>

Since 2019, the Austrian conservative delegation has never voted in favor of the Kremlin or authoritarian practices and trends.

Social-Democratic Austrian MEPs favor issues such as culture, gender equality, employment rights, environment and consumption over foreign policy. However, one of the leading SPÖ MEPs, Andreas Schieder, has criticized cooperation between Moscow and the European far right (and the FPÖ in particular), and praised an EP resolution rephrasing foreign interference in European affairs. Schieder also promotes European integration for the Western Balkans, which goes against the Kremlin's interests in the region. Another SPÖ MEP, Bettina Vollath, made comments critical of authoritarian practices in Turkey and China. **The votes of the SPÖ delegation to the EP mainly comply with its pro-liberal agenda, but in the minority of cases, they would disregard particular pro-Kremlin and authoritarian developments,** for instance, by voting against a paragraph in an EP resolution on foreign electoral interference on potentially establishing a special committee investigating the problem.

Like conservative and Social-Democratic parliamentarians, Green Austrian MEPs seem to be usually disinterested in geopolitical issues and foreign policy, while mostly focusing on environment/agriculture-related policies. **However, Thomas Waitz is a stark opponent of the Nord Stream 2 project, saying that it only serves Putin's interests, and he has criticized Austrian authorities for delaying a directive to reduce dependence on Russian gas.** Another Green MEP, Monika Vana, criticized Russia for the annexation of Crimea and its discrimination against the LGBT community, and China for the brutal treatment of the Uyghur minority. At the same time, while Vana and Sarah Wiener have predominantly supported Kremlin-critical resolutions and those condemning authoritarian acts, they have not always been consistent in these positions. As an example, both have voted against inserting a reference to a European human rights violations sanctions regime (the so-called Magnitsky Act) into an EP resolution on Russia.

Expectedly, NEOS MEP Claudia Gamon has never supported either pro-Kremlin or pro-

authoritarian stances during her voting in the EP. Gamon was one of the starkest critics of Putin's visits to Austria and condemned then-FPÖ leader Heinz-Christian Strache for his calls to lift the EU's sanctions on Russia. Gamon also opposes influences of other authoritarian regimes in the EU.

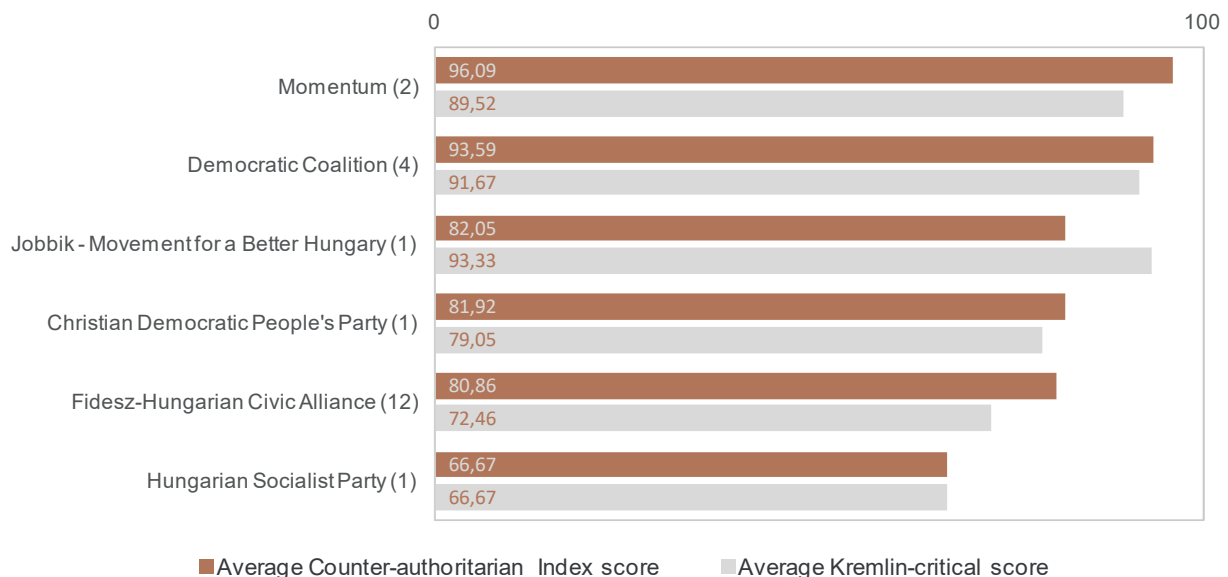
In contrast to all other Austrian delegations to the EP, the FPÖ delegation consists of the most pro-Kremlin MEPs. Harald Vilimsky has traveled to Russia several times and was also part of the FPÖ group that went to Moscow to sign the agreement between the FPÖ and "United Russia." Georg Mayer called for the lifting of the EU's sanctions against Putin's Russia, while Roman Haider criticized the opposition to the Nord Stream 2 project in the EU. However, the FPÖ MEPs' approach to the Kremlin's interests in Europe and authoritarian practices in other parts of the world are sometimes clearly nuanced. For example, the FPÖ MEPs abstained during the EP vote on the resolution that demanded from the Russian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release Ukrainian filmmaker Oleg Sentsov and all other illegally detained Ukrainian citizens in Russia and Crimea – the abstention was a rebellion against the decision of their "Europe of Nations and Freedom" group to vote against the

resolution. Moreover, the FPÖ delegation to the EP also voted for the resolution calling on the Russian authorities to repeal the "Foreign Agents Law" and bring existing legislation in line with Russia's constitution and obligations under international law. Despite these nuances, the **FPÖ MEPs still tend to refuse support for resolutions critical of Putin's Russia but are more inclined to condemn, rather than disregard, authoritarian practices elsewhere.**

On the whole, Austrian MEPs, except the FPÖ MEPs, are overwhelmingly supportive of resolutions critical of the Kremlin's domestic and international activities. As a rule, they also condemn authoritarian trends in other parts of the world, and even the FPÖ MEPs often join this consensus.

HUNGARY: JANUS-FACED FOREIGN POLICY

The Hungarian government has been following an increasingly pro-East foreign policy ever since the ruling parties acceded to power in 2010. This is especially prevalent in its rhetoric. Budapest regularly notes that the EU or the West should stop interfering in the political affairs of other countries,⁹³ argues



14. Figure Average Counter-authoritarian and Kremlin-critical Index scores among Hungarian MEPs, broken down by national party. The higher number represents a more critical attitude towards authoritarian regimes in general and the Kremlin in particular, respectively. (Numbers in parentheses represent the number of MEPs.)

93 "Orbánnak elege van abból, hogy kioktatják emberi jogokból," accessed August 30, 2020, <https://magyarharsas.hu/belpol/orbannak-elege-van-hogy-kioktatjak-emberi-jogokbol-104159>.

for lifting the EU-mandated sanctions on Russia⁹⁴ and Belarus⁹⁵ – although they also voted with the mainstream on these sanctions consistently in the Council –, blocked EU-level initiatives on criticizing China for its human rights track record and economic expansion,⁹⁶ and it is involved in joint projects with multiple authoritarian regimes. The list of these undertakings includes the Russian-financed Paks II Nuclear Power Plant⁹⁷ and the reconstruction of the Budapest-Belgrade railway, which is backed by a Chinese loan.⁹⁸

However, the votes of the Hungarian ruling parties (Fidesz and KDNP) in the European Parliament show a somewhat different picture. **Orbán's Fidesz is using its delegation in the European Parliament as a "buffer" between the increasingly illiberal foreign policy of Budapest and the expectations of Brussels – and especially the European People's Party.** There were only a few instances when Fidesz voted against the official line of the European People's Party, for instance, when the delegation supported an amendment rejecting the idea of setting up a foreign interference special committee in the EP. Moreover, some Fidesz MEPs did not cast a vote on several occasions. For instance, Tamás Deutsch did not cast votes on EP resolutions concerning the Uyghurs, Iran, Nicaragua, the parliamentary coup in Venezuela and the Foreign Agents Act, while László Trócsányi only started voting on foreign policy-related decisions in January 2020.

In some cases, Fidesz-affiliated MEPs' votes are in complete contrast with the Hungarian government's pro-Eastern rhetoric. One example is the approved paragraph in the resolution on the Russian 'Foreign Agent' law that expresses that sanctions against Moscow can only be lifted "when Russia fully complies with its obligations." They approved another resolution on targeted sanctions and asset freezes against Chinese officials responsible for human rights violations and the crackdown in Hong Kong. **The first decision is in stark contrast with the rhetoric of the Hungarian government arguing against the sanctions,⁹⁹ but in the case of China, it also goes against the vetoes (allegedly) raised by Hungary in the Council.¹⁰⁰**

However, in their written explanations of votes, several parliamentarians affiliated with Fidesz-KDNP used rhetoric consistent with that of the Hungarian government. For instance, when discussing their decision on the resolution on foreign electoral interference, multiple Fidesz MEPs expressed their concern that the text did not mention NGOs as a potential source of disinformation.¹⁰¹ **The ruling parties' representatives in the EP, just like the administration in Budapest, are strongly against deeper integration in EU foreign affairs,** particularly the introduction of qualified majority voting (QVM) in the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) because "it would take away the opportunity from smaller member states to influence EU foreign policy in issues important to them."¹⁰² This is not an extreme

94 "Magyarország 6,5 Milliárd Dollárt Veszített Az Oroszország Elleni Szankciók Miatt," Kormányzat, accessed August 30, 2020, <https://www.kormany.hu/hu/kulgaszdasagi-es-kulugyminiszterium/hirek/magyarorszag-6-5-milliard-dollart-veszített-az-oroszország-elleni-szankciók-miatt>.

95 Balázs Wéber, "Belorusz Válság: Aligha a Pénz Miatt Hallgatott Az Orbán-Kormány - Privátbankár.Hu," accessed August 30, 2020, <https://privatbankar.hu/cikkek/makro/belorusz-valsag-aligha-a-penz-miatt-hallgatott-az-orban-kormany.html>.

96 Péter Magyari, "Európa Büszkeségéről Szólt Az a Szöveg, Amit a Magyar Kormány Megvétőzött," 444, April 19, 2018, <https://444.hu/2018/04/19/europa-buszkesegerol-szolt-az-a-szoveg-amit-a-magyar-kormany-megvetozott>.

97 Csurgó Dénes, "66 milliárdba került a Paks 2 műszaki terve," February 19, 2020, https://index.hu/gazdasag/energia/2020/02/19/paks_2_hitel_elotorlesztes/.

98 "A Budapest-Belgrád vasútvonal," Index, May 10, 2019, https://index.hu/aktak/budapest-belgrad_vasutvonal_epitkezés_meszaros_lorinc_kina_rm_international_zrt_tiejiju/.

99 PM Orbán, for instance, met with Russian President Vladimir Putin in 2018. During the meeting, the Hungarian premier called sanctions against Russia "harmful," suggesting that they should be lifted. For more, see: <https://444.hu/2018/07/17/a-magyar-nyilvanossagot-elfelejtettek-tajekoztatni-hogy-orban-az-oroszország-elleni-szankciók-kartekonyasagrol-szonokolt-putyin-oldalan>

100 Simon Denyer, "Analysis | Europe Divided, China Gratified as Greece Blocks E.U. Statement over Human Rights," Washington Post, accessed August 30, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/06/19/europe-divided-china-gratified-as-greece-blocks-e-u-statement-over-human-rights/>.

101 "Written Explanations of Vote | Andrea BOCSKOR | MEPs | European Parliament," accessed August 30, 2020, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/124712/ANDREA_BOCSKOR/other-activities/written-explanations.

102 "Written Explanations of Vote | Andrea BOCSKOR | MEPs | European Parliament."



10. Photo PM Orbán meeting Vladimir Putin in 2018, before arguing against the sanctions. Photo: Facebook/Orbán Viktor

view, though; many politicians in Central and Eastern Europe share these concerns.

Hungary generally lacks openly pro-Russian and pro-authoritarian MEPs in the EP. MEPs from Momentum and DK have been the most supportive of the European Union's mainstream foreign policy agenda in general, **while, surprisingly, Jobbik's Márton Gyöngyösi (who was banned from Ukraine in 2014 for participating as an "election observer" in the Donbas¹⁰³) was found to be the most hawkish against Russia,¹⁰⁴** regularly condemning authoritarian actions with his votes in Russia, China, Venezuela, Bolivia or Nicaragua – among others. The delegation of the Hungarian Socialist Party has by far the lowest CAI and KCI scores among Hungarian parties, mainly because their only MEP, István Ujhelyi did not vote in 13 out of 19 cases.

The statements of MEPs affiliated with Hungarian opposition parties are also generally supportive of the European efforts on the international scene, favoring closer cooperation between EU member states of foreign policy-related issues. Attila Arakóvács, for instance, advocates for the introduction of Qualified Majority Voting in the Foreign Affairs Council, and a stronger role for the EP in European foreign policy.¹⁰⁵

Overall, Hungary has, on paper, an EP delegation very critical of authoritarian practices in third countries. This might be surprising, especially in the case of Fidesz and Márton Gyöngyösi. While traditionally, the EP delegations of national parties are perceived to represent their own parties' positions in the European Parliament, the votes of MEPs from the Hungarian ruling parties frequently contradict the rhetoric or actions of their domestic counterparts.

103 Csaba Tóth, "Pro-Russian Jobbik 'Election Observers' Banned from Ukraine," The Budapest Beacon, November 4, 2014, <https://budapestbeacon.com/pro-russian-jobbik-election-observers-banned-ukraine/>.

104 His views have changed during the party's "moderation" process, but even as recently as 2019, he still defended Jobbik's past views on Ukraine. His current stance on Hungarian foreign policy is that Budapest needs pragmatic cooperation with Russia, China and Turkey, but not at the expense of its connection with the West, noting that the Orbán regime upset this balance to an extent that is now "unhealthy."

105 "Viták - Éves jelentés a közös kül- és biztonságpolitika végrehajtásáról - Éves jelentés a közös biztonság- és védelempolitika végrehajtásáról," accessed August 14, 2020, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2020-01-14-INT-2-389-0000_HU.html.

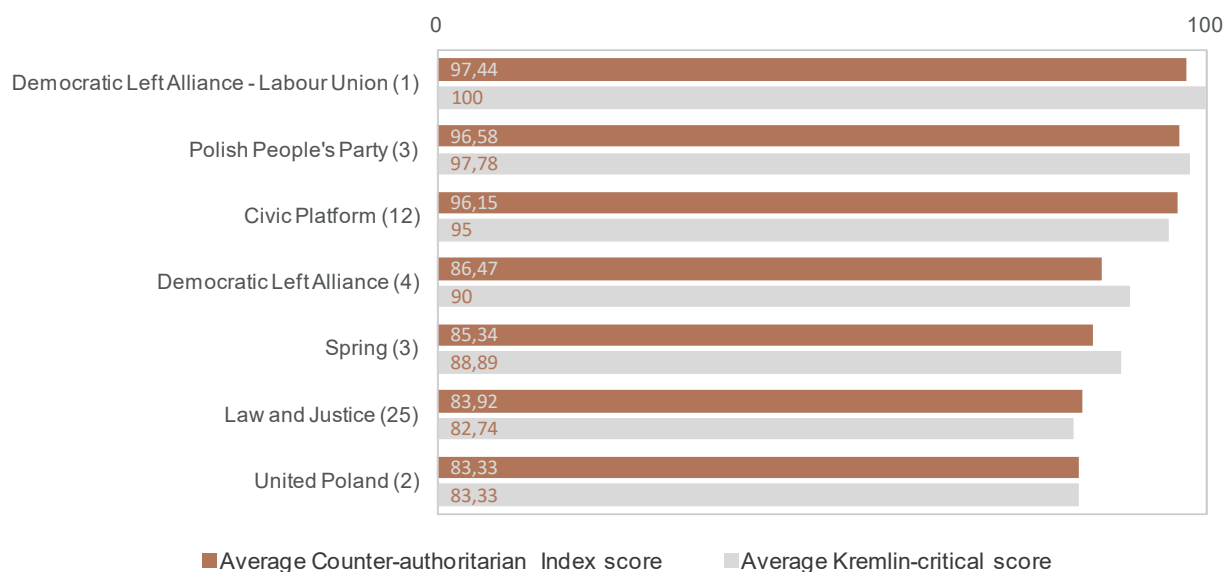
This shows the strength of the European mainstream and the institutions: governmental MEPs from Hungary are keeping the mainstream line of the EPP as they (and Orbán) know this is the price to pay to be able to stay in the group.

POLAND: NO CHANCE FOR OVERT KREMLIN-FRIENDLY VIEWS

For the last two centuries, Poland's political culture has been overly shaped by opposition to Moscow's policies ranging from moderate to radical stances. **In the last three decades, very few politicians retained popularity when they were publicly identified and recognized as an individual inclined towards Russia.** Poland, in general, is at the forefront of diplomatic initiatives that restore the memory of historical responsibility for totalitarianism in Germany and Russia, as well as policy initiatives on energy security and the eastern neighborhood - directly in opposition to Moscow's aims. In contemporary Poland, even indifference to the Kremlin's policies or narratives puts a political career at risk. Although fringe political movements are seeking to exploit this niche, their significance is minuscule in comparison to those in other EU countries. Thus, the differentiation between the views of politically relevant parties on Russia is very nuanced. In contrast, Polish foreign policy and political strategy on China is more varied, and features less prominently in public affairs.

The Polish delegation in the European Parliament sits in three groups: the ECR (27 MEPs), the EPP (17) and S&D (8). The Polish right-wing PiS government is represented in the ECR, while the opposition's MEPs from various parties were elected from the joint list of several parties, with the largest delegation coming from the former centrist ruling party, the Civic Platform. Socialist and progressive MEPs are a mix of politicians serving in post-communist governments and individuals from new progressive movements launched in recent years. **All of the three main groups of the Polish delegation have a long-standing position critical of Russia and other authoritarian regimes and rejecting the communist past.** Moreover, Polish ECR and EPP delegates are political descendants of the Solidarity movement – the one that brought down the authoritarian system in Poland.

At the same time, Polish parties regularly accuse each other of being prone to the influence of the Kremlin or conspiring with Russia. In the case of the current government, its autocratic methods and drive towards centralization give grounds for the opposition's narrative on moving closer towards the Russian system. Regarding the previous, Civic Platform-led government, the 2010 Smolensk plane crash killing the incumbent president along with some 90 VIPs from the Polish elite in Russia and a moderate line in diplomacy in the context of US President Barack Obama's "Russia reset" served as



15. Figure Average Counter-authoritarian and Kremlin-critical Index scores among Polish MEPs, broken down by national party. The higher number represents a more critical attitude towards authoritarian regimes in general and the Kremlin in particular, respectively. (Numbers in parentheses represent the number of MEPs.)

a pretext for conspiracy theories and other attacks by the PiS against the Civic Platform. Hence, both major political groups in Poland hold each other in check over the Russia question, which is representative of two-thirds of Polish voters in general.

This political setting translates in the European Parliament to a **very critical stance taken by the Polish delegation against both authoritarian regimes in general and the Kremlin in particular.** The Polish delegation sitting in the ECR group has a more critical stance than the EU28 or Central and Eastern European average in both cases. However, there is a considerable, over 10-point difference between the index scores of the PiS in ECR and Polish parties sitting in the EPP (Platforma Obywatelska and Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe). The Polish members of the S&D group rank on average in between the two.

The Polish EPP delegation exhibited more consistent voting patterns on these issues and, consequently, it positions itself as a political force doing more on countering Russian influence than the government. The PiS delegation is more diverse. It contains **Anna Fotyga, a stark opponent of the Kremlin and rapporteur of two crucially important reports on countering Russian propaganda ion the previous cycle. At the same time, individual PiS-affiliated MEPs are sometimes moving towards pro-Russian positions due to their individual political strategies, which flirt with “alt-lite” and autocratic sentiments.**

Out of this group, it is worth highlighting Dominik Tarczyński (CAI: 67.52, KPI: 53.33) and Ryszard Legutko (69.10 and 65.71, respectively). Tarczyński joined the EP as a result of the post-Brexit seat reshuffle. Yet, as compared to Miriam Lexmann (EPP, Slovakia), who scored 100 while joining at the same time, the MEP might rather have chosen not to show up on several voting sessions involving issues related to Russia or other authoritarian regimes. Moreover, he was recently discovered to belong to the radical alt-right MEGA group, which is spreading and augmenting overt racism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia, misogyny, and anti-Muslim bigotry online.¹⁰⁶ Tarczyński is also known to lead the Polish “troll army,” which has been pivotal in

PiS’s online campaigning performance. Legutko, in contrast, is a political philosophy professor who is known to be an open critic of democracy using Plato’s philosophy as justification, and he has often appeared at public events with a far-right religious agenda. Nevertheless, his political influence in terms of policy-making is marginal.

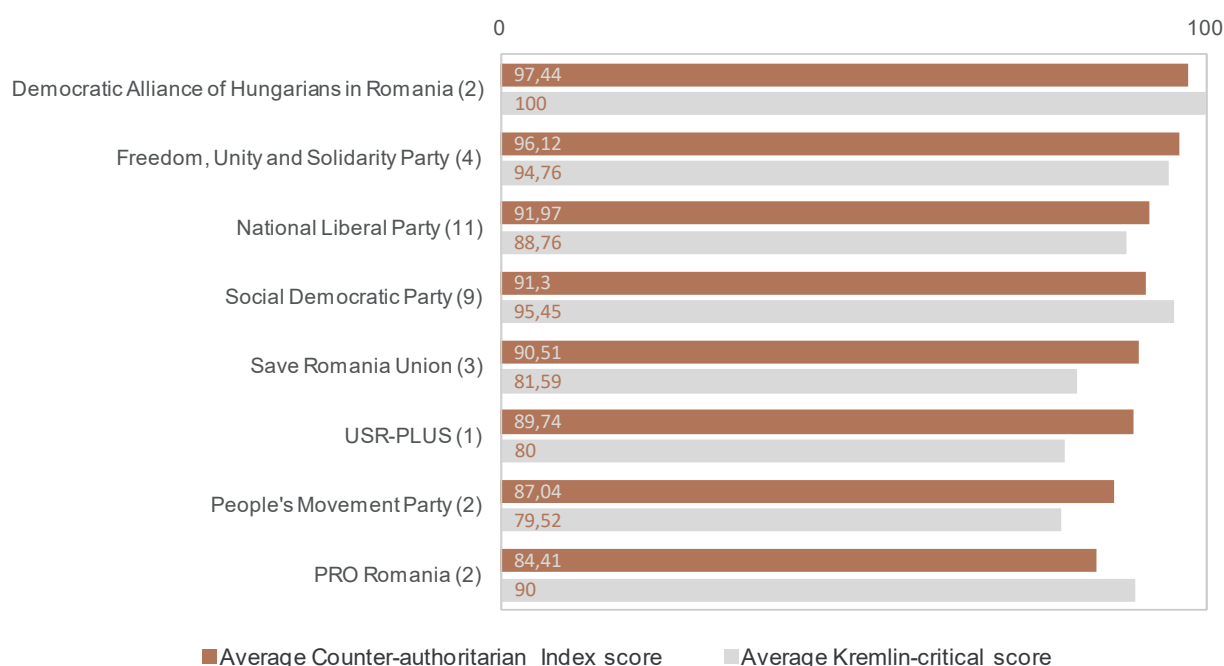
The lowest score belongs to Janina Ochojska (CAI: 58.97, KPI: 60) from the EPP group, sitting there as an independent. Her absence largely distorts her score during intensive medical treatment for cancer that coincided with the examined period; when she did vote, she always voted critically of authoritarian actions.

ROMANIA: CONFORMITY WITH THE EU MAINSTREAM – UNLESS DOMESTIC INTERESTS ARE AT STAKE

The Romanian MEP delegation, in general, is extremely critical towards authoritarian regimes. On the other hand, this is sometimes in stark contrast with domestic political strategies. On a strategic level, the cross-party consensus on the country’s pro-Western, pro-European orientation, with strong popular backing, still trumps political opportunism. MEPs will therefore vote with the European mainstream almost by default, especially when there are no direct domestic interests attached. At the same time, MEPs do not feel their vote entails any need for a coherent behavior of their party domestically along the same lines. **While this strategic pro-EU alignment is not an indicator of the absence of authoritarian tendencies, it is, at best, a significant bulwark against serious backsliding.**

Romania strongly supports the agenda of the EU. The general perception is that either through its values, funds, or technical assistance programs, the EU has been a modernizing force in Romania and a source of direction and strategy, whereas domestic players often possess neither. There is almost no deviation from mainstream EU politics in foreign policy issues. It is also essential that the most influential member states defining the “EU mainstream” are also Romania’s closest allies. This accounts for the quasi-uniformity in different parties’ voting patterns, irrespective of the topic at stake.

106 “From Alt Right to Alt Lite: Naming the Hate,” Anti-Defamation League, accessed August 26, 2020, <https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounders/from-alt-right-to-alt-lite-naming-the-hate>.



16. Figure Average Counter-authoritarian and Kremlin-critical Index scores among Romanian MEPs, broken down by national party. The higher number represents a more critical attitude towards authoritarian regimes in general and the Kremlin in particular, respectively. (Numbers in parentheses represent the number of MEPs.)

The lack of a robust ideological backbone in Romanian political parties is another reason why there is little differentiation among social democrat, liberal, or conservative MEPs; they do not feel compelled to align with certain ideological principles. Similarly, since Romania mostly has centrist parties with a rather mixed but relatively balanced agenda, there is little incentive for MEPs to take firmer stances or to feel like they need to make a political point by voting Eurosceptic or farther to the right or left of the center. The self-branded Social Democratic Party (PSD) is the most socially conservative one in Romania, while the liberals themselves also exhibit many conservative traits. The Romanian members of the Renew Europe group also include both center-left and center-right politicians. Consequently, topics that are not of direct relevance to the country raise virtually no interest among them from an ideological standpoint.

It is only in the rare cases when action taken at the EU level might impact domestic politics that MEPs' votes might support authoritarian regimes (i.e., Maria Grapini voted in favor of the rejection of setting up a committee on electoral interference as supporting these decisions might have 'legitimized' a similar approach towards the PSD's anti-democratic behavior in Romania). Romanian politicians tend to

feel that if there are some similarities between a topic discussed in the EP and Romanian internal affairs (e.g., the rule of law in Moldova), the given region or third country displays certain shared features EU borders; then a similar stance might be applied to Romanian internal issues that they have a stake in.

As a general rule, however, the distance between MEPs and their home parties tends to be very wide. Once they land in Brussels, MEPs feel little connection to domestic politics back home and – with few notable exceptions – they become relatively marginal figures in party politics. Most of them will not have a high profile in Romania, and they cannot exercise significant influence over their parties. Therefore, their voting behavior is often motivated more by their attempts to become influential in Brussels or their personal understanding of the problem. The position of the EP group they sit in matters more than their party back home. For instance, the Romanian parties that exhibit the highest level of uniformity in voting amongst their MEPs (PNL [EPP] and USR-PLUS [RE]) are also the best connected with their respective EP groups, whereas, for different reasons, the others are more loosely connected (i.e., the PSD has been reprimanded in recent years by the S&D for their domestic behavior, and they often diverge from their group).

Other MEPs will only take an interest in EU foreign policy and security topics when these might echo among their electorate, and often rather for their nationalistic overtones or as a reiteration of aspects that are important to their constituencies (i.e., being pro-European, pro-West on a strategic level resonates well with the overwhelming majority of the electorate, even though a growing number of them might disagree with many EU policies and values, and how they are implemented).

Given all these factors, nuanced assessment of the foreign policy issues in the EU is somewhat rare, and the “follow the group” rule is the dominant one. It also means that the anti-authoritarian stance of Romanian MEPs expressed in their votes is more opportunistic than principled. This is line with Romanian foreign policy decisions, such as opportunistically safeguarding good relations with some countries. In the case of China, for example, Romania would not cross the ‘red line’ of the ‘one China policy’ and will not condemn human rights abuses in Tibet, but will not refrain from criticizing abuses against the Uyghurs, for instance.

ASSESSMENT: THE ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION IN SHAPING FOREIGN POLICY

Overall, the current crop of European Parliamentarians supported a highly ambitious foreign policy agenda for the EU; however, their vision has not always become a reality. We have discussed the issue of qualified majority voting (QVM) in the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) and a larger role for the European Parliament in external affairs. These are precisely the steps supported by the CSFP report approved by 64% of MEPs partaking in the vote. Such changes, though, would have to be approved by all member states unanimously, and several nations would likely block this, particularly smaller Central and Eastern European countries (e.g., Hungary, Poland, Czechia), whose governments and MEPs have expressed multiple times that **such a move would hinder their ability to represent national interests on the European level.**

In the realm of defense, the EP would strengthen the EU's role in peacekeeping operations, making CSDP missions "robust" in terms of human resources and their mandate, and increase funding for EU battlegroups, which have never been deployed since their creation in 2007. However, European decision-making processes make it very hard to achieve this, as CSDP missions require a unanimous agreement to start and maintain, too. This, for instance, has proven problematic in the case of the European Union's mission patrolling the Mediterranean Sea: when Matteo Salvini threatened to veto its continuation, boat patrols were stopped by the EU.¹⁰⁷

On China, the EP also proved to be more hawkish than the rest of the EU institutions.

In a resolution concerning the PRC national security law in Hong Kong, **the EP asked EU members to consider avoiding technological and economic dependence on China, including in decisions on 5G networks** – taking a line similar to the US on this issue. MEPs also warned the Commission to put pressure on Chinese authorities via all methods at its disposal to ensure that Hong Kong preserves its high degree of autonomy, such as targeted sanctions against Chinese officials responsible for policies violating human rights and conducting the crackdown in Hong Kong. Foreign electoral interference was another key issue for the current crop of MEPs.

And while the European Parliament is not a primary player in shaping EU foreign policy, it would be a mistake dismissing its importance.

The policy priorities emphasized by the European Parliament in its resolutions are sometimes reflected in the statements and resolutions of EU institutions. For instance, concerning the Russian Foreign Agents Law, the EP called on Russian authorities to repeal the law and strive to meet its international obligations, which was also reiterated by statements released by the EEAS.¹⁰⁸ **The European Parliament wanted EU institutions to "firmly raise" human rights concerns with the governments of Hong Kong and China.** These concerns did appear in statements by EU institutions but were worded very lightly.¹⁰⁹ Sometimes EP requests are entirely forgotten in public statements: after calling for the High Representative to "insist on an investigation into the scale and nature of the internment camp

107 Jennifer Rankin, "EU to Stop Mediterranean Migrant Rescue Boat Patrols," *The Guardian*, March 27, 2019, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/mar/27/eu-to-stop-mediterranean-migrant-rescue-boat-patrols>.

108 "EUDEL Statement on Amendments to the 'Foreign Agent' Law in the Russian Federation," Text, EEAS - European External Action Service - European Commission, accessed August 18, 2020, https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/71924/eudel-statement-amendments-foreign-agent-law-russian-federation_en.

109 "EU-China Summit: Defending EU Interests and Values in a Complex and Vital Partnership - Press Release by President Michel and President von Der Leyen," Text, EEAS - European External Action Service - European Commission, accessed August 18, 2020, https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/81328/eu-china-summit-defending-eu-interests-and-values-complex-and-vital-partnership-press-release_en.



11. Photo Bill Browder on the EP book launch of *Why Europe Needs a Magnitsky Law* on 13 November 2013, ALDE Group. Source: <https://www.universal-rights.org/blog-nyc-3/towards-a-new-accountability-eu-adds-to-growing-momentum-behind-magnitsky-acts/> The higher number represents a more critical attitude towards authoritarian regimes in general and the Kremlin in particular, respectively. (Numbers in parentheses represent the number of MEPs.)

system [in Xinjiang],” the issue was mostly absent from official EU declarations. On 24 July, a letter¹¹⁰ was addressed to Josep Borrell, noting that there had been “little action on the part of the European Union” on any issues highlighted by Uyghur economist Ilham Tohti, once again demanding the EU to request an independent fact-finding mission and targeted sanctions against government officials involved in repressive acts.¹¹¹

Yet, as we noted above, the EP can exert influence on the statements of EU officials and institutions to some degree. The Parliament has been able to push for launching important policy initiatives as well and create a normative environment for dealing with foreign policy issues.

One example for Parliament achieving progress: EU foreign ministers decided in December 2019 unanimously that the bloc would start preparing a Magnitsky-style human rights sanctions regime,¹¹² something the Parliament had called for in several of its resolutions. According to rumors, the draft bill was recently circulated among all directorates-general of the Commission, entitled “concerning restrictive measures against serious human rights violations and abuses.”¹¹³ The bill, if it was submitted, would undoubtedly be in the center of attention of authoritarian regimes’ lobbying efforts, as the potential targeted sanctions could affect regime officials and regime-friendly oligarchs. Member states supportive of authoritarian regimes and MEPs from parties with a favorable opinion on them will certainly be the key targets and European

110 The letter was signed by 69 MEPs from Renew Europe, S&D, Greens, EPP, GUE/NGL, ECR, ID and three non-attached members.

111 “State-Ordered Birth Prevention and Continuous Dehumanising Treatment of Muslim Minorities in Xinjiang” (Reinhard Bütikofer, 2020), https://reinhardbuetikofer.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Letter-to-HRVP-Josep-Borrell_Brith-Control.pdf.

112 Jacopo Barigazzi, “EU to Prepare Magnitsky-Style Human Rights Sanctions Regime,” POLITICO, December 9, 2019, <https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-to-prepare-magnitsky-style-human-rights-sanctions-regime/>.

113 Browder Bill, “BREAKING: I’ve just been informed that a draft proposal for an EU Magnitsky Act has been circulated to all the Commission DG’s by the EU Council. The regulation is titled “concerning restrictive measures against serious human rights violations and abuses”./ Twitter,” Twitter, accessed August 18, 2020, <https://twitter.com/Billbrowder/status/1293901550788775936>.

operators of these lobbying campaigns, aiming not necessarily to scrap the law but to make it extremely hard to implement sanctions based on it.

The EP has become the European Union's "conscience" in EU foreign policy issues. While conscience does not always drive behavior, it sometimes does and prompts guilt when it does not. EU institutions, particularly the Parliament, are highly supportive of policies in line with US interests (e.g., Huawei), suggesting that a stronger, more united EU policy could benefit Washington.

METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW

In the frames of this project, we gathered data on 19 roll-call votes concerning authoritarian regimes. Our primary focus was Russia and countries where Moscow has vested interests (e.g., Ukraine, Iran, Venezuela), but we also analyzed resolutions concerning China, Bolivia or Cuba.¹¹⁴ Based on the votes cast by MEPs, we created an index, the Counter-authoritarian Index (CAI) (working title), which is a score between 0 and 100. The higher the value of the index is, the more critical the given MEP is towards authoritarian regimes. An MEP received a score of 100 only if he/she participated in all votes (after he/she became an MEP or when he/she was an MEP) and voted critically against authoritarian regimes in all cases (FOR in 18 cases, AGAINST in one case). Parliamentarians who voted the exact opposite way received a score of 0. Seven of the resolutions dealt (almost) exclusively with the Kremlin. We calculated a separate index for these only, using the same method. This is called the Kremlin-Critical Index (KCI).

The project investigated all MEPs who were members of the EP between 2 July 2019 and 1 August 2020. Our list includes a total of 783 MEPs, more than the current total of 705, as we created statistics for British MEPs and parliamentarians who took up their seat after the beginning of the 9th parliamentary cycle.

CALCULATING THE INDEX SCORES

In our database, we have information on all votes (FOR, AGAINST, ABSTAIN, DID NOT VOTE) of every MEP after he/she took his seat or before he/she left the Parliament. We made a decision in all cases on what counts as a vote 'critical' of authoritarian regimes or 'supportive' of authoritarian regimes. In 18 cases, the critical/supportive vote is FOR/AGAINST, and in one case (amendment rejecting the potential creation of a special committee on foreign electoral interference), it is AGAINST/FOR. Calculating the Index takes multiple steps. These are the following:

1. For every MEP, we calculate the difference between his/her critical and supportive votes.

2. We deduct a modifier from the result, which is the number of supportive votes divided by 19 (number of potential votes). This is needed to be able to differentiate between representatives in the case of whom the difference between critical and supportive votes is the same. With the correction, we push those MEPs who have more supportive votes slightly lower in the rankings. Thus, an MEP who has 13 critical and 6 supportive votes counts as less critical than another representative with 10 and 3, respectively.
- 3.
4. In the case of all MEPs, we calculated the number of potential votes he/she could theoretically partake in. This number is 19 minus the votes when he/she was not yet an MEP or he/she was no longer an MEP. Based on this, we calculated his/her potential minimum and maximum scores if the MEP voted completely critical or supportive.
- 5.
6. The score of the MEP is then proportionated to his/her potential score. This then results in a value between 0 and 100. A score of 100 means that the MEP participated in every vote he/she could potentially have and voted critically in all these – reaching the potential maximum value. 0 points mean that an MEP took part in all potential votes and voted supportively in all cases – reaching the potential minimum score.

Using these datasets, we created rankings of MEPs, national delegations, national parties, and parliamentary groups to be able to draw up a picture of potential patterns of authoritarian influence not only in the EP, but the European Union as a whole. We paid closer attention to the seven countries in the focus of the project, namely, the V4, Austria, Romania and Bulgaria. The national party and EP group affiliations of the MEPs are registered as of 18 July 2019.

¹¹⁴ For a complete list and description of the votes included in this study, please see the Appendix, Table 9.

We must note that our current research focused solely on foreign policy-related issues. **MEPs who do not agree with specific European foreign policy initiatives are not necessarily Eurosceptic or support authoritarian regimes; they can support decisions on other problems, just as representatives who support some EU foreign policy aims and condemn authoritarian regimes might disagree with European solutions on other issues. A representative 'supporting' authoritarian regimes and the Kremlin with his/her votes does not necessarily promote their agenda openly or that they entirely agree with the actions taken by these actors.** However, we believe that these supportive votes are in line with the interests of autocratic third countries.

We must also note that MEPs have the chance to correct their votes after the plenary session, indicating, for instance, that they intended to vote differently than they had done. However, this does not change the official results of the vote. Our indexes are calculated based on the official results; thus, the corrections are not represented in them.

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APPENDICES

| Date | Name and number ¹ | description | result (for, against, abstain) |
|-------------|---|--|-----------------------------------|
| 2019.07.18. | Condemning the Maduro regime (RC-B9-0006/2019) | Expresses concern about the severe situation in Venezuela and reaffirms support for a peaceful and democratic solution to the crisis. | 71%, 13%, 16% |
| 2019.07.18. | Amendment inserting a reference to the Magnitsky Act - R (RC-B9-0012/2019 Am 1) | The resolution condemns the Russian government for several rule of law violations, the country's judiciary system, and its treatment of prisoners. The resolution calls on Russian authorities to improve the situation and the HR/VP to monitor it, while reiterating its support for a European Human Rights Act. This particular amendment inserted a reference to the Magnitsky Act into the text. | 54%, 35%, 10% |
| 2019.09.19. | Crimes of the Third Reich and the Soviet Union – R (RC-B9-0097/2019) | Remembers the 80th anniversary of the start of the Second World War and condemns Nazi and communist crimes. | 82%, 10%, 8% |
| 2019.10.10. | Foreign electoral interference in EU – R (RC-B9-0108/2019) | Summarises information about foreign attempts to influence elections in Europe, condemns such practices, condemns attempts by European parties to seek funding from third countries, and calls on the EU to step up against electoral interference and disinformation. | 71%, 22%, 7% |
| 2019.10.10. | Amendment rejecting a Special Committee on electoral interference – R (RC-B9-0108/2019 Am 11) | Deletes a paragraph from the foreign interference text stating that the EP should consider setting up a special committee on foreign electoral interference and disinformation. | 48%, 46%, 5% |
| 2019.11.28. | Concerns about elections in Bolivia (RC-B9-0187/2019) | irregularities that helped former Bolivian President Evo Morales to a new term on 20 October, and calls on all sides to hold a new election according to international standards as soon as possible. | 64%, 20%, 16% |
| 2019.11.28. | Russia's illegitimate prosecution of Lithuanian judges – R (RC-B9-0182/2019) | Condemns Russia for failing to cooperate with Lithuanian authorities in the 13 January trial and harboring and protecting officers who played a role in the 13 January 1991 attack against Lithuanian civilians. Calls on Russia to make its own officers accountable. It condemns Russia for initiating court cases against Lithuanian judges, prosecutors who took part in the 13 January case. Calls on Interpol to ignore arrest warrants against these Lithuanian citizens. | 79%, 7%, 14% |
| 2019.11.28. | Concerns about rule of law in Cuba (RC-B9-0200/2019) | Condemns the detention of José Daniel Ferrer and Cuba's treatment of political prisoners, calling on the Cuban government to implement sweeping legal reforms to address such problems. | 57%, 36%, 6% |
| 2019.12.19. | Human rights violations against the Uyghur in China; §1/3 (RC-B9-0246/2019 §1/3) | The resolution calls on Chinese authorities to respect the fundamental freedom of the Uyghurs, release Uyghur scholar Ilham Tohti and all other human rights defenders. It expresses concerns about China's high-tech population control tools and the possible use of forced labor in detention camps. Paragraph 1 calls on China to put an end to arbitrary detention and close all detention centers. | 94%, 1%, 5% |

¹ 'R' marks votes that focus specifically on Russia

APPENDICES

| Date | Name and Number | Description | Result (for, against, abstain) |
|-------------|---|---|-----------------------------------|
| 2019.12.19. | Violent crackdown on protesters in Iran; §5 (RC-B9-0271/2019) | The resolution condemns Iranian authorities' responses to recent protests. Paragraph five stresses that fundamental rights must be respected and Iranian authorities should meet their international obligations. | 96%, 1%, 3% |
| 2019.12.19. | Concerns about rule of law in Nicaragua (RC-B9-0251/2019) | The resolution condemns the repressive actions of the Nicaraguan government against its own population. | 91%, 2%, 7% |
| 2019.12.19. | Russian 'Foreign Agents Law'; §13 – R (RC-B9-0258/2019 §13) | The resolution condemns Russia's foreign agent law in general and its recently approved amendments, which allows for the stigmatization of individuals as foreign agents in particular. It calls on Russia to repeal the law and fulfil its international obligations. Paragraph 13, among other things, "underlines that the sanctions against Russia can be lifted only when Russia fully complies with its obligations. | 81%, 13%, 7% |
| 2020.01.15. | EU Foreign Policy and Security Strategy (A9-0054/2019) | The report calls on the EU to defend universal values, such as multilateralism, the rule of law and free trade, more effectively both within and outside of the bloc. It condemns Russia, China and Turkey in particular for their aggressive foreign policy actions, and even the US for its retreat from multilateral institutions. The rapporteurs specifically called attention to hybrid threats against the Union, naming Moscow as the main source of such threats. As a solution, the text proposes increasing budgetary resources to efforts countering hybrid threats. The report supports the territorial integrity of Georgia and Ukraine. The text adds that introducing qualified majority voting in foreign policy decisions would make the EU more effective in responding to such threats. | 64%, 21%, 14% |
| 2020.01.15. | Amendment rejecting a Special Committee on electoral interference – R (RC-B9-0108/2019 Am 11) | The report identifies several threats to European stability: the situation in North Africa, the Middle East and the Balkans, as well as Russian aggression in Georgia and Ukraine. Hybrid threats are highlighted in the report as well. The text also condemns China for its actions in the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait. The report says that the EU must become more effective in stepping up against international crises, so it calls on qualified majority voting to be introduced in the area of the Common Security and Defence Policy. | 51%, 38%, 11% |
| 2020.01.15. | Report on human rights and democracy in the world in 2018 (A9-0051/2019) | The report expresses concern about the attacks on democracy and the rule of law worldwide, condemns authoritarian regimes for restricting the rights of its own citizens and highlights that the EU is committed to placing human rights and democracy at the center of its relations with non-EU countries. | 70%, 16%, 14% |
| 2020.01.16. | Parliamentary coup in Venezuela (RC-B9-0048/2020) | The resolution reiterates the EP's recognition of Juan Guaidó as the legitimate president of Venezuela and condemns the attempted parliamentary coup by the Maduro regime. The text attests that the National Assembly is the only legitimately elected democratic body of Venezuela. | 70%, 15%, 15% |

APPENDICES

| Date | Name and Number | Description | Result (for, against, abstain) |
|-------------|---|--|-----------------------------------|
| 2020.06.18. | Setting up a foreign interference committee (B9-0190/2020) | The EP decided to set up a special committee for 12 months dealing with foreign interference in European elections. The committee will also be tasked with finding potential answers to such threats and suggest coordinated EU action against hybrid warfare. | 80%, 12%, 8% |
| 2020.06.19. | Recommendations concerning Eastern Partnership countries – R (A9-0112/2020) | The recommendation strongly condemns the Russian Federation's actions violating the fundamental principles and norms of international law in the EU's Eastern Partnership region, especially in Ukraine. | 76%, 18%, 6% |
| 2020.06.19. | Hong Kong autonomy (RC-B9-0169/2020) | The EP condemned the national security law imposed by Beijing on Hong Kong. It also declares its support for creating a "more robust strategy" on China. | 85%, 5%, 9% |



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