Check for updates

CASE STUDY

EUPopLink Country report - Slovakia

[version 1; peer review: 1 approved, 1 approved with reservations]

Aneta Világi [1], Ľubomír Zvada [2]

[1]Department of Political Science, Comenius University, Bratislava, Slovakia
[2]Department of Politics and European Studies, Palacký University Olomouc, Olomouc, Czech Republic

v1 **First published:** 27 Aug 2026, **6**:306
https://doi.org/10.12688/openreseurope.24445.1
Latest published: 27 Aug 2026, **6**:306
https://doi.org/10.12688/openreseurope.24445.1

Abstract

This article explores the intersection of populism and Euroscepticism within the Slovak political landscape, demonstrating how European issues have evolved from a largely depoliticised post-accession consensus to a pivotal domain of domestic political competition. The article focuses on the differing positions of key populist actors such as Smer–SD, the Slovak National Party (SNS), Movement Republika (Hnutie Republika) and the Slovakia Movement (formerly OĽaNO), situating them within wider changes in Slovak party politics. We argue that Euroscepticism in Slovakia is predominantly soft and generally does not translate into demands for EU withdrawal. Nevertheless, Euroscepticism has become increasingly centred on national sovereignty and the portrayal of Brussels as an external actor that constrains Slovak interests. Furthermore, the article demonstrates that Slovak parties do not hold fixed and coherent positions on European integration. Instead, their attitudes towards the EU are adapted strategically in response to changing domestic competition and broader political crises. The growing overlap between populism and Euroscepticism has therefore reshaped party competition, strengthened pro-European counter-mobilisation and established the opposition between 'Slovak interests' and 'Brussels' as a defining feature of contemporary political discourse.

Keywords

populism, euroscepticism, Slovakia, political parties, populist radical right , valence populism, left populism

This article is included in the COST Actions gateway.

Open Peer Review

Approval Status ✔ ?

	1	2
version 1 27 Aug 2026	✔ view	? view

1. **Sorina Soare**, University of Florence, Firenze, Italy

2. **Natasza Styczynska**, Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Poland

Any reports and responses or comments on the article can be found at the end of the article.

This article is included in the Linking Euroscepticism and Populism (EUPopLink) collection.

Corresponding author: Ľubomír Zvada (lubomir.zvada@upol.cz)

Author roles: Világi A: Writing – Original Draft Preparation, Writing – Review & Editing; **Zvada Ľ**: Writing – Original Draft Preparation, Writing – Review & Editing

Competing interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Grant information: This project has received funding from the European Union's Framework Programme for Research & Innovation as part of the COST Action CA23102 Linking euroscepticism and populism: causes and consequences], as supported by the COST Association (European Cooperation in Science and Technology).
The funders had no role in study design, data collection and analysis, decision to publish, or preparation of the manuscript.

Copyright: © 2026 Világi A and Zvada Ľ. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

How to cite this article: Világi A and Zvada Ľ. **EUPopLink Country report - Slovakia [version 1; peer review: 1 approved, 1 approved with reservations]** Open Research Europe 2026, **6**:306 https://doi.org/10.12688/openreseurope.24445.1

First published: 27 Aug 2026, **6**:306 https://doi.org/10.12688/openreseurope.24445.1

1. Introduction

In the early years following Slovakia's accession to the EU, European integration remained largely depoliticized within domestic politics (Henderson, 2004). A notable shift in political discourse emerged following the debates surrounding Slovakia's contribution to the European Financial Stability Facility in 2011, and later, the controversy over mandatory refugee relocation quotas in 2016 (Gyárfášová and Mokrá, 2021). These developments signalled a discursive transformation in Slovak politics and popular perceptions (Világi and Baboš, 2025). The earlier consensus portraying the EU as an unequivocally beneficial actor began to erode, giving rise to a Eurosceptic narrative cantered on national autonomy and resistance to supranational authority (Gyárfášová and Mokrá, 2021; Henderson, 2017).

By the time of the 2024 European Parliament election campaign, European integration had become a fully politicized and polarizing issue within Slovakia's party system. A leader of governing coalition, Smer-SD adopted increasingly Eurosceptic positions, while the main opposition force, Progressive Slovakia (PS), emerged as a vocal advocate of EU membership and deeper integration.

According to last Eurobarometer surveys, 52% of Slovaks tend to trust the EU and 55% of Slovaks considered the country's EU membership as a good thing (European Commission … 2025; 2024). However, Slovakia has exhibited quite pronounced volatility in EU support over the past twenty years. The country has alternated between periods of high enthusiasm and sharp disillusionment (e.g. 2008, 2021), reflecting both peaks of optimism and significant downturns in support (Világi and Baboš 2025).

The present country report was prepared as part of the EUPopLink COST Action (Andreadis and Vasilopoulou, 2026) following the EUPopLink Theoretical Framework and guidelines (Lorimer et al., 2026).

2. Populist political actors

For at least two reasons, Slovakia offers political scientists an interesting case study of populism. First, its modern populist roots date back to the 1990s, when Slovakia experienced a period known as "Mečiarism", named after Vladimír Mečiar, leader of the HZDS, a nationalist populist movement (Carpenter, 1997) whose government between 1994 and 1998 offered the first example of illiberal democracy in the Visegrad region. Second, if we consider populism as a political strategy and style of communication, then almost all political parties in Slovakia use appeals that can be described as populist to a greater or lesser extent (Haughton and Deegan-Krause, 2020, p. 19).

Following the EUPopLink Theoretical Framework and guidelines (Lorimer et al., 2026), we have identified the following populist and Eurosceptic parties and movements within the Slovak political system.

3. Populist radical right parties

3.1 Movement Republic (Hnutie Republika)

Hnutie Republika, founded in 2021 after a split from the far-right K-ĽSNS, is led by MEP Milan Uhrík and carries over both the personnel and ideology of its predecessor. Although it narrowly missed parliamentary representation in the 2023 elections, it has remained above the electoral threshold in opinion polls and secured two seats in the 2024 European Parliament elections, outperforming the traditional KDH party, the liberal SaS party, and the newly established governmental Hlas-SD party. Alongside the party chairman, Milan Mazurek, the first MP in the modern history of the Slovak Republic to be stripped of his mandate for denying the Holocaust and ultimately convicted of inciting hatred against a group of people based on their nationality, race, or beliefs, was elected to the EP.

Republika is Slovakia's most prominent example of the fusion between populism and Euroscepticism. The party's programme is based on a far-right populist ideology rooted in nativism, authoritarianism, ultranationalism and Euroscepticism. Republika combines its populism with conservatism, an ideology that is evident in its conservative stance on post-materialist issues. The party is a vocal protector of traditional family values, a prominent anti-gender actor and a defender of Christian Europe. In economic matters, the movement advocates a strong state role and considers achieving self-sufficiency in certain policies to be essential. The movement relies on divisive rhetoric, primarily against the West as a whole, of which the EU and NATO are the main building blocks.

3.2 Slovak National Party (Slovenská národná strana, SNS)

Established in 1990 with claims of historical continuity from a 19th-century party, SNS was the only Slovak party in the early 1990s to push for full independence. It has been part of four Slovak governments (1994–1998, 2006–2010, 2016–2020 and since 2023) and led by several figures, most notably Ján Slota and currently Andrej Danko. Although once dominant, it lost influence with the rise of groups like K-ĽSNS and Republika.

In the early years of the newly established Slovak state, the party's main goal was to preserve the country's territorial integrity. This was reflected in its divisive rhetoric aimed at significant, regionally concentrated ethnic minorities, primarily the Hungarian and Roma communities (Haughton et al., 2021, p. 331). This nativist rhetoric and politics have remained an inherent part of the party ever since, though the target of this rhetoric and politics has changed. Today, SNS's rhetoric and politics are primarily directed against migration, Islam and multiculturalism, EU policies, and progressivism. The party's pro-Russian stance has been evident through its leader Andrej Danko's numerous visits to the Russian Federation in recent years as well as his interpretations on the war in Ukraine drawing on Kremlin's narratives. The party has an *ad hoc* tie with the common populist radical right parties across the Europe. In recent times, the collaboration between the SNS and the Czech far-right party SPD has been echoed.

4. Valence populists

4.1 Slovakia/The Slovakia Movement (Hnutie Slovensko; formerly OĽaNO)

Originally founded as OĽaNO in 2011 by entrepreneur Igor Matovič. OĽaNO represents one of the many political entrepreneurs' parties in Slovakia (Marušiak, 2017). Given the negative connotations of the term "party" in Slovakia, which refers to the activities of the Communist Party in the past, Matovič's political project was presented more as a dynamic modern movement that challenges established and corrupt parties.

Since its founding, Matovič's movement has been characterized primarily by organizational minimalism and strategic flexibility, the party adapts its positions based on public opinion and social trends (Buštíková and Baboš, 2020). Moreover, as Gyárfášová and Hlatky (2023) or Bakke (2024) emphasised, OĽaNO continues the long line of highly personalized political parties in Slovakia. Also, since its founding, the OĽaNO movement has been exclusively an opposition anti-establishment party that has focused its political program on fighting corruption. OĽaNO achieved major success in the 2020 elections on an anti-corruption platform, forming a centre-right coalition with SaS (Freedom and Solidarity), Sme Rodina (We are Family) and Za ľudí (For People) which ruled from March 2020 to May 2023. However, its governance was marked by internal strife and the COVID-19 crisis, leading to the formation of Slovakia's first caretaker government which led the country to early elections. After a disappointing performance in the 2023 elections, the movement was rebranded as '*Slovensko' (Slovakia).* In 2025, the name was changed to its current form—'*Hnutie Slovensko*' *(The Slovakia Movement).*

In terms of populism, the movement is most often referred to as centrist populist (Lysek et al., 2020; Petrović et al., 2023) or as valence populist who are predominantly, if not exclusively, competing by focusing on non-positional issues such as fighting corruption, increasing transparency and addressing issues of moral integrity, while emphasising anti-establishment motives (Zulianello, 2020, 329–332; Zulianello and Larsen, 2024). The movement's ideological valence is most evident in its approach to creating its candidate list. Its candidate lists often include individuals from diverse ideological backgrounds, though a conservative orientation is discernible, especially on cultural issues. Internationally, it is passive, lacking substantial cooperation with similar parties abroad, and is aligned with the European People's Party in the European Parliament.

5. Eclectic populism/borderline specific case

5.1 Direction-social democracy (Smer- sociálna demokracia, Smer-SD)

Smer-SD was founded in 1999 by Robert Fico after a split from left-wing SDĽ. In 2005, it adopted a social democratic identity by merging with smaller leftist parties (Marušiak, 2006, 2021). Smer-SD evolved into Slovakia's most electorally successful party, governing from 2006–2010 in coalition with HZDS and SNS; from 2012–2016 in single-party government; from 2016–2020 in coalition with SNS, Most-Híd, and #Sieť. After the 2023 elections, Smer became part of the fourth government, which also includes SNS and Hlas-SD.

Although Smer-SD defines itself as a rustic/old-fashioned/traditional left-wing party, it is a *sui generis* social democratic party due to its strong nationalistic ethos and populist rhetoric (Zvada, 2023, p. 216). This was also the reason why Smer-SD's membership in the Party of European Socialists was suspended yet in 2006 when after the parliamentary elections Smer-SD formed a coalition with the Slovak National Party (SNS) and ĽS-HZDS, which PES considered a violation of its principles (The Slovak Spectator, 2006). In October 2023, the PES once again suspended Smer-SD's membership after the party formed a government with Hlas-SD and the ultra-nationalist SNS, which also led to the suspension of its MEPs' participation in the Socialists and Democrats (S&D) group. Finally, on October 17, 2025, the PES unanimously expelled Smer-SD from its ranks at a congress in Amsterdam precisely because of its long-standing conflict with the PES's social democratic values (Euronews.com, 2025).

Regarding Smer-SD ideology, the party is very similar to Mečiar's HZDS, which has previously been described as national populist (Carpenter, 1997). Smer-SD is indeed an interesting case of a populist party that combines elements of

left-wing and valence populism. Given the clearly defined categories of populism within this project (Andreadis and Vasilopoulou, 2026; Lorimer et al., 2026), Smer-SD does not fit neatly into any of them (left, valence and far-right populism) and we therefore consider it to be an 'eclectic populist' party (see Mosca and Tronconi, 2019). It combines left-wing economic policies focused on redistributing resources to poorer and more vulnerable groups with far-right and nativist positions on post-material issues. Although the party claims to defend the interests of the working class, since its founding, its ties to major financial and business groups and entrepreneurs in Slovakia have been quite apparent, raising considerable doubts about its genuine opposition to the current economic order in Slovakia (see e.g. Bárdy, 2022; Nicholson, 2012; The Slovak Spectator, 2002).

Especially after 2020 when the party spent three years in opposition, it clearly co-opted the rhetoric of the far-right Slovak parties (Zvada, 2023, p. 217). During this period, the party collaborated with the Slovak far right in organizing anti-government protests and spreading disinformation in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, and its position on fundamental geopolitical issues in the region, which are linked to the situation in Ukraine, are essentially indistinguishable from the postulates of far-right populists in Slovakia.

Internationally, Prime Minister Fico maintains close relations mainly with Fidesz leader Viktor Orbán and Czech populist technocrat Andrej Babiš. Given the current geopolitical situation and the promotion of Slovakia's sovereign foreign policy in all four corners of the world, as announced by Fico after the 2023 parliamentary elections, the results of this strategy have been limited and have tended to damage Slovakia's reputation among its closest partners in Europe (Fico visited Putin in Moscow several times, spoke at the CPAC conference in the US, and held bilateral meetings in China, Brazil, and Turkey).

6. Positions on 'Europe' and the populism-euroscepticism nexus

According to the PopuList 3.0 database, three of the seven parties currently represented in the Slovak parliament, The Slovakia Movement (formerly OĽaNO), Smer-SD, and SNS, are classified as both populist and Eurosceptic. The extra-parliamentary movement Republika, which was established in 2021, can also be placed in this group, as it has elected Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) affiliated with the Europe of Sovereign Nations political group and advocates a strongly Eurosceptic political programme. All four parties share opposition to various EU policies, commonly framing the EU as over-centralized and undermining national sovereignty. The Slovakia Movement, while critical, adopts a more ambivalent position, shaped by its rivalry with Smer-SD, so its emphasis on Euroscepticism in political communication depended on the position of Robert Fico towards the EU at a given time.

On specific policies, Smer-SD, SNS, and Republika oppose the EU's migration policy, particularly refugee-redistribution mechanisms. The Smer-SD-led government also rhetorically rejects EU sanctions on Russia and criticises the EU's approach to the war between Russia and Ukraine as one that does not help achieve peace but instead contributes to prolonging the conflict, reflecting broader scepticism toward the EU's foreign policy direction (see e.g. Pisklová, 2025; Wondreys, 2023). Despite their criticisms, none of these parties advocate for Slovak withdrawal from the EU or its dissolution, placing them in the soft Eurosceptic camp. The Slovakia Movement prefers the term Eurorealist, suggesting a critical yet reform-oriented approach. Republika is the most radical, pushing for a fundamental reform of the European Union and its return to a purely economic association and even hinting at a potential referendum on EU membership if reform efforts fail.

Among these actors, Smer-SD has undergone the most notable shift in its EU policy. During the years following Slovakia's 2016 EU Council presidency, then-Prime Minister Robert Fico championed deeper European integration and sought to position Slovakia within the core group of EU member states (Bilčík 2018).[1] However, in the run-up to the 2023 national and 2024 European elections, this stance reversed sharply. Smer-SD's 2024 EP program portrayed the EU as a force of "Brussels dominance" allegedly acting against Slovak national interests. The party criticized "increasing attacks from Brussels warmongers" in response to Slovakia's refusal to provide military aid to Ukraine, framing its foreign policy stance as one of peaceful neutrality. Smer-SD now formally endorses a "Europe of Nations", a vision shared by SNS, that emphasizes national sovereignty and rejects top-down EU governance.[2]

Viewed through Vasilopoulou's (2011) typology of radical-right opposition to European integration, both Smer-SD and SNS increasingly exhibit conditional to outright rejecting positions: they contest core elements of EU identity, oppose supranational decision-making, and challenge EU policy practice. The Smer-SD party has long combined formal support

[1]"I know exactly where I want to get Slovakia, to the core of the EU." (Robert Fico's FB, 20.08.2017, Available from: https://www.facebook.com/robertficosmersd/videos/704160643106431/.)
[2]Available from: https://www.strana-smer.sk/storage/app/media/za-mier-v-europe.pdf.

for European integration with selective criticism of specific EU policies, thereby demonstrating a flexible and pragmatic approach to European issues; at the same time, this party has consciously embraced the politicization of European integration in Slovakia as one of its key political strategies for retaining its existing electorate or recruiting new voters (Mravcová and Havlík 2022, pp. 124–125). In contrast, The Slovakia Movement adopts a distinctly more compromising stance. While stressing the protection of national interests, it presents itself as willing to seek agreements within the EU framework and does not question the fundamental legitimacy of European cooperation. This situates The Slovakia Movement closer to Vasilopoulou's "compromising Euroscepticism," in contrast to the more confrontational narratives of Smer-SD and SNS.

These parties exemplify sovereignty-based Euroscepticism (Vasilopoulou, 2018), now widespread in the Visegrad region. In Smer-SD's case, this Euroscepticism has a strongly populist character, which constructs a dichotomy between the 'people' and 'elites,' mapped onto a geopolitical axis of "Brussels versus Slovakia." This narrative grew more pronounced in the party's 2024 campaign than in 2023, setting it apart from SNS and The Slovakia Movement, who gemploy less overt populist rhetoric.

Recent crises, Brexit, the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and Donald Trump's political resurgence, have strengthened the populist-Eurosceptic alliance among Slovak parties. During the pandemic, Smer-SD and Republika criticized public health measures and vaccination and, the then-ruling The Slovakia Movement controversially imported the Sputnik V vaccine from Russia despite EU objections. However, the populist-Eurosceptic nexus has become particularly apparent since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. Smer-SD, SNS, and Republika opposed both EU and prior Slovak government positions on the conflict. Once back in power in 2023, Smer-SD and Robert Fico articulated a "sovereign foreign policy" that rhetorically openly diverges from EU foreign and security policies, contributing to Slovakia's growing regional isolation. In the context of the war in Ukraine and the re-election of Trump, criticism of the EU and NATO seemed to validate the populist and Eurosceptic narratives of Slovak politicians.

7. Responses to euroscepticism and consequences

In the Slovak context, even non-populist opposition parties, such as the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) and Freedom and Solidarity (SaS), have historically maintained a critical stance toward the European Union, a position embedded in their political identities since their establishment. While SaS, under the leadership of Richard Sulík (until recently), exhibited a clear form of soft Euroscepticism, advocating for a reversal of EU integration to its original economic cooperation framework, KDH has consistently supported European integration since the 1990s. However, its pro-European orientation has been tempered by a strong emphasis on national sovereignty and a near-religious commitment to the principle of subsidiarity.

Crucially, the soft Euroscepticism expressed by KDH and SaS does not originate in a reaction to the populist Euroscepticism of parties such as Smer-SD or SNS but stems from long-standing ideological commitments (Henderson 2007, 2017). However, the intensification of sovereigntist rhetoric by the governing parties has influenced their strategic positioning: instead of amplifying their criticism of the EU, both KDH and SaS have moved toward a more moderate stance, intentionally distancing themselves from hardline narratives and repeating their support for European integration.

An exemplary case of an adversarial response (Meguid, 2005) to the governing coalition's populist Euroscepticism can be found in the stance of leading centrist opposition party, Progressive Slovakia (*Progresívne Slovensko,* PS). The party not only adopts diametrically opposing positions on issues most criticized by Smer-SD, such as qualified majority voting, EU migration policy, and environmental targets, but also reinforces its pro-European stance through symbolic messaging. This is most clearly reflected in its main campaign slogan for the 2024 EP elections: "We will keep Slovakia in the EU," a direct counter-narrative to the sovereigntist framing employed by its political rivals.

Among the current governing parties in Slovakia, left-wing (social democratic) Hlas-SD *(Voice-Social Democracy)* is the only one that explicitly positions itself as pro-European. Although the party did not publish a standard electoral program for the 2023 parliamentary elections, it instead issued a *Declaration on Values-Based Principles of Post-Election Cooperation.* While this document contains limited references to the European Union, it affirms the party's commitment to European integration, identifying "Slovakia's membership in the European Union and NATO" as foundational to the "free development of our nation."[3]

[3]Available from: https://strana-hlas.sk/dokumenty/.

Salience of Euroscepticism has a different pattern among the parties. Smer-SD primarily uses its Euroscepticism to maintain its domestic support, portraying itself, through the words of its chairman R. Fico, as a party that fights for Slovak interests against Brussels. Prime Minister Fico's current efforts to pursue a sovereign foreign policy are dragging both the party and the country towards international isolation as mentioned above. The same applies to the SNS party, which, according to public opinion polls, is losing the battle for the nationalist vote to the Smer-SD party and the Republika movement. It is questionable whether it will surpass the parliamentary threshold in future elections.

Regarding far-right Republika, the party is the most transnationally connected among those in Slovakia. However, the Europe of Sovereign Nations (ESN) faction in the European Parliament, with which Republika is aligned, has only 25 out of 720 MEPs in the EP. In contrast, the Patriots for Europe (PfE) faction has amassed a faction more than three times the size of the ESN with 86 MEPs. The fact that some parties, such as the German far-right AfD or Republika in particular, were not offered membership when PfE was founded, shows the limits of cooperation between populist and far-right parties across the European continent and suggest that members of the PfE faction do not want to be associated with the ESN members.

8. Conclusion

Populism in Slovakia is pervasive, with few exceptions. From the radical right's embrace of Euroscepticism and nativism, through centrist anti-establishment movements like OĽaNO/The Slovakia Movement, to the complex, ideologically hybrid Smer-SD, the populist label manifests across the political spectrum.

The politicisation of European integration in Slovakia is not a spontaneous reaction to Euroscepticism; rather, it is a strategically managed process by elites who use the European agenda as a tool in domestic political competition. It is important to note that Slovak political actors' attitudes towards the EU are not the result of stable programme positions, but rather ad hoc decisions in response to the current context (Mravcová and Havlík, 2022, pp. 124, 137). Since 2016, Euroscepticism in Slovakia has increasingly mobilized the concept of national sovereignty, framing Brussels as an external force undermining Slovak interests. This sovereignty-based critique has not only intensified but has become deeply intertwined with populist rhetoric, often casting the EU as an elite project imposed on the will of the people. The narrative of "Slovak interests versus Brussels" now functions as a central axis in both populist and Eurosceptic discourse, reinforcing each other in a mutually legitimizing way.

This evolution mirrors broader patterns observable across the Visegrad Group, where political elites have increasingly framed EU integration as a threat to national sovereignty. Figures such as Viktor Orbán and Robert Fico exemplify this trajectory, having transitioned from early Europhile positions to becoming instrumental Eurosceptics (Batory 2008; Morini and Plenta 2024).

Ethics and consent

Ethical approval and consent were not required.

Data availability

No primary dataset is associated with this paper. The study is based on secondary sources, all of which are appropriately cited in the text and listed in the bibliography.

References

Andreadis I, Vasilopoulou S: **The populism–euroscepticism nexus in a contested Europe: The EUPopLink COST Action.** *Open Research Europe.* 2026; **6**: 27.
PubMed Abstract | **Publisher Full Text** | **Free Full Text**

Bakke E: **The art of self-selection or the intervention of the voters? The 2023 election and the shifting social bias of Slovak parliamentary elites since 2006.** *Politologický časopis – Czech Journal of Political Science.* 2024; **31**(2): 87–118.
Publisher Full Text

Batory A: **Euroscepticism in the Hungarian party system: Voices from the wilderness?.** Szczerbiak A, Taggart P, editors. *Opposing Europe?: The comparative party politics of euroscepticism: Volume 1: Case studies and country surveys.* Oxford: Oxford University Press; 2008; pp. 263–276.
Publisher Full Text

Bárdy P: *Fico: posadnutý mocou.* Bratislava: Ringier Slovakia Media, s.r.o; 2022.

Bilčík V: **Back to normal: Slovak European policy in 2017.** Brezani P, editor. *Yearbook of Slovakia's foreign policy 2017.* Bratislava: RC SFPA; 2018.

Buštíková L, Baboš P: **Best in Covid: Populists in the time of pandemic.** *Politics and Governance.* 2020; **8**(4): 496–508.
Publisher Full Text

Carpenter M: **Slovakia and the triumph of nationalist populism.** *Communis. Post-Commun.* 1997; **30**(2): 205–219.
Publisher Full Text

Euronews: **European Socialists expel Slovakian PM's party for values breach.** 2025 17 October.
Reference Source

European Commission and European Parliament: **Eurobarometer 101.1, February–March 2024.** 2024.
Reference Source

European Commission: **Eurobarometer 103, March–April 2025.** 2025.
Reference Source

Gyárfášová O, Mokrá L: **Slovakia: Euroscepticism as a changing notion in electoral campaigns.** Kaeding M, Pollak J, Schmidt P, editors. *Euroscepticism and the future of Europe.* Cham: Palgrave Macmillan; 2021; pp. 131–133.
Publisher Full Text

Gyárfášová O, Hlatky R: **Personalized politics: Evidence from the Czech and Slovak Republics.** *Elect. Stud.* 2023; **81**: Article No. 81.
Publisher Full Text

Henderson K: **EU accession and the new Slovak consensus.** *West Eur. Polit.* 2004; **27**(4): 652–670.
Publisher Full Text

Henderson K: **Slovak political parties and the EU: From symbolic politics to policies.** Lewis PG, Mansfeldová Z, editors. *The European Union and party politics in Central and Eastern Europe.* London: Palgrave Macmillan; 2007; pp. 149–168.
Publisher Full Text

Henderson K: **Euroscepticism and the "missing left": The Slovak case study.** *Politologický časopis – Czech Journal of Political Science.* 2017; **24**(3): 229–248.
Publisher Full Text

Haughton T, Rybář M, Deegan-Krause K: **Leading the way, but also following the trend: The Slovak National Party.** *Politics and Governance.* 2021; **9**(4): 329–339.
Publisher Full Text

Haughton T, Deegan-Krause K: *The new party challenge: Changing cycles of party birth and death in Central Europe and beyond.* Oxford: Oxford University Press; 2020.
Publisher Full Text

Lorimer M, Roch J, van Kessel S: **Populism, euroscepticism, and the populism-euroscepticism nexus.** *Open Research Europe.* 2026; **6**: 73.
Publisher Full Text

Lysek J, Zvada L, Škop M: **Mapping the 2020 Slovak parliamentary election: Analysis of spatial support and voter transition.** *Politologický časopis – Czech Journal of Political Science.* 2020; **27**(3): 278–302.
Publisher Full Text

Marušiak J: **Fenomén strany Smer: medzi "pragmatizmom"a sociálnou demokraciou.** *Středoevropské politické studie.* 2006; **8**(1): 19–55.

Marušiak J: **Political Entrepreneurs as a Challenge for the Party System in Slovakia.** *Politologický časopis – Czech Journal of Political Science.* 2017; **24**(2): 179–200.
Publisher Full Text

Marušiak J: **Slovak, not Brussels social democracy.** *Politologický časopis – Czech Journal of Political Science.* 2021; **28**(1): 37–58.
Publisher Full Text

Meguid B: **Competition between unequals: the role of mainstream party strategy in niche party success.** *Am. Polit. Sci. Rev.* 2005; **99**(3): 347–359.
Publisher Full Text

Morini M, Plenta P: **Following the benefits. Utilitarian attitudes towards the European Union: evidence from three Central and Eastern European countries.** Guiso A, Pasquinucci D, editors. *Anti-Europeanism, Populism and European Integration in a Historical Perspective.* London: Routledge; 2024; pp. 166–182.

Mosca L, Tronconi F: **Beyond left and right: the eclectic populism of the Five Star Movement.** *West Eur. Polit.* 2019; **42**(6): 1258–1283.
Publisher Full Text

Mravcová H, Havlík V: **Pragmatism and support for the EU in Slovakia's politics.** *East European Politics.* 2022; **38**(1): 123–143.
Publisher Full Text

Nicholson T: *Gorila.* Bratislava: Dixit; 2012.

Petrović N, Raos V, Fila F: **Centrist and radical right populists in Central and Eastern Europe: Divergent visions of history and the EU.** *J. Contemp. Eur. Stud.* 2023; **31**(2): 268–290.
Publisher Full Text

Pisklová M: **Slovakia's European policy lost in Fico's "four cardinal directions" in 2024.** Brezani P, editor. *Yearbook of Slovakia's Foreign Policy 2024.* Bratislava: RC SFPA; 2025.

The Slovak Spectator: **Who is Smer?.** 2002 5 August.
Reference Source

The Slovak Spectator: **Euro-socialists suspend Fico's Smer party.** 2006 16 October.
Reference Source

Wondreys J: **Putin's puppets in the West? The far right's reaction to the 2022 Russian (re) invasion of Ukraine.** *Party Polit.* 2023; **31**(2): 299–309.
Publisher Full Text

Vasilopoulou S: **European integration and the radical right: Three patterns of opposition.** *Gov. Oppos.* 2011; **46**(2): 223–244.
Publisher Full Text

Vasilopoulou S: **Far Right Parties and Euroscepticism: Patterns of Opposition**. *ECPR Press*; 2018.

Világi A, Baboš P: **Unpacking negative public attitudes towards European Union integration: Insights from a qualitative study in Slovakia.** *J. Contemp. Eur. Stud.* 2025; **33**(2): 449–469.
Publisher Full Text

Zulianello M: **Varieties of populist parties and party systems in Europe: From state-of-the-art to the application of a novel classification scheme to 66 parties in 33 countries.** *Gov. Oppos.* 2020; **55**(2): 327–347.
Publisher Full Text

Zulianello M, Larsen E: **Blurred positions: The ideological ambiguity of valence populist parties.** *Party Polit.* 2024; **30**(1): 190–199.
Publisher Full Text

Zvada Ľ: **The state of social democracy in Slovakia: The twilight (or rebirth) of social democracy?.** Skrzypek A, Bíró-Nagy A, editors. *The social democratic parties in the Visegrád countries.* Cham: Springer International Publishing; 2023; pp. 177–224.
Publisher Full Text

Open Peer Review

Current Peer Review Status: ✔ ?

Version 1

Reviewer Report 21 September 2026

https://doi.org/10.21956/openreseurope.26474.r80079

© **2026 Styczynska N.** This is an open access peer review report distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

?

Natasza Styczynska
Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Poland

This is a very well-structured, informative piece on populism and Euroscepticism in Slovakia. While the article is already solid and can serve as an informative case study, the authors may wish to take my minor remarks into account.
I would suggest adding information about the far-right Kotlebovci – Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko party, given their clear Eurosceptic message. They advocated for 'Slovexit', and while this may not be relevant now, they used to be the most visible anti-EU force. Currently, the party is mentioned but not characterised.
It would also be interesting to learn more about the Eurosceptic and populist aspects of Fico's "sovereign foreign policy" since 2022, and how this translates into Slovakia's European policy (and the coordination of EU policies in Slovakia).
More relevant literature on Slovak populist/Eurosceptic parties and their policies can be found in:
Refer (1); and Refer (2) as well as
Refer (3) and
Refer (4)

References

1. 'Economic Policies of Populist Leaders: A Central and Eastern European Perspective', edited by István Benczes (Routledge).
2. 'Central European Populist Euroscepticism', in: The Routledge Handbook of European Union Politics, edited by Michèle Knodt, Natalia Chaban, Oriol Costa and Patrick Müller;.
3. Tökölyová, Tatiana, and Peter Orosz (2024), 'The Anti-System in the System: The Far Right in Slovakia', Slovak Journal of Political Science, Vol. 24, No. 1, 2024.
4. Gyárfášová, O., and L. Mokrá. 2021. 'Slovakia: Euroscepticism as a Changing Notion in Electoral Campaigns'. In Euroscepticism and the Future of Europe, edited by M. Kaeding, J. Pollak and P. Schmidt. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Is the background of the case's history and progression described in sufficient detail?
Partly

Is the work clearly and accurately presented and does it cite the current literature?
Yes

If applicable, is the statistical analysis and its interpretation appropriate?
Not applicable

Are all the source data underlying the results available to ensure full reproducibility?
No source data required

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the results?
Yes

Is the case presented with sufficient detail to be useful for teaching or other practitioners?
Yes

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: Euroscepticism, Populism, Central Europe, Balkans, EU enlargement, EU integration

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard, however I have significant reservations, as outlined above.

Reviewer Report 12 September 2026

https://doi.org/10.21956/openreseurope.26474.r80078

© 2026 Soare S. This is an open access peer review report distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Sorina Soare
Department of Political and Social Sciences, University of Florence, Firenze, Italy

I read this report with a lot of interest; it is a solid, informative, and well-structured analysis. It is clearly aligned with the analytical framework developed by Lorimer et al. at the basis of the project. Its discussion of the changing relationship between populism and Euroscepticism is particularly valuable, as its attention to the strategic adaptation of party positions over time. I nevertheless have some reservations about the classification of Smer-SD as an example of eclectic populism. The category is understandable, especially given the party's combination of left-wing economic policies, nationalism, cultural conservatism, nativism, and populist rhetoric. However, it would be useful to clarify whether eclectic refers to the coexistence of elements derived from different ideological traditions or to the absence of a sufficiently coherent host ideology. Populism may be approached as a thin-centered ideology, but the report itself shows that Smer-SD increasingly articulates a relatively substantive ideological position on sovereignty, European

integration, migration, cultural questions, geopolitical alignment, and the war in Ukraine. At least in these areas, the party's profile appears ideologically thicker than the label eclectic might suggest.

The authors could therefore distinguish more explicitly between populism as a thin-centered ideological component and the thicker ideological configuration with which it is combined. This clarification would also strengthen the comparison between Smer-SD, Republika, SNS, and the Slovakia Movement.

The report is much stronger on the supply side than on the demand side. Public attitudes are briefly discussed through Eurobarometer data, but the mechanisms connecting social attitudes, political crises, and party strategies remain underdeveloped. I would encourage the authors to add at least a short paragraph on the demand-side conditions that have made Eurosceptic messages politically resonant. To be added in the conclusions, most probably. Relevant catalysts might include the migration and refugee relocation debate, perceptions of double standards between older and newer member states, the COVID-19 crisis, and the war in Ukraine. The latter is especially important because it intersects with energy dependence, inflation, sanctions, security concerns, and competing understandings of peace and national interest. I think that this small addition would help the report move beyond a predominantly elite-centered explanation. In its present form, the conclusion states that the politicisation of European integration is not a spontaneous reaction but a strategically managed process by elites. This is plausible, but somewhat too categorical given the limited treatment of public attitudes and social grievances. Either the demand-side evidence should be expanded, or the claim should be reformulated to acknowledge the interaction between elite entrepreneurship and pre-existing social dispositions, at least in theory.

As a tiny recommendation, I think that the section on responses to Euroscepticism could also be broadened beyond party competition. At present, it offers a useful analysis of the reactions of Progressive Slovakia, KDH, SaS, and Hlas-SD, but it says little about civil society organisations, quite relevant in the most recent history of Slovakia. The authors might discuss the apparent mismatch between increasingly Eurosceptic governing actors and a significant part of organised civil society that remains more closely aligned with EU norms. This produces a somewhat unusual constellation in which pro-European positions may be strongly represented within NGOs and professional advocacy networks while being more vulnerable or polarising in electoral competition. A last comment refers to a clarification needed with regard to the different dimensions of party positioning. The report occasionally moves between programmatic position, rhetorical intensity, issue salience, and strategic use of Euroscepticism as though they were interchangeable. Smer-SD's trajectory would become clearer if these dimensions were separated. The party may retain formal support for EU membership while increasing the salience of sovereignty, adopting more confrontational rhetoric, and selectively opposing particular EU policies.
A final language edit would correct small typos: gemploy, duplicated wording, etc.

Is the background of the case's history and progression described in sufficient detail?
Yes

Is the work clearly and accurately presented and does it cite the current literature?

Yes

If applicable, is the statistical analysis and its interpretation appropriate?
Not applicable

Are all the source data underlying the results available to ensure full reproducibility?
Yes

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the results?
Yes

Is the case presented with sufficient detail to be useful for teaching or other practitioners?
Yes

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: political parties, populism, postcommunism

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard.