The Far-Right's Mnemonic Alliance with Putin's Russia: ĽSNS's Mastering of a Disruptive Past

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Abstract

This study identifies the mnemonic strategies of the Slovak extreme-right Ľudová Strana Naše Slovensko (ĽSNS) / People's Party Our Slovakia as a means of establishing a mnemonic alliance with Putin's Russia. ĽSNS's construction of mnemonic culture surrounding two critical events in Slovak history – the 1944 Slovak National Uprising and the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Soviet army and its allies – is marked by an effort to overcome the ideological divide between its extreme-right ideology and Russia's identity and memory politics rooted in its anti-fascist heritage. Those two events represent an uneasy terrain for building political and mnemonic alliances between ĽSNS and Putin's Russia. Even though these two historical milestones represent a seemingly unmasterable past and an obstacle in an ĽSNS-Russia alliance, the party implemented several mnemonic strategies to reconfigure the place of these two key historical events in national memory and clear the path for a closer alliance with Putin's Russia. We argue that ĽSNS's memory construction is multidirectional rather than competitive or discordant. We unpack ĽSNS's memory construction and identify multidirectional effects and trajectories as vectors for building a mnemonic alliance with Putin's Russia.

Introduction

The large volume of scholarship published in the past 20 years on the upsurge of the radical right has heavily focused on its causes and mobilization (Kende and Krekó 2020; Ashe et al. 2020; Pirro 2014a; Pytlas 2015; Bustikova 2019; Enyedi 2020; Greskovits 2015; Grzebalska and Pető 2018; Herman, Hoerner, and Lacey 2021). Scholars also paid closer attention to the diffusion of far-right ideology via actors (Pietraszewski and Törnquist-Plewa 2016), material culture, mechanisms, and channels (Jacquet-Vaillant 2021, 3). What has been addressed to a lesser degree is the ideational and behavioral diffusion of extreme-right ideology in collective memory (J. Assmann 2011; A. Assmann 2006; Halbwachs 1992; Anderson 2006) by establishing mnemonic regimes' (Kubik and Bernhard 2014) practices and cultures. Mnemonic cultures that emerge around the commemoration of historical events disseminate messages within society and beyond the boundaries of the state. More specifically, mnemonic cultures are instrumentalized to either form new or affirm existing mnemonic alliances between a broad range of mnemonic actors.

That said, the key mnemonic actor under scrutiny in this study is the far-right party, Ľudová Strana Naše Slovensko (ĽSNS). We identify ĽSNS as a "mnemonic warrior," i.e., as a memory actor who "tend[s] to espouse a single, unidirectional, mythologized vision of time" (Kubik and Bernhard 2014, 7). In the mindset of a mnemonic warrior, "the meaning of events is often determined by their relation to some "paradise lost" or – negatively – an "aberrant past." Additionally, in such mythical

constructions of time, the distinction between the past, present, and future is sometimes collapsed" (Kubik and Bernhard 2014, 7). As a "mnemonic warrior," ĽSNS introduces a type of mnemonic regime that is acceptable for Putin's Russia. ĽSNS's politics of conciliation and trust-building with Putin's Russia required a set of "mnemonic manipulations" (Kubik and Bernhard 2014, 2), as it stumbled across seemingly irreconcilable Slovak-Russian histories, in particular the 1944 Slovak National Uprising (SNU) and the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia by Soviet troops, two critical events in the Slovak national history. These two histories under scrutiny display ĽSNS's implementation of mnemonic strategies reconfiguring these events' place in national memory and soothing the friction between ĽSNS's extreme-right identity and memory politics of Putin's Russia, which is rooted in its anti-fascist heritage.

The main objective of this study is to scrutinize the mechanics of ĽSNS's construction of a transnational alliance with Putin's Russia surrounding historical events that seem to be ideologically irreconcilable for both mnemonic agents. It proceeds by first giving theoretical background, then explaining the methodological approach and introducing the country context. The study follows by presenting the results of the analysis, before summarizing and discussing them in the conclusions.

Theoretical Background and Methodology

At the core of collective memory and its respective mnemonic cultures are shared practices and "discourses that mark certain boundary lines and define respective principles of inclusion and exclusion" (A. Assmann 2006, 13). These practices approached as competing memories have been extensively studied and confined within the national memory and narratives, which have been "*communicatively bound* to the members of a nation, … tied to a *national territory*" and were seen as "*non-universal*" (Khoury 2020). Europeanization and globalization's push for a "transnational turn" (Bond, Rapson, and Erll 2014) yielded concepts that bridged two or more "*lieux de memoir*" (Nora 1989) across national boundaries. As a result, scholarly attention shifted towards transnational memory alliances, i.e., "informal or formal associations formed on the basis of a shared narrative of the past" (McGlynn, 2020). Transnational memory alliances have been approached as either being "dialogical" (Khoury 2020), qualitatively identified as competing and discordant (Himka and Michlic 2013), complementing and entangled (Henderson and Lange 2017), or "multidirectional" (Rothberg 2009).

To unpack the subtle mechanics of transnational ĽSNS and Russia's memory alliance, we move away from the notion of competitive memory and apply Rothberg's concept of "multidirectional memory" as a process of "ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not privative" (Rothberg 2009, 3). Inspired by Sigmund Freud's "screen memory" (Freud 2001), Rothberg approached multidirectional memories as entangled histories or "histories [that] are implicated in each other" (Rothberg 2009, 313). Screen memory "cover[s] up a traumatic event… that cannot be approached directly" (Rothberg 2009, 12) and suppresses the original experience "with a 'mnemic image' which screens out the aspects of the original experience which were objectionable" (Silverstein 2015, 155). Despite the inherent resistance, screen memory does not compete with or directly silence a traumatic event but rather questions the validity of the original memory and "generate[s] a compromise which condenses both memories" (Quinodoz 2005, 35).

Screen memory formed on an individual level is intertwined with historical multidirectional memory formed within "social frameworks" (Rothberg 2009, 14–15). What distinguishes multidirectional memory from screen memory is the process behind their interaction: "while screen memory *replaces* a disturbing memory with a more comforting, everyday scene, the multidirectional memory… frequently *juxtaposes* [our emphasis] two or more disturbing memories and disrupts everyday settings" (Rothberg 2009, 14). Rothberg's multidirectional memory model allows us to understand *how* the extreme right ĽSNS appropriates two dominant narratives to build mnemonic alliances as a pretext of transnational and civilizational alliances with Russia. In

particular, the 1944 Slovak National Uprising and the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact troops under the command of the Soviets were approached differently in the collective memory of ĽSNS and Putin's Russia. To investigate ĽSNS's memory architecture of 1944 and 1968 as a way of building memory alliance with Russia, we created a database of ĽSNS's statements about 1944 and 1968 histories posted on ĽSNS's leader Marian Kotleba's Facebook page, YouTube channel, and online news outlets between 2016 (the year when ĽSNS made it to Parliament) and 2021 (the time of writing this study).

Our investigation into how the extreme right ĽSNS constructs and instrumentalizes 1944 and 1968 mnemonic cultures to affirm alliances with Putin's Russia is critical for several reasons. Above all, the collective memories of 1944 and 1968, which unfolded on semi-periphery where Slovakia has been located, are multidirectional; they connect past and present, operate inter-generationally, inter-imperially (Parvulescu and Boatcă 2022), and transnationally. The 1944 SNU and 1968 events leading to the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact troops are at the core of dominant mnemonic culture and identity politics in Slovakia. Both historical events can be approached as eras of disruption that marked the onset of new historical developments, and as such represent a memory space where mnemonic actors stepped in and invested in the recollection of past events with certain ideological and political messages to affirm the respective identities.

We selected these two mnemonic cultures because their respective histories were determined by direct encounters between the Soviet Union and Slovak historical actors. The nature of 1944 and 1968 Slovak-Soviet historical interactions differed substantially. While the official interpretation of the 1944 SNU – the history of which was entangled with the help, planning, and assistance of Soviet partisans – represents a cornerstone of Slovak identity; the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact troops under the command of the Soviets is condemned as an act of aggression.

From ĽSNS's viewpoint, the 1944 SNU and the 1968 invasions represent a challenge, anomaly, or obstacle for their Russophilia and pan-Slavism as expressions of transnational, civilizational identity based on a close alliance with Russia. To understand *how* ĽSNS approximates this seemingly irreconcilable rift to solidify the mnemonic alliance with Russia and how ĽSNS constructs a "mnemic image" to soothe the unmasterable 1944 and 1968 histories, our investigation will proceed in the following steps:

1. Introduce ĽSNS and context behind the upsurge of the extreme right in Slovakia.
2. Provide the context behind the history and memory of each milestone (1944 and 1968).
3. Chronologically trace ĽSNS's commemoration practices (speeches, symbolic acts, and relevant actions) surrounding 1944 and 1968.
4. Identify the nature of these commemorative practices.
5. Reflect on how these specific commemorative practices disseminate pro-Russian sentiments and messaging.
6. Where possible, trace the responses of Russia to ĽSNS's 1944 and 1968 commemorative practices.

These steps and objectives outline our methodology and guide us through the entire article.

The Country in Context

Slovakia represents a post-communist "showcase" of raised nationalism accompanied by semi-authoritarian populist politics and radical-right nationalistic appeals. The first decade of post-communist developments produced scholarship scrutinizing the dominant party of the 1990s, the Movement for Democratic Slovakia, and the traditional Slovak national party (Deegan-Krause 2006, 2004; Rybář and Deegan-Krause 2008; Haughton 2001). Later years brought the rise in popularity of radical-right parties and not only in Central and Eastern Europe – most Western democracies also faced the challenge of radical right-wing movements' electoral fortunes, rising

xenophobia, populism, and Euroscepticism (Pytlas 2015; Pirro, 2014b; 2015; Bustikova 2019; Mudde 2007; Caiani and Císař 2019; McDonnell 2020; Ramet c1999; Rydgren 2008). The world-wide economic crises along with global and national turbulence have brought a new populist impetus for democratic societies – be it post-communist or established traditional democracies (McDonnell 2020; Kende and Krekó 2020; Szyszlak, 2019; Vachudova 2020; Gwiazda 2021).

A new societal cleavage that ran hand in hand with globalization, political transnationalization, and manifold crises has less social and economic character; instead, cultural and identitarian dividing lines are in the foreground (Norris and Inglehart 2019; Zúquete 2018). Furthermore, in several EU countries, including the CEEC, the 2015 refugee and migrant crisis accelerated the shift in the prominence of political issues and highlighted the changes in their reconfiguration (Goździak, Main, and Suter 2020; Trix 2018; García Agustín and Jørgensen 2019; Marino 2021). These developments can be observed across liberal democracies where, of course, the country context is extremely important.

History and Profile of the Ľ'SNS

ĽSNS is the only extreme-right party in the National Council of the Slovak Republic and the only Slovak extreme-right party in the EU Parliament. Until the split of ĽSNS earlier in 2021, ĽSNS represented Slovakia's most successful embodiment of the radicalization trend. What was the opportunity structure of the ĽSNS advance? We could distinguish at least two aspects: political and discursive. The political opportunity came with the decline of the Slovak National Party (SNS) due to the internal split, a waning nationalist agenda, and finally entering the ruling coalition (as a junior partner) with a party representing the Hungarian minority, namely Most-Híd (Bridge). The partnership with the Hungarian minority made the SNS a traitor in the eyes of its hard-core nationalist electorate. As a result, the SNS's loss of credibility and relevance opened opportunity for ĽSNS to draw disillusioned SNS voters into ĽSNS ranks.

Discursive opportunity structure can be conceptualized as higher public receptivity for radical appeals (Paulovicova 2020). Dozens of public opinion surveys conducted over the past decades confirm the Slovak society's distinct and long-lasting distancing from national minorities, sexual and gender minorities, foreigners, and any form of "otherness." In the first two decades after 1989, the distance has been mostly articulated (and politically mobilized) toward traditional autochthonous minorities, especially Hungarian and Roma (Gallová Kriglerová et al. 2015). When Slovak-Hungarian relations consolidated, ĽSNS abandoned the Hungarian minority card and amplified anti-gypsyism targeting Roma, the second largest minority. ĽSNS's core identifier "Our Slovakia," a collective of decent white Christian cisgender Slovaks, had roots in ĽSNS's racism, anti-gypsyism but also in antisemitism, Islamophobia, homophobia, economic protectionism, anti-Westernism, and anti-elitism (Paulovicova 2022). A pro-Russian orientation as the path to a successful civilizational rescue mission emerged with greater urgency in the wake of the 2015 refugee crisis when ĽSNS securitized refugees and migrants by constructing a mnemic image of refugees as "Muslim hordes'" rapists and Islam as "satanic-pedophile work of the devil" (Vražda 2017, 30). To counter the threat, this gendered securitization trope amplified the brotherhood of Slavs, Christianity, tradition, and family as core values of the Eurasian civilization and alternative to the "morally decadent" West – a nest of "dangerous sects and sexual deviations" (Simms 2016). The refugee and migration crises of 2015 accompanied by the "xenophobization" of the domestic political and public discourse created a situational discursive opportunity and contributed to the breakthrough of the ĽSNS into the national parliaments in the 2016 general election (Gyárfášová 2019).

Historical consciousness, as a pillar of identity politics, represents the artery of the ĽSNS multidimensional identity's temporal (connecting past, present, future) and spatial (transcending local, regional, national, transnational) trajectories at the center of which is "Our Slovakia." ĽSNS is the party of "the radical return" (Shafir 2012, 31), promoting the values of the controversial wartime Slovak republic, a satellite of Nazi Germany that is condemned by Putin's Russia as a "Slovak fascist

state." The Slovak nationalists and extremists mythologize the Slovak state (1939–1945) and downplay its problematic nature. Contrary to the historical fact that the Slovak state was allied with Nazi Germany and, as such, more than 70,000 of its Jewish citizens and about 1,000 Roma were deported to concentration camps and certain death, ĽSNS's representatives sanitize this past by hyper-focusing on the establishment of the first state of Slovaks. The mnemic image of the "independence" of the Slovak state thus challenges the undeniable fact that the wartime Slovak Republic was a vassal state of Nazi Germany, and establishes the historical tie between the 1939 and 1993 Slovak Republics to confirm the "rootedness" of the Slovak nation (Paulovicova 2021).

The wartime "independent" Slovak state adopted racial legislation inspired by the Nuremberg laws and actively collaborated with Nazi Germany in the implementation of the Holocaust of Jews and Roma, as well as the mentally ill and disabled. The 1993 Slovak Republic was based on the anti-fascist tradition embodied in the 1944 SNU. Therefore, the modern Slovak Republic is considered a successor to the Czechoslovak federation and neither a legal nor political successor to the wartime Slovak state; however, the revisionism that relativized the Slovak wartime problematic past has become an indelible part of post-1989 identity building (Paulovicova 2021). ĽSNS embraced revisionism, glorified ethno-nationalists Andrej Hlinka and wartime President Jozef Tiso as staunch anti-communists, copied the logo of the authoritarian HSĽS (Hlinka Slovak People's Party), adopted HSĽS's slogan "For God and For the Nation," and disseminated Nazi symbols in charity cheques donated to socially marginalized families. Moreover, ĽSNS MPs requested a minute of silence in memory of Jozef Tiso and proudly ranked him among Slovakia's national heroes, while denying any connection to fascism.

Pro-Russian Sentiments in Slovakia – Explaining the Attraction of Pan-Slavism

Slovakia was influenced by the narrative of solidarity with Slavic nations that became popular in the mid-19th century, largely thanks to national awakeners. The pivotal role in these theories was played by Russia, which was portrayed as the protector of small Slavic nations against their historical enemies. In particular, Ľudovít Štúr, whom the extreme right appropriated as a symbol of distancing from Western liberalism, suggested that small nations, including Slovaks, should merge with Russia, accept Russian as an official language, and convert to Orthodoxy (Marušiak 2020, 109). But such Russophilia of Slovak national revivalists never translated into a political program. In the 20th century, Russophilia was harnessed toward the establishment of Czechoslovakia in 1918, toward the recognition of the 1939 wartime Slovak state by the Soviet Union, or as a means of gradual distancing from Nazi Germany when it was obvious that the Wehrmacht was losing World War II. In the postwar era, Russophilia was one of the critical vectors of Stalinization and Sovietization.

The communist regime reconciled Russophile traditions and anti-Western sentiments with Slovak nationalism into "the paradoxical symbiosis of communist ideology and the tradition of conservative currents in Slovak thought" (Marušiak 2020, 109). Due to the coexistence of communism and conservative currents, Slovakia was a latecomer in confronting the communist regime in comparison to other Central European countries. In fact, in the 1990s and early 2000s, there was lower popular support for the integration of Slovakia into the EU. As a result of Mečiar's policies and pro-Russian stance (1994–1998), Slovakia was the only V4 country not invited to the pre-accession talks with the EU and NATO (Krekó, Győri, Milo, Marušiak, Széky, Lencsés, 2015, 24). Even after Slovakia joined the EU in 2004, Slovak-Russian relations did not deteriorate despite ever-increasing Russian interference and the proliferation of pro-Kremlin narratives (Golianová and Kazharski 2020).

The positive public perception of Russia in recent Slovakia has been documented in several surveys (Gyarfášová and Mesežnikov 2021). A recent survey compares trust toward Russia among Visegrad Four countries and shows a deep division between the very skeptical position of Polish respondents on one side and Slovakia's respondents on the other. Compared to Czechia, Slovakia's

respondents show a higher trust towards Russia because the Czech population has a more critical perception of the Soviet invasion of August 1968 and the subsequent 20 years of Soviet occupation. The 2021 Globsec survey confirmed the deep division in the perception of Russia in the Central and Eastern European region (Milo 2021). Based on respondents' attitudes toward Russia, the survey categorized countries as bear huggers (Slovakia, Serbia, Montenegro, and Slovenia), bear feeders (Czech Republic, Hungary, and North Macedonia), and bear skeptics (Poland and Romania). With its radical anti-Western and anti-NATO approaches, the ĽSNS is the leading representative of pro-Russian-oriented political forces (Mesežnikov 2021, 56).

ĽSNS's pro-Russian orientation translated into a petition for a referendum about Slovakia's exit from NATO and EU shortly after the 2016 general election – an effort that failed to gain momentum due to marginal public support. Moreover, in the 2019 European Parliament election, the ĽSNS obtained two (out of 14 Slovakia mandates) MEP mandates. One of them, Milan Uhrík, was one of the most active pro-Russian members of the European Parliament in 2019–2020 (Mesežnikov 2021, 59). He frequently sought the opportunity to gain public support for the politics of the Russian federation and engaged in hard attacks against the West – a stance that contradicted the official Slovak Republic's foreign policy (Mesežnikov 2021, 59).

ĽSNS's Mnemonic Culture Account of 1944 Slovak National Uprising

1944 in History and Memory

August 29, 1944, was a critical milestone when Slovaks expressed their determination to fight Nazism and fascism during the Slovak National Uprising (SNU). Following the outbreak of the SNU, Soviet partisans joined Slovak partisans, as both sides shared a common goal to defeat Nazi Germany. The democrats in Slovakia also welcomed the Soviet presence without which Nazi Germany could not have been defeated. The uprising opened the path to the reestablishment of Czechoslovakia and offered Czechs and Slovaks a ticket to a postwar camp of victors.

In the immediate aftermath of World War II, during a very short era of parliamentary democracy in Czechoslovakia (1945–1948), SNU was mostly addressed in memoirs outlining historical events by politicians or journalists, rather than historians. However, the situation shifted with the defeat of communists in the 1946 elections to the Democratic Party. As a result, two SNU mnemonic accounts with identifiable transnational and civilizational trajectories emerged during this period. One was articulated by the Chairman of the Democratic Party, Jozef Lettrich, at the occasion of the third anniversary of SNU. It emphasized utilizing SNU as a vehicle toward ensuring the equal status of Czechs and Slovaks in postwar Czechoslovakia – a state based on social justice with friendly ties with Slavic nations and the Soviet Union in particular. The other mnemonic account was articulated on the same occasion by Gustáv Husák, a leading representative of communists in Slovakia (Milan Zemko 2010, 85). Husák underscored the threat of distorting the SNU meaning posed by the clash of interests between the rich urban class and the working class. Husák's speech reflected the accelerating tension between the Democratic Party and communists, which, in February 1948, culminated in the putsch communist takeover followed by four decades of a totalitarian regime. Husák's mnemic image of a rich urban-class threat challenged democrats' recollection of SNU. This mnemic manipulation prioritized the class paradigm prevalent in historians' approach to SNU during the communist era.

SNU in the communist era represented a *lieu de memoir* of multiple trajectories. The memory of SNU emphasized the political vision of Slovaks in Czechoslovakia and transnational links with the international working class and the Soviet Union. More importantly, SNU served as a means of "self-legitimization" and affirmation of regime's historical role and heroism during critical SNU events. Personal qualities such as diligence, hard work, kindness, and willingness to self-sacrifice, in addition to the emphasis on state leaders' humble origins, were highlighted not only to showcase SNU as an event during which national and individual pasts were intimately interwoven; more

importantly, state leaders infused SNU's commemoration with personal qualities to disseminate a message about the desired behavioral norm of Slovak polity (Michela 2020, 308). In the hands of the communist regime, the SNU narrative served as a moral societal code.

The supporters of Tiso's Slovak state, a vassal republic of Nazi Germany, approached SNU as a betrayal of the Slovak republic and joined forces to suppress it. The ethnonationalists condemned the uprising as a death blow to the interest of Slovak nationhood and denounced August 29, 1944, as a "black day" in the history of the Slovak nation (Paulovicova 2021, 180). Although such sentiments were silenced during the communist era, they prevailed in exile (Vondrášek and Pešek 2011) and reemerged after 1989 as a wartime Slovak state nostalgia, which is still an essential force in the nation's memory. For example, in 2014, at the SNU's 70th anniversary, ageing émigré historians František Vnuk and Milan Ďurica and the controversial Slovak historian Martin Lacko, supporter of the extreme-right ĽSNS, challenged SNU's place in the nation's memory by selling T-shirts with an anti-uprising message that called for "fighting Judeobolsheviks" (Paulovicova 2021, 180).

ĽSNS's Uprooting of SNU from National Memory

Ethnonationalists and revisionists in Slovakia more often than not support Kotleba's ĽSNS, which venerates wartime problematic president-priest Jozef Tiso,[1] promotes Holocaust denial and relativization, disseminates racism and antisemitism, and condemns the 1944 SNU as a putsch against the Slovak nation and a death blow to the first Slovak ethnic state. ĽSNS condemns the SNU as a "Black day" in history and labels SNU participants as "deserters" and "red murderers" ("Zvolá Kotleba zasadnutie poslancov na výročie SNP?," *Pravda*, August 12, 2016). During an aired TV debate on TA3 Channel in May 2017, Milan Uhrík accused the director of the Museum of Slovak National Uprising Stanislav Mičev of being an Štb[2] agent who denounced people for money. Mičev categorically refused such accusations, reported Uhrík to the authorities for libel, and requested an apology, which Uhrík eventually issued on July 12, 2019 ("Uhrík sa po dvoch rokoch ospravedlnil šéfovi Múzea SNP Mičevovi," *Pravda*, August 6, 2019).

Trauma informed mnemic image of SNU as communist, red murderers or Štb's conspiracy challenges the validity of original SNU memory as a gateway to re-establishment of postwar Czechoslovakia and condenses original memory and ĽSNS's mnemic image into a compromise via mnemonic manipulation. SNU memory thus becomes *lieux de memoir* of multiple directions, which a) diachronically links 1944, communism, and post-communism, b) negotiates Slovakia's inter-imperiality and positionality between the East (Soviet Union, Putin's Russia) and the West, and c) affirms transgenerational values as was the case during SNU's 73rd anniversary during which President Andrej Kiska encouraged people to vote in upcoming elections and "select a non-fascist candidate." Kiska expressed the hope that the nation could defeat the fascists in its ranks and be inspired by "self-confidence, bravery and values of Slovak National Uprising." Kiska's speech, along with speeches of Fico and Danko, were condemned by ĽSNS as "a desperate call in a desperate election campaign" (*SITA,Webnoviny*, August 30, 2017).

Mnemic images challenging official SNU memory represent vectors of memory transition deeply entangled in the politics of emotions as a mover of transformation (Sindbæk Andersen and Törnquist-Plewa 2016; A. Assmann 2008; Bond, Rapson, and Erll 2014; Krawatzek and Soroka 2022; Frič and Gyarfášová, 2019). ĽSNS's mnemonic alliance-building through SNU memory relies on manipulating emotions of ethnonational pride, fear, or anxiety (reference to red murderers) to reconfigure the distant past in a way that past concerns merge with present socioeconomic and political concerns (Landsberg 2004, 8–9; Sindbæk Andersen and Törnquist-Plewa 2016, 8). Symbolic memory acts have the same function.

Placing a black flag in the window of a county office in Banská Bystrica on the day of the 71st anniversary of SNU, scheduling a special party meeting on the day of the 72nd anniversary of SNU in 2016 ("Zvolá Kotleba zasadnutie poslancov na výročie SNP?," *Pravda,* August 12, 2016), or flying a dark green balloon with the ĽSNS logo over Banská Bystrica as a sign of provocation (*BBonline.sk,*

August 29, 2017) all represent a range of ĽSNS's symbolic gestures to challenge SNU in national memory. Excessive emotionalization of politics (Sindbæk Andersen and Törnquist-Plewa 2016; Magni 2017; Manning and Holmes 2014; Frič and Gyarfášová 2010) through historical memory or symbolic acts are signs of securitization (Balzacq 2011; Gaufman 2022), demarcating power (Vachudova 2020, 328) and affirming alliances. While on the national level, ĽSNS resorts to attacks against the SNU as well as those politicians who commemorate it as a critical cornerstone of Slovak identity, its approach to the SNU differs when SNU is negotiated as a transnational *lieu de memoir*, which ĽSNS utilizes for the maintaining of close ties with Putin's Russia. Not surprisingly, ĽSNS's condemnation of SNU did not escape Russia's notice.

Russia's Response to ĽSNS Commemoration Politics of 1944

ĽSNS's problematic identity, rooted in the wartime Slovak state as a vassal state of Nazi Germany, was flagged in the 2019 report of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. The report stated that ĽSNS's "racially motivated extremism," racism targeting Romas, antisemitism, and ĽSNS's effort to "create a nationally- and socially-oriented state (National Socialism) based on the model of the pro-fascist Slovak Republic during the Second World War" (Дипломатическая академия МИД России, 2022) are unacceptable for Russia, whose identity is heavily rooted in anti-fascism and the Red Army's victory over Nazism. Yet, on the ground, the Kremlin's transnational alliances are rooted in pragmatic trans-ideology, i.e., "cross[ing] the traditional boundaries of left and right by functionally developing ideologically controversial communication strategies" (Braghiroli and Makarychev 2016, 215). Kremlin's trans-ideology is amoebic as it adjusts to "highly ideological partners" to lower the risk of "contradictions of contrasting ideological stances" (Braghiroli and Makarychev 2016, 215). While the Kremlin's tactics of temporary controversial alliances with far-right groups is highly pragmatic, its strategy "related to the consolidation and supremacy of the socialist Soviet model" is not subjected to any compromises (Braghiroli and Makarychev 2016, 215).

The Soviet Union played a role in the SNU, which ĽSNS condemned as a black day in Slovak history leading to the death of the Slovak state and restoration of Czechoslovakia, which would not be possible without the advancement and victory of the Red Army over Nazi Germany in 1945. Putin does not tolerate any historical interpretation that questions the role of the Red Army and its unprecedented human and material sacrifices in liberating Europe. Post-Cold War Central and Eastern European states, however, put the Soviet regime and Nazi regime in the same category of totalitarian regimes, demanded transitional justice, implemented restitution, opened archives, and publicly discussed the communist regime's crimes (Laruelle 2021, 64). In the Slovak context, 2002 law coined the term "nesloboda" (non-freedom) comprising both the clerical fascist era (1939–1945) and the era of communism (1939–1989). Such equation of Soviet and Nazi regimes, in Putin's eyes, is "pure historical revisionism… a kind of Nuremberg trial for the Soviet regime" (Laruelle 2021, 64), undermining the geopolitical importance and power of Russia. ĽSNS faced the task of overcoming this clash of polarized ĽSNS's (extreme right) and Russia's (whose identity is rooted in anti-fascism) ideologies and resorted to several mnemonic strategies and symbolic acts to approximate the ideological gap of 1944–1945's place in collective memory.

ĽSNS's Mnemonic Strategies of Approximation of Contested SNU History

In the past few years, ĽSNS has strived to build a closer alliance with Russia by soothing the ĽSNS's memory of 1944 SNU and Putin's World War II tropes. Just like Putin, ĽSNS downplays the importance of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the responsibility of the Soviet Union for the outbreak of World War II and shifts attention toward the Munich Agreement and the West's responsibility for that outbreak. In 2019, the ĽSNS's representative, Miroslav Radačovský, a lawyer who is also an MP in the European Parliament, pointed to the West's responsibility for the outbreak

of World War II by bringing attention to the Munich Agreement on several occasions (Mesežnikov 2021, 65).

To soothe the gap between ĽSNS and Russia's different approaches to the SNU, ĽSNS resorted to symbolic gestures. Hoisting the Russian flag from the window of Kotleba's office in Banská Bystrica (*HN Online.sk*, May 5, 2016), a town that was the center of the SNU, represents one example of ĽSNS's conciliatory gesture toward Putin's Russia and its anti-fascist identity. Denying the accusations of being fascist allows ĽSNS to mobilize voters from a broader pool of the conservative electorate but also to signal to Putin that ĽSNS's values and goals overlap with those of Russia. Despite Kotlebists's effort to demote the place of SNU in the Slovak national memory as a death blow to Slovak statehood, 67% of ĽSNS voters support the claim that the "Slovak National Uprising was the resistance of Slovaks against fascism and therefore we can be rightfully proud of that" (Database Osudové osmičky, 2018). As this survey indicates, many ĽSNS voters do not deny that the SNU played a critical role in the fight against fascism. Despite diametrically opposite official approaches of ĽSNS and Russia toward the SNU, there is a shared consensus on the level of ĽSNS's electorate and Putin's Russia. Such acceptance of SNU among ĽSNS's electorate is possible only via attaching new signifiers to the SNU as a transnational *lieu de mémoire* at the core of ĽSNS-Russia relations. The place of SNU in ĽSNS's mnemonic politics is conditioned by ĽSNS's geopolitical need to build an alliance with Putin's Russia as a counterweight to the "decadent West."

Subtle omission of the role of the Soviet Union in SNU serves as a "vector of [memory] transition" (Rothberg 2009, 84). When launching its attacks against the SNU, ĽSNS tends to target the "betrayers" of Slovakia – Czechoslovaks who fought for the restoration of Czechoslovakia after the war's end – but rarely brings the Soviet Union into the context. The mnemic image of Czechoslovaks is a focal point that "cover[s] up a traumatic event… that cannot be approached directly" (Rothberg 2009, 12). In this case, the historical role of the Soviet Union in the defeat of Nazi Germany, and hence the end of the Slovak state as a vassal state of Nazi Germany, is traumatic and "objectionable" history (Silverstein, 2015, 155). The subtle rather than direct silencing of certain facts and abstaining from histories that represent obstacles toward the conciliation of far-right ĽSNS and Putin's Russia "generate a compromise which condenses both memories" (Quinodoz 2005, 35). Such a mnemonic approach allows for a certain degree of soothing conflicting memories and even a partial convergence of historical narratives. According to Forsberg, the "full convergence of the historical narratives and national identities do not need to exist for stable peace and normalized relations between former enemies to emerge" (Forsberg 2016, 43). In this regard, even symbolic gestures and carefully implemented fact-omissions and subtle silencing can have a major impact on the formation of mnemonic alliances and eventually actual alliances on the geopolitical scene.

The juxtaposition of past and present is at the heart of ĽSNS's multidirectional "practice of remembrance" (Banke 2016, 31). When the Constitutional Court rejected the referendum calling for early elections, Kotleba appealed to the nation from the Museum of SNU with an effort to incite a "real Slovak uprising" against the current "barbarian government" and its "fascist and totalitarian policies" that are "masked under the pretext of a pandemic" (*Ľudová strana* 2021). Kotleba did not "cancel out" SNU, but rather soothed the trauma of the original historical event by suggesting that it was not "real" and by doing so "condensed both memories" via "verbal expression" facilitated by the "polysemous nature of the words" (Quinodoz 2005, 35). Kotleba explicitly called for an insurrection but implicitly juxtaposed the 1944 SNU and a 2021 Kotlebists-led "real Slovak uprising" (*Ľudová strana* 2021). Kotlebists' "mnemic image" of a "real Slovak uprising" questions the validity of 1944 SNU as a key symbol of a democratic society embedded in the Western structures of EU and NATO. Challenging the 1944 SNU with a 2021 "real Slovak uprising" reveals the depth of trauma that 1944 SNU inflicted on ethnonationalists who have not come to terms with the death of the Slovak wartime state. ĽSNS's reference to current government in Slovakia, which belongs to Western EU and NATO as "barbarian," is a part of a colonial/ civilizational frame where "barbarization" of the West signals regression or "'decivilization' of the colonizer," the concept that "rests on an

indiscriminate and self-serving view of other societies to which modern, presumably advanced societies are compared" (Rothberg 2009, 75; LaCapra 1998).

L'SNS's Mnemonic Culture Account of 1968

1968 in History and Memory

1968 marked the culmination of the liberalization of the communist-controlled regime. In May 1968, Ota Šik, a deputy Prime Minister of the Czechoslovak government, introduced a bold vision of "socialist democracy" to a student rally: "a model of socialist society that will become genuinely attractive for the working people of all capitalist countries and that will have a tremendous impact on the development of left-wing movements in Western countries" (Bischof et al. 2009, 39). This idea of "socialism with a human face" at the core of the reform-wing program, led by Alexander Dubček, was aborted by a military invasion of 200,000 Warsaw Pact troops and 2,000 tanks, directed by the Soviet army on August 21 (Stoneman 2015, 107). What followed was years of normalization under the leadership of Gustav Husák, the rule of communist hard-liners, the elimination of reformists from the party ranks, the end of reforms, censorship, small-scale show-trials, arrests of intellectuals, and persecution (Bryant 2021, 168). Yet, the Prague Spring marked the 1970s and 1980s with important legacies: a societal disillusionment with the regime was all-pervasive and nurtured a dissident movement that abandoned the idea of reforming the regime and instead worked toward its peaceful dismantling in the 1989 Velvet Revolution (Stoneman 2015, 107).

During the normalization, the narrative of 1968 was constructed as a securitized discourse of brotherly help of the Soviets and the Warsaw Pact armies, which came to the rescue of Czechoslovaks who faced the threat of NATO-led counter-revolution. The commemoration of 1968 as an act of aggression was suppressed into the "social unconscious" as unofficial narratives circulated mainly in families or the private sphere (Želinský 2019, 211). The narrative of the 1968 invasion as an act of aggression emerged in full force in the post-1989 context and faded away in the following two decades, as the younger generation did not have any personal recollections of the events compared to older generations of Czechs and Slovaks. Fieldwork among Czech youth in August 2018, shortly before the 50th anniversary of the event, indicates the possibility of a complete absence of 1968 cultural trauma (Bochkov 2019).

The views of Slovakia's public on the 1968 military invasion are predominantly critical but resonate less with the critical assessment of the communist regime. Thus, attitudes toward occupation are relatively shallow and, to a large extent, detached from a complex political context (Bútorová and Mesežnikov 2018, 66). In the 1960s, Slovaks called for the federalization of the Czechoslovak Republic, and the issue of "the Slovak question" received considerable attention during the Prague Spring events. For Slovaks, 1968 meant not only the quest for democratization and the liberalization of "real socialism" but also a call for a more symmetrical political setting within unitary Czechoslovakia. Želinský argues that in Slovakia "the memory of the Prague Spring … remains generally dormant, on the margins of the political discourse" (2019, 209). Opportunistic mobilization of the Prague Spring memory for various political agendas indicate the presence of "boundary-work, the process by which social actors demarcate the symbolic borders between their own group and others" (Želinský 2019, 209).

Boundary-work embedded in the Prague Spring narrative allows social actors to make a distinction "between viable and unviable political identities, between those with whom one can align and those one must stay away from" (Želinský 2019, 215). The instances of boundary-work surrounding the Prague Spring display two modes of memory: the one of "continuity … and that of radical disruption" (Želinský 2019, 217). This is best demonstrated when looking at the place of Alexander Dubček in political discourse. On the one hand, Dubček is seen as a symbol of the Prague Spring and hopes for a better future, which, in the post-1989 context, evolved even further. His bust

in the European Parliament presents Dubček as a symbol of the post-1989 European unification. On the other hand, neoliberals and neo-Ludaks demote Dubček from the pedestal of leading historical figures by portraying him as a fervent communist (Marušiak 2021, 11).

L'SNS's Commemorative Practices of August 1968

Neither the Prague Spring nor August 1968 were on the agenda of the ĽSNS as reference points. There are very few occasions when ĽSNS representatives articulate or instrumentalize this period of national history. Although the contradiction between Russia as an invader and liquidator (killer) of democratization and Russophilia deeply anchored in the ĽSNS narratives is not explicitly addressed, we can trace ĽSNS's mnemonic strategies to mend this divide in collective memory.

In 2018, representatives on all sides of the political spectrum commemorated the 50th anniversary of 1968. However, ĽSNS, at that time already a parliamentary party, was conspicuously silent. The media even reported that "the ĽSNS did not answer the question of whether they are preparing something on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the invasion of the occupying forces" ("August '68: SaS a OĽaNO Budú Spomínať, Vedenie Smeru Či ĽSNS Mlčí," *Aktuality.sk*, August 13, 2019). Instead of giving a commemorative speech on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of 1968, Kotleba's ĽSNS distributed leaflets accusing the Slovak government of servility towards the democratic West (Martinický 2021). ĽSNS challenged the August 1968 invasion with the mnemic image of the West embedded with the notion of an existential threat as the new era aggressor. Juxtaposing the Soviet Union as a 1968 aggressor with the mnemic image of the Western colonizer condenses and reframes 1968 memory and invites reassessment of the responsibility of Russia (as the offspring of the Soviet Union) for past aggression. ĽSNS, as a "securitizing agent" identifies the West as a "referent object of the threat" (Butler 2020; Gaufman 2022) to dress up the 1968 Soviet Union invader in the cloak of 2021 rescuer and civilizational savior. More importantly, just like, in earlier examples, one can trace certain parallelism as a sign of multidirectional memory, ĽSNS's condemnation of the West as a new-era aggressor, colonizer, and occupier resembles Soviet propaganda, which justified the invasion of Czechoslovakia by half a million soldiers from the Warsaw Pact on the basis of protecting and rescuing Czechoslovakia from the claws of the West (Martinický 2021).

Whereas ĽSNS's comments on the commemoration of 1968 invasion were rather hesitant, in 2019, ĽSNS was more active and commented on the 51st anniversary of 1968 events:

> ĽSNS does not forget the sad anniversary when our homeland lost freedom and sovereignty under the guns and cannons of tanks while the entire so-called democratic world was just watching. 51 years have passed since the occupation, and the boots of foreign soldiers are being stamped on Europe and Slovakia. This time, they were no longer soldiers of the Warsaw Pact armies, which were dismantled in the meantime, but soldiers and tanks from NATO led by the USA. So, let's be aware! American military boots are no better than the Soviet ones were (*O médiách.com* 2019).

The status was illustrated by an iconic photo of a man with a bare chest standing against a tank in the center of Bratislava. ĽSNS did not ask for permission to use this picture. The mnemic image of democratic world as a passive onlooker challenges 1968 official memory. Existential threat is embedded in hyper-masculinized "stamp[ing]… American military boots," which were "no better than the Soviet ones." The presence of "American military boots," 51 years after 1968, underscores the temporality of return of Western colonialism, which "boomerangs" into semi-periphery (Rothberg, 2009, 74). The tanks and soldiers are not Russian but "Soviet," which is formally correct but which, in this case, intentionally avoided any historical attribution of responsibility to Russia. "The boots of foreign soldiers" identified as the Warsaw Pact armies is as far as ĽSNS was willing to go, again without directly mentioning the 1968 invasion instigator. More importantly, the emphasis on Warsaw Pact armies' "dismantling" implicitly "de-securitizes" (Butler, 2020)

Russia's imperialism and colonialism. In other words, multi-directional vectors of ĽSNS's memory move Russia's colonial aggression in the region "out of emergency mode and into the normal bargaining process of the political sphere" (Buzan et al., 1998, 10).

Similar mnemonic strategy can be traced back to Kotleba's personal Facebook page post on August 21, 2020. Kotleba mixed personal recollections with comments on the 52nd anniversary of the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia. Wishing a happy birthday to his nephew, he stated that August 21, 1968, was "the saddest day of our modern history. Following the invitation letter of traitor politicians, our homeland, at that time Czechoslovakia, became a target of thousands of tanks and ten thousand troop soldiers of our own allies. Fortunately, the Warsaw Pact and Soviet troops left Czechoslovakia voluntarily and without violence" (Kotleba 2021). Kotleba claimed that although today we cannot see any sign of Russian troops in our country, we can see American soldiers, "NATO criminals," the allies who occupy us and who will not leave voluntarily (Kotleba 2021). A mnemic image of "NATO criminals" re-imposes the question about Russia's role in 1968. ĽSNS's feminizing the Warsaw Pact and Soviet troops by embracing its non-violent and peaceful departure "desecuritizes" Russia by moving it "down from the security sphere and back to so-called normal politics" (Sjöstedt 2020, 31). Doing ĽSNS's mnemic manipulation implies that the alliance with Russia is the only viable option to fend off the threat of NATO criminals. At the same time, NATO's hyper-masculinization through the assigned notion of criminality and permanent security threat as "they will not leave voluntarily" identifies NATO as a threat. ĽSNS's mnemic manipulation triggers a "securitizing move" (Sjöstedt 2020, 31), which, in turn, challenges the validity of 1968 memory (Quinodoz 2005, 35). The parallel between the Soviet and Warsaw Pact troops and NATO, as well as the parallel between "thousands of tanks and ten thousand troop soldiers of our own allies" in 1968 and "American soldiers, NATO criminals, the allies who occupy us and who will not leave voluntarily" are not accidental. They "embody the global domain of imperial history in a multidirectional discourse" (Rothberg, 2009, 74). In sum, verbal navigation toward Soviet rather than Russian identity, condensing the 1968 invasion with a "referent object" (Gaufman, 2022) of the hyper-masculine West's colonialism along with parallelism and temporal condensing of 1968 and 2020s, display this memory's frame of multiple directions constructing transnational civilizational alliance with Putin's Russia.

Russia's Response to ĽSNS's Commemoration Politics of 1968

Putin's Russia has made several attempts to rewrite the history of the August 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia. In 2007, while hosting the Czech president Václav Klaus in the Green Room of the Grand Kremlin Palace (President of Russia, 2007), Putin confessed Russia's responsibility for the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia: "Russia is the formal and legal successor of the Soviet Union. However, modern Russia is a completely different country with a completely different political system from that of the Soviet Union. And we condemn everything negative that happened in the past, and of course I am first and foremost referring to the events of 1968," claimed Putin (President of Russia, 2007). According to Nillson, this confession "came only in the context of Klaus's statement from the previous year that Russians and Russia had been those most exploited by the Soviet system" (Nilsson 2021, 292). However, this apology seemed temporary.

In 2015, the Russian state television channel aired a documentary titled "The Warsaw Pact – Declassified Pages" whose producers' ambition was to cast a new light on the Prague Spring based on allegedly previously unreleased Soviet archival material. The documentary asserted that the Warsaw Pact invasion was a preemptive move to protect Czechoslovakia against a NATO-backed coup, supposedly being planned under cover of "the peaceful civilian uprising with the romantic name of the Prague Spring." The Czech and Slovak governments condemned such blatant historical factual distortions in strong terms, and Slovaks reminded Putin's Russia that the Soviet Union and fellow invaders Bulgaria, East Germany, Hungary, and Poland had apologized in December 1989 for their actions ("Russia Rewrites History of the Prague Spring," Financial Times, June 3, 2015).

Juxtaposing the 1968 occupation of Czechoslovakia with a mnemonic narrative of 1968 as Soviet Union brotherly aid to rescue Czechoslovakia from the claws of NATO is now widely accepted by Russian politicians despite a bilateral Slovak-Russian treaty, which in its preamble condemns the 1968 occupation of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact troops ("Duleba: Rusi veria fikciám o roku 1968 a aj o dnešku," *Aktuality.sk*, May 12, 2020). The idea of Russians as liberators, peacekeepers, and peace defenders is deeply embedded in Russia's identity memory politics. According to Duleba, "It is a Soviet narrative, a communist narrative, and it is also a narrative of Russian national identity that the Russians have always saved peace with military forces" ("Duleba: Rusi veria fikciám o roku 1968 a aj o dnešku," *Aktuality.sk*, May 12, 2020). Military aggression against Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968, and Crimea in 2014 is juxtaposed with the notion of peacekeeping and rescuing from the permanent threat of the West, NATO in particular.

The same narrative of Russia as a rescuer of Slavic nations from the claws of the West is widely disseminated by ĽSNS. In a February 2022 video statement shortly after Russia invaded Ukraine, ĽSNS leader Marian Kotleba stated that the "events in Ukraine are sad but logical consequence of EU, NATO and US policies in last 20 years" (*Ľudová strana* 2022). Bringing into the frame US involvement in Yugoslavia and Iraq, Kotleba downplayed Russian aggression in Ukraine and diverted responsibility for the conflict toward the US and the West. Kotleba does not make a distinction between Ukraine and Russia and frames the polarization as West versus East. By doing so, Kotleba, like many other pro-Russian politicians and groups, "de-legitimiz[es] the EU and NATO, and justifi[es] Russia's sphere of influence by means of de facto bracketing Ukraine out of Europe" (Braghiroli and Makarychev 2016). In this framing, both Slavic nations are victims of those "who pull the strings in the background" (*Ľudová strana* 2022). As Kotleba stated, "the longer this conflict lasts, and the more precious Christian and Slavic blood is shed in this conflict, the more joy those who planned and provoked it from the background without any risk of their own will have" (*Ľudová strana* 2022). In this line of thinking, Slovakia should stay neutral and even leave NATO. ĽSNS's key word – peace – serves as an intentional avoidance to attribute responsibility for the aggressive war to Russia.

Conclusion

In this study, we dissected ĽSNS's mnemonic strategies to understand how ĽSNS builds mnemonic alliances with Putin's Russia via the 1944 SNU and 1968 memory construction. We benefited from Rothberg's concept of multidirectional memory, which refuses to contemplate "disparate acts of remembrance" (Rothberg, 2009, 309) or the interplay of memory and counter-memory as competing for hegemony within a national context and instead recognizes each memory and their interplay as implicated in each other, and hence multidirectional with a potential of "'revisiting' and rewriting of hegemonic sites of memory" (Rothberg, 2009, 210). Mnemonic alliance with Putin's Russia was achieved by implementing several mnemonic strategies. ĽSNS's choice of mnemic image (SNU as communist, red murderers, or Štb's conspiracy, Czechoslovaks as betrayers of SNU, Kotlebists' real Slovak uprising, the West as an existential threat, democratic world as a passive onlooker or NATO as criminals) challenged the traumatic and "objectionable" 1944 or 1968 original memories by condensing (not replacing) them in a single memory frame. This condensing via presence of mnemic image functioned as a "vector of transition" (Rothberg, 2009, 84), linking multiple *lieux de memoir* as a pretext for mnemonic alliance-building.

While dissecting ĽSNS's memory architecture, we identified diachronical, transnational, transgenerational, inter-imperial, and trans-ideological trajectories embedded in selected memory frames of 1944 and 1968 events with the potential to amplify a mnemonic alliance between ĽSNS and Putin's Russia. ĽSNS memory frames displayed several effects of multi-directionality: forms of parallelism (for example, between Kotlebists-led "real Slovak uprising" and 1944 SNU), "decivilization" of the Western colonizer (Rothberg 2009, 75; LaCapra 1998), and temporality of return of Western colonialism, often gendered language of victimhood and emotionalization embedded in securitization

of the West as a threat and de-securitization of Russian imperialism. These trajectories and their effects implied Putin's Russia as the only viable solution to the identified threat.

ĽSNS also resorted to symbolic gestures such as hoisting a black flag or flying green balloons with the ĽSNS logo over the town of Banská Bystrica, a historic center of the SNU, to challenge the original SNU memory. ĽSNS denied the accusations of being fascist and disseminated Putin's World War II tropes that turn attention away from the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact and the responsibility of the USSR toward the Munich Agreement and the responsibility of the West for the outbreak of World War II. ĽSNS's approach to the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact was surrounded by a greater silence, as it is more challenging to question Russia's role as the aggressor and invader of Czechoslovakia. ĽSNS's memory architecture questions the validity of the fact that the Soviet Union was the 1968 aggressor, which is empowered by the recent Russian trope of the Soviet Union "rescuing" and "liberating" Czechoslovakia from a NATO-led putsch and attests to ongoing ĽSNS convergence with Russia's memory politics. Such convergence is an indicator of a mnemonic alliance and the presence of a multidirectional mnemonic trajectories facilitating the alliance of seemingly irreconcilable ideologies: the extreme right ĽSNS and Putin's Russia's heritage embedded in anti-fascism.

Disclosure. None.

Notes

1 Only 18% of the entire population see the Slovak war state in a positive light, whereas among L'SNS adherents it is 35% (Database Osudové osmičky, 2018).
2 ŠtB or Štátna Bezpečnosť (State Security) was a state police during the communist era.

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