

Report on Conspiracy Theories in the Online Environment and the Counter-Disinformation Ecosystem in Slovakia

Pavol Hardoš



Licensing Information

Open Access. Some rights reserved. As the publisher of this work, REDACT wants to encourage the circulation of our work as widely as possible while retaining the copyright. We therefore have an open access policy which enables anyone to access our content online without charge. Anyone can download, save, perform or distribute this work in any format, including translation, without written permission. This is subject to the terms of the Creative Commons By Share Alike licence. The main conditions are:

- REDACT and the author(s) are credited including our web address
www.redactproject.sites.er.kcl.ac.uk
- If you use our work, you share the results under a similar licence

A full copy of the licence can be found at

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>



Designed by Julius Haferkorn

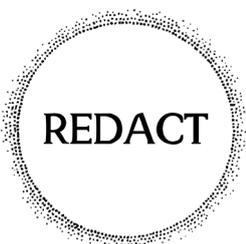
Imprint

Published by REDACT November 2025

© REDACT. Some rights reserved.

www.redactproject.sites.er.kcl.ac.uk

REDACT is supported by the CHANSE ERA-NET Co-fund programme, which has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme, under Grant Agreement no. 101004509. The research on Poland and Slovakia is funded by the Slovak Academy of Sciences.



Funded by
the European Union

Contents

Executive Summary	4
1. History and Context of Conspiracy Theories in Slovakia	6
2. Slovak Online Environment and Online Conspiracist Environment	8
3. Case Study: The Great Replacement Conspiracy Theory in Slovakia	10
4. Case Study: ‘Gender Ideology’ and ‘LGBT Ideology’ Conspiracy Theories	13
5. The Counter-Disinformation Sector in Slovakia	16
References	18

Executive Summary

REDACT Project Summary

The REDACT project analysed how digitalisation shapes the form, content and consequences of conspiracy theories, including online sociality and offline actions and effects. Rather than seeing digitalisation as a process that has universal outcomes, or conspiracy theories as the same over space and time, REDACT considered online conspiracy theories and counter-disinformation organisations in a selection of European countries. The project involved a team of 14 researchers analysing data from Western Europe, Central Europe, the Baltics and the Balkans.

Methodology

Using keywords from a range of conspiracy theory topics, the project gathered 6 million posts from Twitter/X, Facebook, Instagram and Telegram between 2019–2024. The researchers used a mixture of digital methods and close reading strategies to analyse the datasets. Each regional team also conducted ethnographic interviews with key members of counter-disinformation organisations across Europe. Political, social and economic contexts were brought to bear on all of these methods and findings.

About the Author

Pavol Hardoš is an assistant professor at the Institute of European Studies and International Relations, Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences, Comenius University in Bratislava. His research interests focus on democratic theory, political philosophy and the epistemic aspects of democratic politics, expertise and conspiracy theories. He is also a member of the review board for the initiative Konspiratori.sk, which maintains a public database of Slovak and Czech websites that spread dubious, deceptive, fraudulent, conspiratorial or propaganda content.

Key Findings

- **Entrenched historical narratives:** Conspiracist reasoning draws on long-standing tropes of national victimisation and suspicions about the West, making modern frameworks (e.g., anti-Soros, anti-gender ideology) resonant and politically useful.
- **Political mainstreaming:** Political actors have repeatedly instrumentalised conspiratorial frames (Mečiar era, 2015, 2018, 2023–2025), turning them into potent partisan mobilisation tools.
- **Platform ecology and moderation:** Facebook (and YouTube) are primary vectors; Telegram is a resilient secondary space that preserves and radicalises audiences when moderation increases. Limited, inconsistent moderation and state responses are framed as ‘censorship’, reinforcing victimhood and driving people to less-moderated channels.
- **Weak gatekeeping between fringe and mainstream:** Influencers, politicians and conspiracist media routinely cross into mainstream spheres, amplifying narratives and recruiting activists into party politics.
- **Recycling and adaptation of issues:** Topics shift with crises (migrants → gender → COVID → Ukraine → elections), but actors reuse core repertoires (anti-elite, anti-West) to fit new contexts.

- **Grievance-driven susceptibility:** Real grievances (corruption, precarity, institutional failure) are channelled into conspiracist explanations instead of being addressed by policy.
- **Interlocking repertoires amplify polarisation:** Anti-gender ideology, Great Replacement, anti-vax, anti-NGO and pro-Russian narratives interweave into a multi-issue ecosystem that compounds polarisation.
- **Declining trust in mainstream media:** Perceived politicisation and oligarchic ownership reduce trust in traditional outlets, increasing openness to alternative and conspiracist sources.
- **Counter-disinformation sector under pressure:** Civil-society monitoring, fact-checking and resilience projects are small, donor-dependent and politically attacked, weakening capacity and legitimacy.
- **Policy reversals weaken resilience:** Government backtracking (e.g., dismantling counter-disinformation capacities after 2023) reduces institutional defences and enables conspiracist actors' co-optation into power.

Recommendations

1. **Treat conspiracy theories as a distinct problem:** Study what makes them 'sticky' and how they differ from ordinary misinformation.
2. **Address the whole ecosystem, not just social media:** Map offline and online actors, institutions and channels that sustain conspiracism.
3. **Tackle root grievances with policy:** Prioritise anti-corruption, social welfare, judicial and public-service reforms so that factual, functioning institutions reduce fertile ground for conspiracies.
4. **Prioritise society-centred, not tech-only, solutions:** Narratives predate platforms – combine social policy, community engagement and communication, not only technological fixes.
5. **Design tailored, evidence-based responses:** Different conspiracy types (anti-gender, anti-migrant, anti-Ukraine, etc.) need different approaches and evaluation.
6. **Recognise the political dimension:** Conspiracy talk is often elite-driven and political; countermeasures must be non-partisan in practice, transparent in rationale and mindful of democratic norms.
7. **Protect and strengthen independent institutions and journalism:** Fund and legally safeguard public service media, investigative outlets, regulators and public broadcasters to rebuild trust and prevent capture.
8. **Invest in civic capacity and rapid response:** Provide stable, multi-year funding for NGOs and create cross-sector, non-partisan rapid-response units for coordinated communications, fact-checking and evidence-based explanations.
9. **Scale practical media literacy:** Run nationwide programmes for all ages that link media skills to real local issues (corruption, health, pensions) and use trusted local messengers (teachers, doctors, community leaders).
10. **Regulate platforms with transparency and local capacity:** Push platforms for fine-grained moderation data, stronger Slovak-language moderation teams, cooperation with regulators and measures that disincentivise disinformation.

- 11. Avoid heavy-handed censorship; insist on due process:** Any legal measures must have clear criteria, judicial oversight and swift, proportionate implementation – transparency over secret takedowns.
- 12. Coordinate internationally and enable oversight:** Work at EU level to share threat analyses and best practices; publish open, periodic national briefs and public databases tracking conspiracist trends, reach and policy responses.
- 13. Fund deradicalisation and exit pathways:** Support community-based programmes to help highly engaged consumers leave echo chambers and rejoin civic life.

1. History and Context of Conspiracy Theories in Slovakia

Understanding the spread of conspiracy theories in Slovakia today requires a brief look at their history and political context. Though themes have shifted, Slovak conspiracy theories have consistently drawn on narratives of national victimhood and foreign threats.

In the nineteenth century, Slovakia was part of the multi-ethnic Habsburg lands, where social dislocation under authoritarian monarchy was compounded by ethnic divisions and state inefficiency. Economic shocks, political unrest and intensifying ethnic conflicts made secret-elite narratives attractive: Jews, Freemasons and other supposed shadowy actors were blamed for social ills and for undermining nation and faith. Antisemitic conspiracy myths circulated in conservative and clerical networks, preparing cultural ground for later fascist movements, especially during the wartime Slovak state.

As today, social anxieties were readily channelled into conspiracist explanations. For example, the 1831 peasant uprising in eastern Slovakia, sometimes called the Cholera riots, was partly driven by cholera and rumours that official measures to curb the disease were part of an elite plot to kill peasants and seize their property.

Slovak nationalist discourse since the 19th century tended to romanticise ‘unspoiled’ ways of life opposed to modernising Western influences. At the same time, these nationalist discourses framed the nation’s fate as a series

of injustices, tragedies and losses, building up a national identity of ‘victimhood’, where evil ‘others’ were responsible for Slovak collective suffering.

These nationalist narratives did not merely recount historical events; they predisposed audiences to interpret ambiguous or tragic episodes through a conspiratorial lens, since every victimisation implies perpetrators, real or imagined. Foundational narratives of Slovak victimisation – ‘a thousand-year oppression’ by Hungarians and later patronising treatment by Czechs – have often provided fertile ground for conspiracy theories.

Apart from the Hungarian political establishment, whose 19th- and early 20th-century Magyarisation efforts harmed Slovak cultural self-determination, the role of the evil ‘other’ often fell to more imaginary foes, seen as instruments of dangerous Western or modernising influences threatening the nation’s well-being. In interwar Czechoslovakia, the most prominent culprits were Jews, but also Masons, Czechs, liberals or communists. After the 1948 communist coup, this role was easily supplanted through official communist propaganda by the collective capitalist ‘West’, especially Americans and their alleged local ‘reactionary’ helpers. Distrust of the collective ‘West’ and its corrupting influence is a thread that still runs through most Slovak conspiracy narratives today.¹

After 1989 and the transition towards democracy, market economy and independent statehood, Slovak conspiracy narratives followed the essential logic of national victimhood and remained deeply rooted in the 'Us versus Them' schema, in which foreign powers – most often the West, but also supranational bodies like the NATO or the EU – were cast as persistent antagonists to Slovak sovereignty and well-being.

In the 1990s, Slovakia's PM Vladimír Mečiar and his illiberal allies actively mobilised anti-Soros narratives, portraying George Soros and linked organisations as malign foreign influencers secretly controlling the media, civil society and the political opposition, as part of a broader effort to delegitimise independent civic actors and regime critics. This targeting had a concrete basis: Open Society and other Western pro-democratic foundations had established a visible presence in Slovakia, funding nascent NGOs and independent media, making them convenient scapegoats for a government wary of foreign-backed civic mobilisation.

The February 2018 murder of investigative journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancée, archaeologist Martina Kušnírová, shocked Slovakia and triggered mass protests demanding the government's resignation. The killings exposed party-linked patronage networks and compromised law enforcement. In response, PM Robert Fico used conspiracist rhetoric to delegitimise the protests and deflect blame for entrenched corruption, notably employing anti-Soros narratives – echoing campaigns in Hungary under PM Orbán – and claims of a foreign-driven plot to overthrow Slovakia's government in a 'coloured-revolution' style 'maidanisation'. Pressured by coalition partner Most-Híd, Fico resigned, but the events marked a turning point: he began framing protests, critical media and NGOs as tools of foreign interests. This shift consolidated his loyal base, normalised illiberal narratives, deepened polarisation and steered Smer-SD towards a nationalist-populist, conservative agenda, recasting political conflict as a struggle over national sovereignty rather than accountability for corruption.²

This was in some respects a re-enactment of the illiberal playbook from the 1990s. The 1990s political experience showed that using conspiracy narratives for political communication, self-victimisation and the erosion of democratic accountability long predates social media. The 1990s political struggles about Slovakia's place in Europe, connected to political and economic reforms, have also established many of the political battle lines and key figures that form the conspiracist media and influencer ecosystem today.

Readiness to accept conspiratorial accounts crosses party lines. After the 15 May 2024 assassination attempt on PM Robert Fico, online doubts arose that the attack was fabricated or misrepresented; a July 2024 survey found 16% believed it was faked, with opposition supporters more likely to endorse this. Conversely, coalition supporters – and later PM Fico himself – blamed 'progressives' and made unfounded claims that the attacker, an ideologically inconsistent pensioner, had ties to the opposition.³

Opinion surveys have long placed Slovakia among the countries with very high levels of conspiracist belief – depending on the data or survey questions somewhere between a third and a half of the population can be said to endorse some conspiracy narrative.⁴

Sociologists at the Slovak Academy of Sciences (SAV), covering the Visegrad Four, found that COVID-19 conspiracy narratives are endorsed by 40%, anti-Western conspiracy narratives by more than 30% and anti-science narratives by 35% of respondents – the highest among the surveyed countries. SAV also examined the political profile of these attitudes and found roughly equal-sized, politically polarised camps: those who reject conspiracist narratives tend to be pro-EU, pro-West, pro-Ukraine and pro-science, while supporters align in the opposite direction. A third group of comparable size is undecided or apathetic.⁵ Demographically and politically, conspiracist producers and consumers tend to be older, male, conservative or nationalist, pro-Russian and anti-US; they cluster among voters of parties such as Smer, the Slovak National Party and Republika.⁶

2. Slovak Online Environment and Online Conspiracist Environment

Slovakia's conspiracist ecosystem is a porous, partly mainstreamed network that spans social media, alternative outlets and real-world politics. Online communities and influencers drive narratives that occasionally translate into offline action; the COVID-era protests were the clearest recent example where online conspiracism materially shaped offline mobilisation.



Figure 1. *Informácie bez cenzúry* (Information without Censorship), a popular account specialising in promoting alternative media sources, links an article of 29 July 2021 on Covid protests, amplifying protesters' messages against 'experimental vaccines' and 'genocide of the nation.'

Illiberal politicians and online conspiracy influencers have a symbiotic relationship, sharing audiences and amplifying each other. Conspiracist language is normalised in partisan Facebook groups and politicians' social feeds as political actors adopt influencer tactics – engaging styles and emotional mobilisation – which creates a clear pipeline from online influence to party politics: in 2023–2024 parties recruited activists and disinformation figures onto candidate lists, altering electoral results (e.g., SNS, Republika and Smer's inclusion of figures like Ľuboš Blaha and Judita Laššáková), and collaborations with extremists such as Danny Kollár (Daniel Bombic) have been notable.

Conspiracy rhetoric forges unlikely alliances and intensifies polarisation: illiberal currents from the conservative left and far right converge against 'progressive' elites, 'gender ideology', NGOs and international actors. Older tropes (antisemitic, anti-globalist, 'Soros', pro-Russian pan-Slavic themes) have been repurposed into broader illiberal strategies.

The flow of conspiracist content is both local and international: some narratives have deep Slovak roots, others are global memes (Great Replacement, Great Reset) selectively adapted to local anxieties; some, like QAnon, have only negligible traction.

Not all social media platforms are equally relevant for Slovak online conspiracism. Facebook and YouTube are its main vehicles: Facebook hosts short text, image-plus-text post, and punchy clips, while YouTube carries longer sermons, interviews and panel recordings with influencers, politicians and 'alternative' journalists. Instagram is marginal, limited to health-woo and 'JAQ' (just-asking-questions) stories by celebrities. Telegram gained prominence after COVID and especially following Russia's 2022 escalation in Ukraine, serving as a backup for deplatformed influencers and a lightly moderated space for pro-Russian and anti-Western narratives.

Slovakia has 5.4 million inhabitants (about 15% under the age of 15). According to the EU's Digital Services Act (DSA) transparency report (October 2023), YouTube is the largest platform (c. 4.3 million users) with five Slovak-language moderators; Facebook has around 3.2 million users and Instagram around 2.3 million – representing the three largest platforms. The DSA also shows Meta employed 11 Slovak-language moderators for Facebook and Instagram, with over 90% of moderation automated. TikTok follows distantly (c. 0.9 million users), then Snapchat (c. 0.59 million), LinkedIn (c. 0.2 million) and Twitter/X (c. 27,000 active monthly users; c.400,000 registered). Moderator numbers have risen but are widely regarded as insufficient and attract strong criticism from Slovak

journalists and stakeholders. Despite YouTube's large user base, Facebook is the leading platform for Slovak politics, media and online debate.

Much of the conspiracy, disinformation and 'alternative' scene migrated to Telegram after COVID and increased moderation of health disinformation on Facebook and YouTube. The platform is marginal overall but attracts committed followers and risks echo-chamber dynamics since there is little mainstream Slovak content there. Telegram has so far avoided DSA rules by claiming fewer than 45 million EU users (41 million). A commercial survey (October 2023) found 6.3% of Slovak adults use Telegram.⁷

Slovak content on Telegram is dominated by disinformation-driven, pro-Russian channels, including accounts of major alternative media like *Zem & Vek*, *InfoVojna* and *Slovanské Noviny*, but also extremist politicians such as Ľuboš Blaha, Milan Uhrík and Milan Mazurek. Alongside them, prominent 'disinfluencers' like Mimi Šramová and Danny Kollár (Daniel Bombic) amplify conspiracy content, attracting the largest audiences and interactions on the platform.

The new online environment has not been favourable to traditional Slovak media outlets, which have seen their trust declining to 25% in 2024.⁸ This low trust has been linked to media commercialisation and oligarchisation, the rise of 'alternative' media, political attacks on journalists, lower institutional trust more broadly, a perceived activist inclination among some journalists and a weaker, less stable public service media.⁹

The main broadcasters are private Joj and Markíza and public RTVS (STVR since the 2024 government reform), each with over 40% weekly reach. Newspapers include four broadsheets (*SME*, *Pravda*, *Hospodárske noviny*, *Denník N*) and two tabloids (*Nový Čas*, *Pluska*), both owned since 2023 by government-sympathetic oligarchs. Main news websites are *aktuality.sk*, *topky.sk* and *sme.sk*. Twelve per cent of people pay for some form of online news.

The disinformation site *hlavnespravy.sk* reaches the top 15 with c. 8% weekly reach. It was one of three sites temporarily closed by the National Security Office after Russia's 2022 invasion

of Ukraine for allegedly spreading Russian propaganda; the block was lifted in July 2022. At that time, *Denník N* published a 2021 video showing a *Hlavné správy* journalist accepting a bribe from a Russian embassy employee to set up a spy network; he pleaded guilty and received a three-year suspended sentence and €15,000 fine. *Hlavné správy* responded by 'accusing several NGOs of being "foreign agents"'.¹⁰

Political attacks and accusations of bias are intertwined with trust: government officials – especially Prime Minister Fico and his party Smer-SD – target journalists at *SME*, *Denník N*, *Aktuality*, TV Markíza and other critical media. Recent analysis shows that political pages of coalition politicians and parties have sponsored over 500 Facebook posts with negative, insulting or dehumanising content in the past year alone, reaching millions of viewers, explicitly attacking critical journalists, activists and NGOs.¹¹

Furthermore, since the current government took office there has been sustained pressure on the public broadcaster to be more sympathetic to the government; the 2024 reform is widely seen as an attack on its independence. Government pressure on TV Markíza's owners and alleged management interference has led several high-profile journalists to leave.

Mainstream media is widely distrusted by conspiracist constituencies and often portrayed as 'progressive,' 'liberal' or an agent of foreign interests. Non-tabloid outlets generally adopt counter-disinformation framing, drawing on research from civil-society organisations and academics, treating conspiracist content as part of a hybrid threat or social pathology. However, coverage is sometimes undifferentiated, collapsing diverse phenomena – conspiracy theories, organised propaganda, hateful content, disinformation – into one category and implying endorsers suffer cognitive or moral deficits. This stance feeds grievance narratives depicting moderates and journalists as out of touch or hostile.

Furthermore, gatekeeping is weak: boundaries between fringe and mainstream are porous, with individuals moving in both directions, while any efforts to professionalise or police content are often framed as censorship.

Content moderation has long been a grievance in Slovakia, despite its near non-existence prior to Covid. It improved only slowly (and temporarily) under international pressure. But conspiracy influencers adapted quickly – evading keywords and migrating audiences to Telegram and other less-moderated spaces. Conspiracy media outlets like *Zem & Vek*, *Hlavné správy* and *InfoVojna* use Facebook to drive their web traffic and funnel readers to Telegram. Even limited moderation is framed as persecution by conspiracist actors – Brussels, elites and ‘liberals’ are accused of censoring dissent – reinforcing follower identity and describing moderation, fact-checks or monitoring as censorship.

Topical cycles track shifting crises. From 2020–2022 topics related to COVID (rules, vaccines, denialism) mixed legitimate governance criticism with denialist and anti-vaccine narratives; after February 2022 attention moved to Ukraine, echoing Russian disinformation about military aid or refugees. Pre-election periods in 2023–2024 revived older scripts – claims about ‘political NGOs’, ‘Soros plots’ and threats to national identity – amplified across the illiberal spectrum.

These shifts show continuity and adaptation: many outlets trace their conspiracist roots to 2012–2015 and radicalised further after 2015. Over the last decade the online space enabled elite radicalisation and professionalised message-crafting: COVID amplified and sorted actors, turning the issue into a political identity marker. Conspiracist narratives are not uniformly stigmatised in Slovak society, and civil-society attempts to moralise or shame believers have had limited – and sometimes counterproductive – effect, reinforcing victimhood frameworks.

Underlying many believers’ acceptance of conspiracist claims are concrete grievances – corruption, incompetence, precarity and declining public services and infrastructure – which conspiracist narratives channel toward elites, NGOs, minorities or foreign actors.

In sum, Slovakia’s conspiracist ecosystem is resilient: it exploits weak institutions, polarisation and socioeconomic anxiety, moves across platforms and between fringe and mainstream and adapts to new crises.

3. Case Study: The Great Replacement Theory in Slovakia

Distrust of the collective ‘West’ and its allegedly corrosive influence is a common thread running through most Slovak conspiracy narratives. The Great Replacement theory and related anti-immigrant propaganda are no exception. In this context, the West is portrayed not only as a lost cause – ruined by ‘unrestricted immigration’ and ‘multiculturalism’ – but also as a source of dangerous ideas, regulations and actors intent on increasing immigration to Slovakia. During and after the 2015 refugee crisis, Prime Minister Robert Fico repeatedly vowed to prevent the emergence of ‘cohesive Muslim communities’ in Slovakia and positioned himself against the EU’s ‘political correctness’.

Building on such officially endorsed Islamophobia, disinformation and conspiracy narratives routinely invoked EU institutions, European liberals, pro-Western human rights NGOs and their local ‘do-gooder’ allies

(*slniečkári*, literally ‘sunpeople’) as either unwitting or complicit threats to Slovak society.

Immigration to Slovakia has historically been low, mostly from neighbouring countries and the post-Soviet space. The surge of Islamophobic, racist and anti-immigrant discourse after 2015 reflected broader anxieties rather than actual migration. As in other post-communist countries, these sentiments mirrored mishandled socio-economic transformation, declining public services and demographic concerns about low birth rates and depopulated regions.

Migration has nevertheless remained central in Slovakia’s disinformation environment. Since 2015, it has been a polarising political issue, even though flows from Africa and the Middle East largely bypassed the country. Online narratives rely on scaremongering, xenophobia and Islamophobia, warning of ‘mass immigration’ and portraying refugees as criminals or sources

of disorder, often citing Western Europe. Explicit references to the Great Replacement are rare; where present, they are embedded in broader conspiracist discourses – Covid-19, ‘gender ideology,’ LGBTI+ rights or the Great Reset – or used as markers of conspiracist cultural capital.

On 21 October 2019, *InfoVojna* (InfoWar), a prominent Slovak disinformation outlet, quoted Jiří Weigl, a Czech analyst linked to the Václav Klaus Institute, who framed ‘mass migration’ as part of a globalist and progressivist assault on nation-states, akin to feminism undermining the family or ‘transgender ideology’ threatening human identity. Similarly, on 20 October 2021, a member of the anti-vaccination Facebook group ‘I won’t get vaccinated’ linked government Covid-19 measures to ‘the Kalergi plan, Agenda 2021, 2030, 2050, NOW’.

On Facebook, more explicit references to the Great Replacement tend to come from far-right influencers and politicians, often linked to neo-Nazi or fascist movements. However, assessing their presence today is difficult: many extremist accounts have been since deplatformed, typically for Covid-19 disinformation rather than hate speech or anti-migrant content.



Figure 2. Facebook post from by Kultúra Novej Európy (Culture of New Europe): ‘Naples over the weekend: Similarity with the Kalergi plan is purely coincidental’, 18 September 2023.

One illustrative case of typical conspiracist content was a short video (19 seconds) that gained around 100,000 views, 2,000 shares, and over 1,000 comments. Posted on 18 September 2023, the clip – allegedly from Naples, Italy – showed a square filled with men of apparent Middle Eastern origin, praying or protesting. Its caption warned that any resemblance to the ‘Kalergi plan’ was ‘purely coincidental’, while invoking Africa’s ‘billion and a half’ people ‘already due north’. The video was shared by the alt-right page Kultúra Novej Európy (Culture of New Europe), linked to the website *reconquista.sk* and run by Jakub Škrabák, a convicted far-right extremist and leader of the Slovak Togetherness movement.

This type of content illustrates how the Great Replacement narrative circulates implicitly on Slovak Facebook, usually through dehumanising portrayals of migrants – especially Muslims – as a looming, violent horde ready to replace Europeans. Such narratives also surface in domestic politics. For example, on 15 November 2022, MP Marek Kotleba (brother of the far-right leader Marián Kotleba) used his official Facebook page to post a video of himself in parliament questioning ‘directed migration’, implicating both the EU and Slovakia’s interior minister.

Alternative media outlets on the nationalist and far-right spectrum have also spread such claims. On 3 January 2019, the Facebook page of *ExtraPlus* magazine shared an article titled ‘Europe’s gone mad’, accompanied by a statement alleging that ‘globalists’ intended to replace Europe’s population with one that is ‘darker-skinned and with lower IQ’. Likewise, a September 2019 post on the website *napalete.sk* linked the fall of Italian far-right minister Matteo Salvini to ‘directed migration’ and the ‘devilish Kalergi social engineering plan’. *Na Paleta*, run by a Mečiar-era journalist Pavel Kapusta (formerly of the Slovak National Party), has since provided a platform to nationalist, far-right and even governing Smer-SD politicians through its website and YouTube channel.



Figure 3. Facebook post by ExtraPlus with a link to its article ‘Europe has gone crazy’. Caption: ‘Globalists want to replace the population of the old continent with another, darker-skinned and with a lower IQ’, 3 January 2019.

The most explicit and influential Great Replacement narratives in Slovakia today, however, appear on Telegram. The most prominent figure is Daniel Bombic, also known as Danny Kollár, an extremist who runs the country’s largest Slovak-language Telegram channels. By April 2025, his main channel had 63,000 subscribers, while his secondary news feed, *DK/bleskovky*, had more than 29,000. His posts openly embrace the Great Replacement theory, often in explicitly antisemitic, racist, neo-Nazi and homophobic terms. He routinely integrates it with other conspiracist tropes, including anti-LGBTI+ rhetoric and Covid-19 denial.

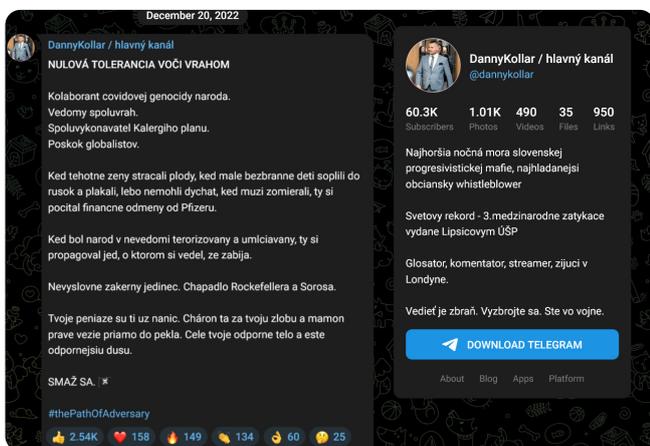


Figure 4. Telegram post from Danny Kollár’s channel. Titled ‘Zero Tolerance for Murderers’, the post celebrates the death of Dr. Vladimír Krčméry.

For example, in February 2024 he described LGBTI+ rights as ‘the hidden genocide of white children’, allegedly part of the ‘Kalergi plan’ to accelerate population replacement. In May 2023 he claimed that ‘LGBT are castrating children’, noting that 99% of victims were white. In July 2023, at a protest in Malacky, he vowed ‘to my last breath’ to resist the supposed conspiracy of ‘the chosen incestuous satanists’. In December 2022 he celebrated the death of prominent doctor Vladimír Krčméry, calling him a ‘co-executor of the Kalergi plan’ and ‘lackey of globalists’. Krčméry was a member of a government advisory team during the COVID-19 pandemic and contributed to the vaccination campaign. Earlier, in December 2021, Bombic shared a video with the caption ‘COVID IS WHITE GENOCIDE, PART #2’.

Bombic’s radical rhetoric has attracted not only extremists but also mainstream political actors. His channels have hosted discussions with Smer-SD officials, including Interior Minister Robert Kaliňák and MP Tibor Gašpar. His close collaborator, Judita Laššáková – lawyer, alternative media influencer and frequent debate partner of Smer allies – was elected to the European Parliament on Smer’s list in June 2024. Other nationalist politicians, such as Slovak National Party leader Andrej Danko and far-right influencer Lukáš Machala (now a senior official at the Ministry of Culture), have also sought his audience.

Telegram’s lax moderation has further enabled extremist voices. For example, neo-Nazi Marián Magát, sentenced to six years in prison for extremism in 2024, still has over 3,500 followers. Another channel, *Protokoly sionských mudrcov* (Protocols of the Elders of Zion), with more than 8,000 subscribers, repeatedly links antisemitic tropes to current events – such as BLM, migration or LGBTI+ rights – framing them as evidence of a planned invasion to replace Europe’s white population.

4. Case Study: ‘Gender Ideology’ and ‘LGBT Ideology’ Conspiracy Theories

Online conspiracy theories in anti-gender and anti-LGBTQ+ narratives are a common fixture in Slovakia. The contemporary anti-gender movement uses recognisably conspiratorial logic, framing ‘gender ideology’ (and related terms such as ‘LGBTI ideology’, ‘homolobby’ or ‘gender lobby’) as a hidden, intentional project by liberal elites, feminists, LGBTQ+ activists and international institutions aimed at erasing sexual differences, corrupting children and destroying the ‘natural’ family, religion and national sovereignty. The term ‘gender ideology’ serves as an empty signifier aggregating diverse demands and grievances and personifying social changes as the work of a coordinated enemy.¹² In Slovakia, these discourses quickly moved from civic campaigning into mainstream institutional politics.

Conspiracy narratives about the pernicious influence of a ‘gay/gender lobby’, ‘gender ideology’ and ‘LGBTQ ideology’ feed into pre-existing tropes of national victimisation and suspicions towards the West. Early on, religious authorities promoted this logic. The pastoral letter from the Slovak Bishops’ Conference’s of 1 December 2013 used apocalyptic language about a ‘culture of death’ and ‘gender ideology’, portraying these as conspiratorial forces threatening society – framing later civic and political campaigns.

Such discourse expanded into conspiracy media, anti-vaccination circles, and nationalist and far-right groups, creating a shared platform for anti-liberal and anti-EU narratives. The internet conspiracy radio *Slobodný vysielač* (Free Transmitter) became a key early meeting point where these actors mixed anti-gender and conspiracist themes, later feeding into mainstream politics through campaigns like the 2014 constitutional marriage amendment, the 2015 Referendum on Family, the campaign against the Istanbul Convention and the rise of far-right parties such as *ĽSNS* and *Sme Rodina* in the 2016 elections.¹³

Civic initiatives like the Alliance for the Family (*Aliancia za rodinu*) and allied Catholic-network

organisations mobilised the 2015 referendum against homosexual partnerships and sexual education (‘Referendum on Family’) by invoking the dangers of an ‘LGBTI lobby’ and ‘gender ideology’ supposedly seeking to alter children’s education and upbringing, threatening their ‘psycho-sexual development’ and codifying same-sex marriage and adoption. It framed diffuse social change as the work of a targeted, clandestine and malevolent interest.

The referendum failed, but the same activists secured an early victory in the constitutional amendment of 2014 that defined marriage as a heterosexual union. Afterwards, they focused on the Istanbul Convention, portraying it not as an international instrument to combat gender-based violence, but as a disguised vehicle for ‘gender ideology’ to be imposed on Slovak society – a foreign plot to undermine parental rights and national sovereignty. The ratification of the convention was successfully scuttled in 2019, but the rhetoric maintained its influence even in competition with conspiracy narratives about Covid and Ukraine.

The existing online conspiracist discourse is often implicit, invoking dangers of ‘gender’ and ‘LGBTQ’ ideologies while leaving interpretation to users’ prejudices. An overview of popular Facebook posts using the ‘gender ideology’ frame shows many are relatively recent – originating before the 2023 parliamentary elections – and posted by political pages of Fico’s *Smer-SD*, the far-right Slovak National Party, or the neo-Nazi *Republika*. These posts often echo older anti-gender campaigns by ecclesiastical activists, priests and the far-right fringe. They rely on familiarity with anti-gender tropes and largely avoid explicitly conspiratorial rhetoric, though such elements do appear.

An example of this is a video posted on Facebook on 13 July 2023 by the official account of *Smer-SD*, entitled ‘We must protect Slovakia from the perverse gender ideology of Progressives’. The video alleges that there is ‘a massive attack by non-governmental organisations on Slovak women and men’, asking ‘[w]ho is actually under the influence of hybrid propaganda?’



Figure 5. “We must protect Slovakia from the perverse gender ideology of Progressives”, Facebook post by Smer-SD, 13 July 2023.

The most popular, both offline and online, are the sermons by priest and activist Marián Kuffa, the most visible face of the campaign against ratifying the Istanbul Convention. On YouTube, where he railed against ‘the evil from Istanbul,’ his videos have hundreds of thousands of views. He repeatedly described ‘gender’ as a product of liberalism akin to a totalitarian project, calling it ‘a plague’ and ‘a moral murder,’ and warned that liberal policies (sex education, same-sex partnerships, the Istanbul Convention) amounted to cultural genocide that ‘kills the nation.’

In a recent video, ‘Stop Gender Ideology and Liberalism’, posted by the Facebook account of the pro-Russian biker gang and influencer project Brat za brata (Brother for Brother) – which emerged during COVID and gained momentum after Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine by spreading pro-Russian disinformation – leader Matúš Alexa welcomed Kuffa as a guest. Together, they discuss the evils of ‘gender ideology,’ stressing traditions, nationalism and the dangers of liberal Western values.

In this video, Kuffa goes through the rhetorical arguments against genderism, describing it as the ‘killing [sic!] sin’, and the ‘betrayal of God’. He does not believe in the sincerity of proponents of gender ideology, ‘a person of average intellect does not believe in gender ideology’; those proponents only promote it ‘for the benefits.’ According to Kuffa, ‘devious genderists’ target vulnerable children online and tell them they are of the other sex: ‘Those who support this, support the genocide of our nation.’

He likens ‘gender ideology’ to cancer, ‘[w]hen the cell is sick, cancer begins; [...] the cancer of our society begins when you unravel the family’. As Kuffa observes, ‘This is what our brotherly liberals do to us.’ Their motives are clear, ‘genderists’ simply aim to depopulate Earth for the benefit of rich globalists:

But why do they do this, these genderists – because there are 7 billion people and only 2% own 98% of capital [...] well, and we are in their way, eating their oxygen, they have no place to go hiking, there need to be national parks everywhere [...] one and half billion people would be enough for them. [...] And how do they achieve this? With abortions, lower the population, with registered partnerships, lower the population, with gender, lower the population, and with euthanasia!

Kuffa explicitly connects ‘gender ideology’ with conspiracy narratives about the Great Reset and the aims of the rich to depopulate the planet.



Figure 6. ‘Do you see this finger, dear liberal? You will see it when you are dying, and you will see that Kuffa was right.’ The video debate between priest and influencer Marián Kuffa and the biker gang leader Matúš Alexa was posted on Facebook by Brat za Brata in 2023. It had over 12,000 likes, over 240,000 views and more than 700 comments.

Such connections and allusions to other conspiracy narratives are not uncommon. For example, in a November 2018 long-form Facebook post with over 1100 likes and more

than 600 shares, the current minister of culture Martina Šimkovičová, then an independent MP elected on the list of the far-right Sme Rodina party, called for the ‘protection of our children and traditions’, against the depredations of ‘gender ideology’.

Calling it ‘pernicious and sick’, she suggested it is ‘part of the mechanisms currently being used to bring about an absolute unravelling’ of the world. ‘Someone’ is trying to ‘undermine our inner integrity’ by any means, including media, fashion, movies and so on. ‘Gender Ideology’ is working hand in hand with paedophilia, making vulnerable children susceptible to abuse. ‘Architects of these atrocities’ use celebrities to spread their ‘sick ideas’.

She also explicitly connects ‘Gender Ideology’ with New World Order and satanism discourses, when she declares: ‘I am terrified by this era in which the authors and propagators of the New World Order will stop at nothing [...] they no longer have any qualms about abusing and indoctrinating children into their perverted and, I am not afraid to say, satanic plans.’

Her post closes with a warning against the Istanbul Convention, suggesting it can warrant a future ‘Gender Police’ that would arrest parents for raising their children in ‘gender stereotypical’ fashion.



Fig. 7. “Let’s protect our children and traditions”, post by Martina Šimkovičová on Facebook, 29 November 2018.

Political actors have continued to echo and amplify such claims, framing the LGBTI+ community and ‘gender’ as an external danger. The conspiracy logic reached its political peak in September 2025, when fears about ‘transgender’ ideology and the invasive ‘progressive’ ‘liberal’ agenda from the West allegedly threatening Slovak national identity were deployed by PM Robert Fico and allies to amend the constitution with Christian conservative support. The amendment banned surrogacy and adoptions by same-sex couples, restricted comprehensive sexual education, enshrined sex as binary, and declared ‘national identity’ a matter of full sovereignty, risking conflict with EU and international law.

In the conspiracist framing of ‘gender ideology,’ the term denotes a network of hidden actors – elites secretly manipulating culture, politics and media – rather than a set of ideas. Rights-based policy proponents are portrayed as deliberately seeking to ‘subvert’ or ‘destroy’ family and nation. Threats are routinely inflated, with policies depicted as existential dangers (plague, moral murder, genocide, totalitarian imposition). The plot is often located abroad – the West, the EU, the US government, NGOs, the Globalist/Soros influence – turning domestic grievances into resistance against external interference. These gender ideology narratives are not unique to Slovakia; they map onto broader European trends, but Slovak actors have effectively translated them into concrete political outcomes.

This conspiratorial idiom is a constitutive, not incidental, feature of Slovakia’s anti-gender politics and activism. It spans religious, NGO and partisan arenas, turning the recognition of diversity and value pluralism into a Manichean struggle between a threatened nation, family or Christianity and a malicious, ‘progressive’ ‘gender ideology’. The same rhetorical and performative moves – naming a hidden enemy, dramatising the threat and calling for defensive state action – recur across sermons, web articles, NGO campaigns, social media and party politics. More than a mere ‘culture war’ or opinion-based opposition to rights, anti-gender and anti-LGBTQ discourses function as a political technology using conspiratorial claims with tangible effects on policy and civic freedoms.

7. The Counter-Disinformation Sector in Slovakia

Unlike the online conspiracy ecosystem, Slovakia's counter-disinformation sector is relatively small and fragile, composed mainly of a few civil-society organisations reliant on short-term public and private project grants. Limited resources and staffing push these groups toward a generalist, donor-driven approach; many lack institutional depth and depend on a few key individuals. Despite this, they have played an outsized role in monitoring, research, public awareness, policy advocacy and education. The civil service has recruited NGO specialists to develop counter-disinformation policies and strategic communication, but the sector's visibility has also made its actors targets of politicised attacks and conspiracist narratives.

State policy on disinformation has been inconsistent. Conspiracies were long neglected legislatively and institutionally; only between 2020–2023 – prompted by COVID-19 and renewed Russian aggression – did a basic policy framework emerge. The Security and Defence Strategy was approved in 2021 and, in 2022, an Action Plan for Coordination of Combating Hybrid Threats set out tasks for state institutions. An EU-funded national project to boost resilience ran until the end of 2023, and several ministries established strategic-communication and counter-hybrid units, accompanied by recruitment and training of staff.

Shortly after the 2022 escalation of the war in Ukraine, the National Security Office (Národný bezpečnostný úrad) temporarily blocked several influential disinformation websites that spread Russian propaganda; the intervention was criticised for lacking transparency and consistency. The measure was temporary and based on a sunset law adopted during COVID. A proposed law to legitimise and make such interventions more transparent and subject to court oversight was shelved by the outgoing coalition as too controversial, amid evidence that parts of the then right-wing coalition had also been complicit in spreading and exploiting disinformation for political ends.

After the snap elections and the formation of Robert Fico's government in autumn 2023, active state efforts to build strategic communication capacity and fight disinformation and hybrid threats largely ceased, and some actors from the disinformation scene have since become part of government communication and decision-making. The cabinet has cut funding for projects deemed inconvenient and signalled intentions to introduce laws curtailing NGO freedoms.

One of the most effective state initiatives prior to 2023 was the Slovak police's fact-checking social-media presence. From 2017 the police page, run by former journalist David Púchovský, debunked scams, hoaxes and disinformation with an irreverent, rapid posting style that attracted a large following (over 150,000 by 2023). Although non-partisan, the page often addressed politically charged narratives and became a target; after the 2023 election the media team was replaced and the page now focuses largely on scams.

The civic ecosystem includes several established actors. Demagóg.sk and AFP Fakty are the main fact-checking initiatives: Demagóg began in 2010 as a student project to check political debates, is now run by the Slovak Governance Institute, and employs six analysts; together with AFP Fakty (the Slovak branch of AFP Fact Check), they serve as Slovakia's official Meta fact-checking partners. Globsec, a major non-partisan think tank on security and transatlantic cooperation, addresses disinformation and resilience via its Centre for Democracy and Resilience. The Adapt Institute ran Infosecurity.sk, a multimedia platform publishing fortnightly reports and longer research on disinformation, conspiracy theories and hybrid threats. Konšpirátori.sk provides a public database of Czech and Slovak websites judged unreliable (targeting conspiracy theories, propaganda, misinformation and journalistic malpractice); since 2016, a volunteer panel rates sites and offers advertisers a blacklist to reduce revenue for listed sites.

Counter-mis/disinformation work is routinely framed in bad faith as censorship. For example, projects such as Konšpirátori.sk have been accused of suppressing dissent.¹⁴ Broader efforts to coordinate a public-sector response (since 2020) were portrayed by opponents as propaganda and politicised censorship. Many officials who joined government counter-disinformation roles in 2020–2023 came from relevant CSOs and were later accused of belonging to a ‘liberal NGO plot’; most were dismissed after 2023, and their programmes curtailed or discontinued. This narrowing of official capacity has prompted the emergence of new NGOs, such as the Institute for Resilience Building and the New Security Threats Institute, both focusing on hybrid threats and strategic communication.

Individuals from the civic sector also act as social-media influencers and public educators, often outside formal institutions. More established education and awareness efforts focus on media literacy and critical thinking. Projects like Zmudri produce videos, course materials and workshops, while the Slovak Debate Association runs competitions and training to build critical-thinking skills. Other previously mentioned NGOs also devote part of their activity to similar aims, often shaped by donors’ demand for tangible ‘deliverables’.

The sector itself became the subject of a politicised conspiracy narrative after an April 2023 fact-finding visit to Brussels organised by the European Commission’s representation in Slovakia. The invited group – disinformation experts from several government departments and NGOs – was subsequently denounced by Robert Fico as part of a plot, dubbed ‘Slovakia’s Watergate’; Fico and allies falsely alleged that the representatives had asked the European Commission and NATO to intervene against them. This attack forms part of a wider narrative that portrays NGOs as traitors to national sovereignty; it has been followed by funding cuts and proposed laws aimed at restricting NGO activity.



We can use the metaphor of chronic illness that just has worse and better periods (...) I think that the presence of conspiracies and disinformation in society works in a similar way, that you just never completely stamp it out, but you can have it at a level where it’s just a tolerable societal harm.”

- RESEARCH INTERVIEWEE



So, it is like an entry point, where the content, narratives and attitudes that I had seen for years on the far right – antisemitism, belief in some kind of global conspiracy, of course, xenophobia, racial theories and so on – slowly, gradually, through these conspiracy theories, it is beginning to spread to broader groups of the population.”

“That is simply the extent of the job, that if one wants to do it professionally, one cannot help but say that politicians in our country are part of spreading disinformation and pro-Russian propaganda.”

- RESEARCH INTERVIEWEES

References

- ¹ Z. Panczová and P. Janeček, 'Popular conspiracy theories in Slovakia and the Czech Republic', *Diogenes* 62 no. 3–4 (2015): 101–113; Z. Panczová 'The Image of the West in Conspiracy Theories in Slovakia and Its Historical Context', *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore* 69 (2017): 49–68.
- ² J. Marušiak, 'Slovak, not Brussels Social Democracy', *Politologický Časopis – Czech Journal of Political Science*, XXVIII no. 1 (2021): 37–58.
- ³ M. Kern, 'Prieskum: Málokto verí, že by bol atentát na Fica zinscenovaný. Obavy z ďalšieho útoku majú skôr voliči koalície', *Denník N*, 29 July 2024, <https://dennikn.sk/4114647/prieskum-malokto-veri-ze-by-bol-atentat-na-fica-zinscenovany-obavy-z-dalsieho-utoku-maju-skor-volici-koalicie/>.
- ⁴ See the July 2025 online poll from NMS research agency, Globsec's Trends report (2022) or the Centre for Bioethics at the UCM in Trnava study on Slovakia's conspiracy index: <https://www.globsec.org/what-we-do/projects/globsec-trends>; <https://centreforbioethics.sk/sk/novinky/detail/28/celosvetovo-extremne-vysoky-konspiracny-index-na-slovensku/>; <https://nms.global/sk/tretina-populacie-ma-sklony-verit-hoaxom-najviac-im-veria-volici-republiky-a-smeru/>.
- ⁵ Robert Klobucký and Marianna Mrva, 'Conspiracy supporters in V4 countries are not the same, however, political preferences play a vital role', Institute for Sociology SAS, 21 February 2024, https://www.sav.sk/?doc=services-news&lang=en&news_no=11756&source_no=20.
- ⁶ D. Želinský, 'Aký je pomer priaznivcov a odporcov konšpirácií v slovenskej spoločnosti?' Sociologický Ústav SAV, 2 June 2024, <https://sociologia.sav.sk/podujatia.php?id=3329&r=1>.
- ⁷ 'V komunikácii Slovákov stále dominujú klasické hovory a SMS', *fony.sk*, 14 November 2023. <https://fony.sk/clanky/v-komunikacii-slovakov-stale-dominuju-klasicke-hovory-a-sms>.
- ⁸ Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2024 <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2024/slovakia>.
- ⁹ M. Urbániková, 'Journalists as liars, servants, and sell-outs? On the declining trust in the media in the Czech Republic and Slovakia', *Global Media Journal – German Edition* 12 no. 2 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.22032/dbt.55519>.
- ¹⁰ Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2023 <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2023/slovakia>.
- ¹¹ K. Kóváry Sólymos, J. Šlerka and M. Mozański 'Platená nenávisť: Útoky na novinárov najviac sponzorovali politici na Slovensku a v Maďarsku, platformy nezakročili', *ICJK.sk*, 8 October 2025, <https://icjk.sk/419/Platena-nenavist-Utoky-na-novinarov-najviac-sponzorovali-politici-na-Slovensku-a-v-Madarsku-platformy-nezakrocili>.
- ¹² E. Kováts, M. Poim and A. Pető, *Gender as Symbolic Glue: The position and role of conservative and far-right parties in the anti-gender mobilizations in Europe*. Foundation for European Progressive Studies (2015).
- ¹³ V. Valkovičová and Z. Maďarová 'From Weirdoes to Political Actors – The journey of Slovak gender ideology rhetoric', Gunda Werner Institute, 3 May 2019, <https://www.gwi-boell.de/en/2019/05/03/weirdoes-political-actors-journey-slovak-gender-ideology-rhetoric>.
- ¹⁴ Ironically, the Konšpirátori.sk project repeatedly faced SLAPP-style litigation that was meant to suppress their findings. See T. Langer, 'Case Study – SLAPP in Slovakia' (2023), <https://www.antislapp.eu/curriculum-hub/case-study-slapp-in-slovakia>.



If you would like to hear about future events or projects, or to give your feedback on this report, please scan this QR code.

For more information on the REDACT project:
www.redactproject.sites.er.kcl.ac.uk

