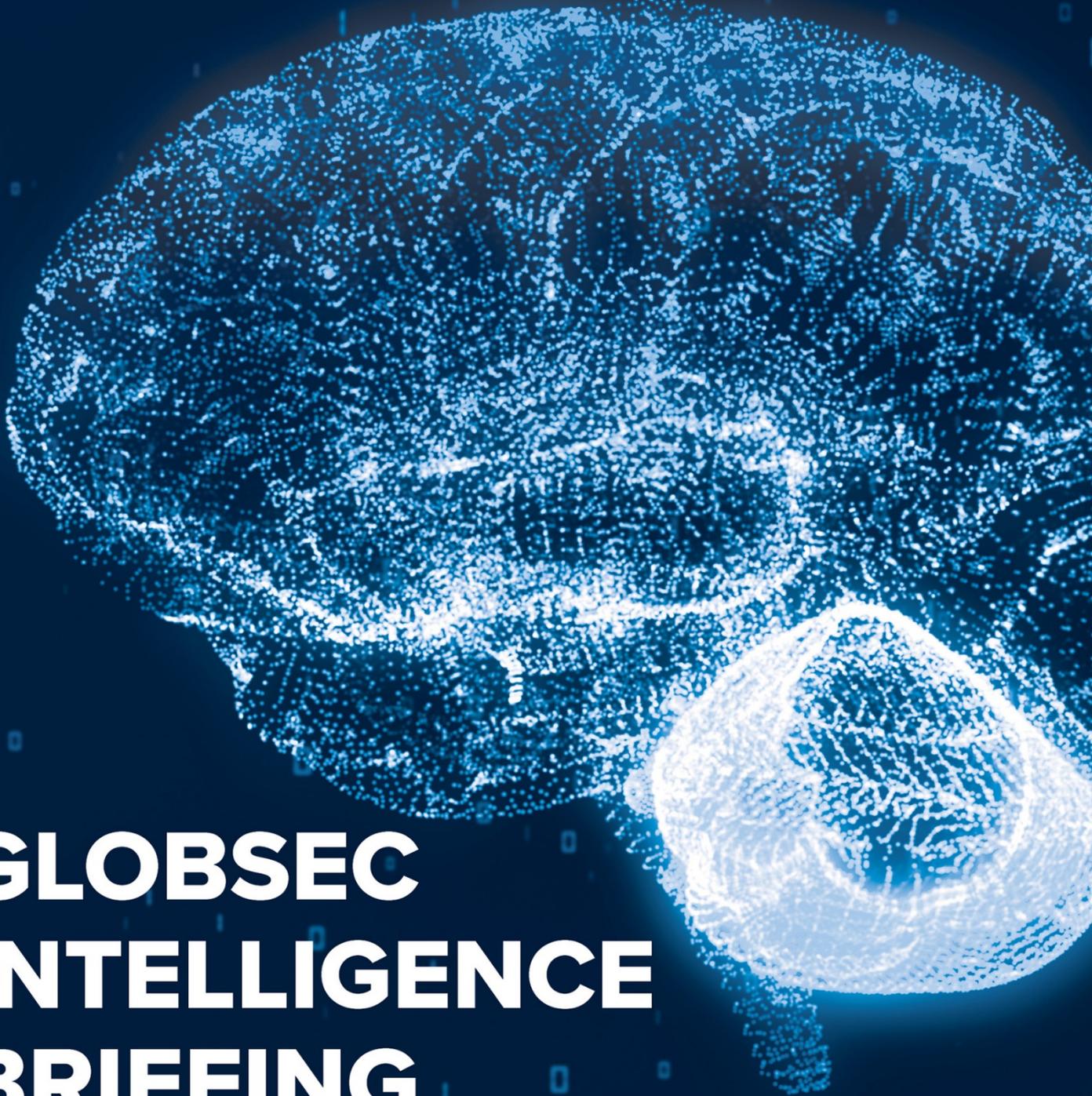




**GLOBSEC**  
IDEAS SHAPING THE WORLD



# **GLOBSEC INTELLIGENCE BRIEFING**

May | 2020

[www.globsec.org](http://www.globsec.org)

## Foreword May Edition

After many weeks of lockdown, most European countries have started to gradually ease their confinement measures and rolled-out recovery and normalization plans. But the battle with the virus is not yet over, as emphasized by European leaders on 9 May, and “the first priority must remain saving lives and protecting the most vulnerable in our societies”. Across the continent over 100,000 people have lost their lives because of the coronavirus. Millions do not have access to proper basic services or to employment opportunities.

In our first GLOBSEC Intelligence Briefing issued in April, we identified three potential major risks for the region moving forward. They included the economic fallout from COVID-19 in Central Europe, the possible attempts to consolidate power in times of corona, and the deepening of social inequalities as a result of asymmetric distribution of negative impact within society. These risks are tackled under various subsections of this briefing.

*With the creation of the **Intelligence Briefing**, GLOBSEC aims to aid leaders, decision makers, businesses to better understand how Central European countries are impacted by and respond to the COVID-19 global outbreak.*

## Major Risks Looking Forward

For the upcoming reporting period, we are paying attention to the following potential risks for the region:

1. **We continue to see the economic consequences from coronavirus on Central Europe as a major risk in the upcoming period, with foreign actors potentially attempting to exploit economic vulnerabilities.**
2. **The pandemic continues to be used as a justification to further consolidate power, with fundamental rights, freedoms, checks and balances suspended in the name of health and national security. As restrictions are gradually lifted, monitoring how emergency powers are used, in particular on restricting freedom of the speech and in violating data privacy safeguards is of crucial importance.**
3. **With border controls gradually removed, we look at the probability of a second wave of infections. While Central Europe has successfully managed to keep the numbers low compared to Western European countries so far, a second wave would have dramatic implications for entire communities already at risk, and for the national economies.**

The May GLOBSEC Intelligence Briefing touches upon:

[Political Developments](#)

[Economic Outlook](#)

[Disinformation Challenges](#)

[Relations with Brussels](#)

[Security Implications](#)

*The views expressed in this document are those of the authors alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of GLOBSEC as an organization.*

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**I. Central Europe Political Outlook**

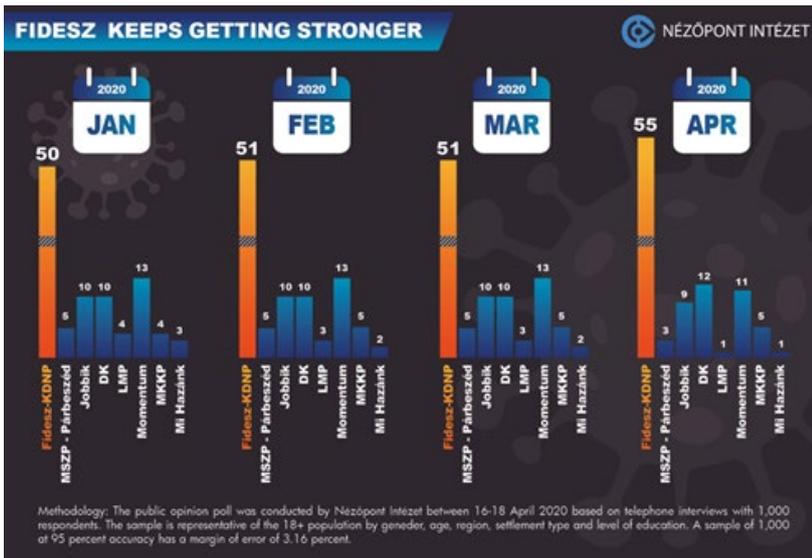
**COVID-19 and Political Support**

The early introduction of strict measures by Central and Eastern European (CEE) leaders to prevent the spread of COVID-19 managed to stabilize the outbreak in the region and keep the numbers significantly below those of Western European countries. While the state of emergency remains in place in all Visegrád countries but Poland, governments have started to ease the lockdown restrictions under strict guidelines.

	Total cases	Cases per mln people	Tests per mln people	Number of deaths
<b>Czech Republic</b>	8240	769	30531	288
<b>Hungary</b>	3341	346	12267	430
<b>Poland</b>	17204	455	13954	861
<b>Slovakia</b>	1469	269	23268	27

*\*as of 13 May 2020*

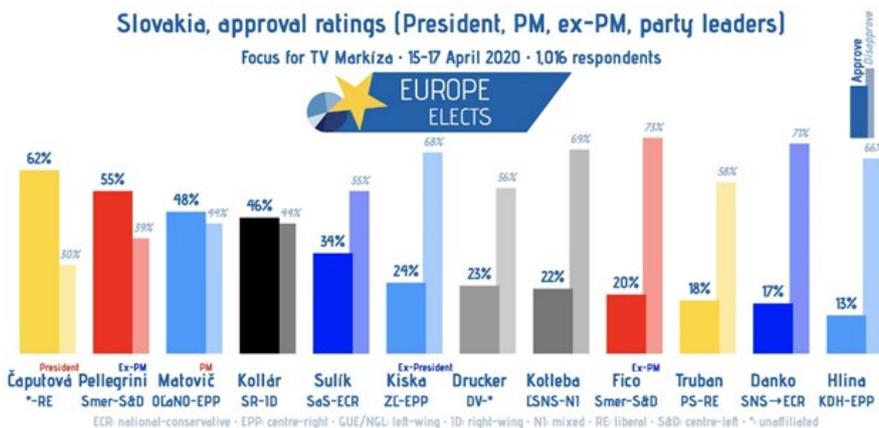
The confinement measures have been met with a high degree of social support across the region, as previously reported. Recent opinion polls in **Hungary** place Prime Minister Viktor Orbán’s Fidesz Party at 55% public support, while in **Slovakia**, President Zuzana Čaputová has an approval rating of 62%, ahead of all other political leaders.



**Hungary, Nézőpont Intézet Public Opinion Poll** conducted between 16-18 April 2020. Sample size: 1,000  
*\*Nézőpont Intézet is reportedly close to Fidesz Party*

**Slovakia, approval ratings (President, PM, ex-PM, party leaders)**

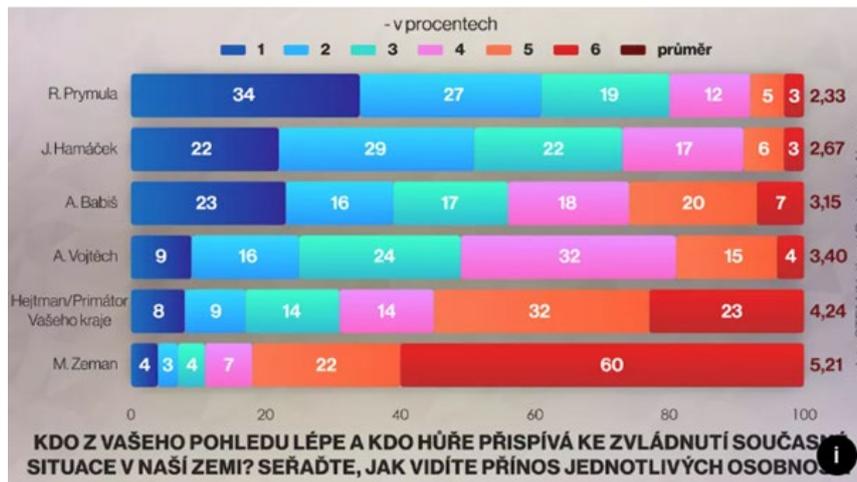
Focus for TV Markíza - 15-17 April 2020 - 10% respondents



**Slovakia, Focus Poll:** conducted between 15-17 April 2020 Sample size: 1,016. Note: The bar in the front represents approval rate, the bar behind represents disapproval rate.

In **Poland**, the Kantar Poll shows an approval rating for incumbent President Andrzej Duda of 44% and for Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki of 49%.

In the **Czech Republic**, a National Pandemic Alarm Online Survey conducted in April shows public support for epidemiologist Roman Prymula and Interior Minister Jan Hamacek of the Czech Social Democratic Party in handling the epidemic, while trust for the Czech President Miloš Zeman has diminished substantially.



### Less Democracies in the Region

Freedom House’s latest report “[Nations in Transit 2020](#)”, which covers 29 countries from Central Europe to Central Asia, states that there are fewer democracies in the region today than at any point since the annual report was launched in 1995. According to the report methodology, Poland has dropped out of the Consolidated Democracies category and has become a Semi-Consolidated Democracy, while Hungary, Serbia and Montenegro are no longer considered democracies, but rather Transitional/Hybrid Regimes. Moreover, Hungary’s decline has been the most precipitous ever tracked in *Nations in Transit*.

The Hungarian emergency bill “On Protecting Against the Coronavirus”, which enables the government to rule by decree without limits during the crisis period, has received growing attention and criticism from international human rights organizations and national capitals. European Commission Vice-President in charge of transparency and values, Věra Jourová, declared that Hungary’s recently-adopted emergency measures do not warrant EU scrutiny yet. However, she made it clear that the Commission is tracking how the Hungarian government is using its very wide discretionary powers. The Hungarian Prime Minister is expected for a debate in European Parliament on 14 May to discuss the prerogatives of the emergency bill, but the likelihood of his participation is low. Hungarian Justice Minister Judit Varga initiated an [unusual request](#) that she [represents Hungary](#) at the European Parliament hearing in these exceptional times, but this has been rejected by Parliament President David Sassoli.

- [Alexandra Martin, Fight in Solidarity. The Importance of European Partners in Response to COVID-19, Visegrad Insight, 23 April 2020](#)

### V4 Solidarity with the Eastern Partnership Countries

V4 Foreign Affairs Ministers discussed the future of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) on 8 April and agreed on jointly supporting the aspirations of partner countries interested in EU integration and access to the single market. Furthermore, acting on the proposal of the Czech Foreign Minister Tomáš Petříček, they agreed to launch an extraordinary V4EastSolidarity Programme, which provides up to EUR 250,000 under the International Visegrád Fund to assist the EaP countries in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The full text of the V4 Joint Statement is accessible [here](#).

- [Alisa Muzergues, Ukraine: trust and responsibility in times of pandemic, Emerging Europe, 6 May 2020](#)

### **Slovakia's Foreign Policy Orientation**

Slovak President Zuzana Čaputová, Parliament's Speaker Boris Kollár and Prime Minister Igor Matovič [signed a joint statement on foreign policy](#) on 9 May 2020, emphasizing the country's need for "a unified and responsible foreign, European, and security policy". European Union and NATO membership are highlighted in the declaration as of strategic and vital interest for the country, and an expression of Slovakia's commitment to uphold democracy, rule of law, human rights, international law, solidarity, and peace.

### **HU and China signed loan agreement to build Belgrade-Budapest rail link of the One-Belt One-Road initiative**

The Belgrade-Budapest railway link is often presented as a crown jewel and a first tangible outcome of the Chinese 17+1 initiative in Central and Eastern Europe. Yet, since the [original memorandum of understanding](#) was signed in 2014 at the 16+1 Belgrade summit, the snail's pace of development has led to delays and questions whether the link has any future. While Serbia started to build its part of the connection in 2018, the Hungarian part has not progressed. This project is riddled with challenges and doubts over its transparency and the [EU initiated infringement procedures against Hungary](#) already in 2016.

The stalemate could change [after Hungary and China signed a loan agreement](#) in April, which should cover the construction of the Hungarian part of the railway. [The 20-year 1.855 billion USD loan](#) was provided to Hungary by the Export-Import Bank of China. This will be the [first](#) major Chinese infrastructure project in the EU. According to the Hungarian Finance Minister, Mihály Varga, the Hungarian section should be finalised by 2025. After the completion of the link from Piraeus port in Greece to Hungary, Budapest would become a crucial hub for Chinese imports into the EU. Documents of the project, which is of "highest public interest" for Hungary, has been classified for ten years; only the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade can guarantee an exception on request.

### **Country In Focus: Poland**

The Polish presidential election planned for 10 May 2020 did not take place, neither were they officially canceled. Substantial concerns about democratic standards and distrust surrounding the election process, including a lack of legal basis to run mail-in elections for all voters, and no conditions for thousands of Poles living abroad to cast their vote have been expressed domestically and internationally.

Following the presidential candidates' debate on 6 May 2020 on Polish State Television, Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS) and its junior partner, Agreement Party, who disagreed in the past over the electoral process, forged an agreement to eventually postpone the election date, and to entrust the the National Electoral Commission to organize the election (not the Minister of State Assets as it was planned before). The new election date is expected within two weeks and Poles will probably cast their votes by July 2020. It is still unclear if the vote will happen entirely through vote-by-mail as per the bill passed on 7 May 2020 or via a hybrid system that includes polling stations (as per new bill that has been forward this week to the Upper House). It is also uncertain if the potential candidates will have to collect or re-collect 100,000 signatures to be eligible to run for office.

Many experts believe that in order to prepare for free and fair elections, the only viable date would be in autumn. However, this date is questioned by the governing coalition, which seems determined to hold the election as soon as possible. Despite current circumstances, the government has still not declared a state of emergency or a state of natural disaster, both of which would have automatically postponed the election until after the pandemic is over.

## **II. The Economic Impact**

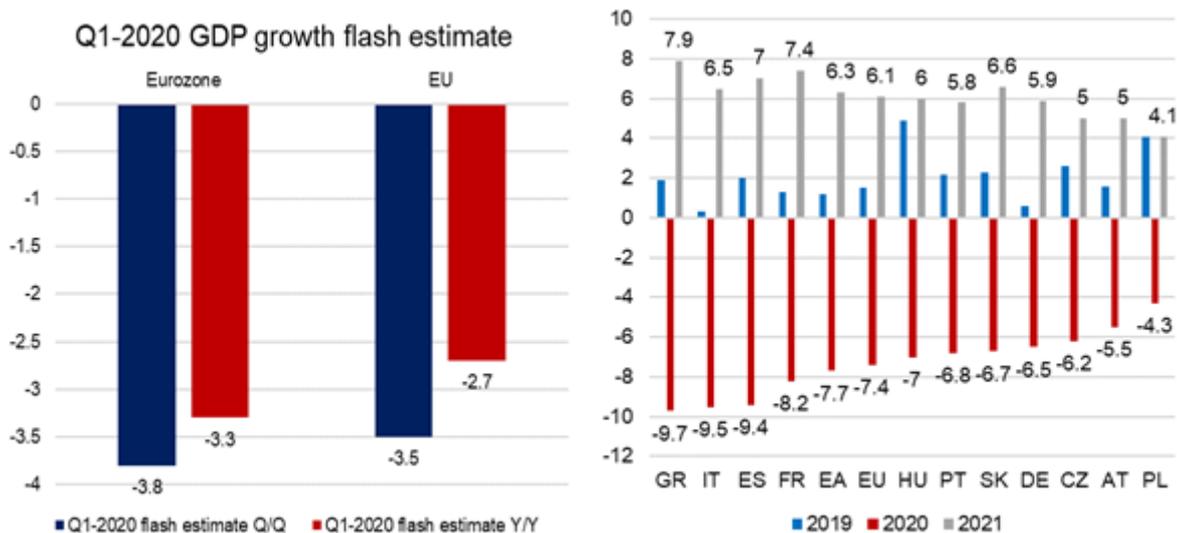
### **V4 Economies are Emerging into the Post-COVID-19 World**

As the contagion curve leveled across most of Europe and the lockdowns are steadily easing, we are slowly emerging into the post-COVID-19 era. The corona crisis has placed the trade-off between social distancing/virus containment measures and the adverse economic effects of these lockdowns at the forefront. V4 governments have been decried at times for being overbearing about the implementation of health measures, resulting in significant economic losses. In recent weeks, authorities across the region have embarked on a mission to

gradually ease the virus containment measures. The new Slovak government has introduced a ‘Tit-for-Tat’ strategy to re-open the economy, divided into four phases and two-week intervals, provided that the situation continues to improve. Austria has taken a similar step on 14 April, while Poland followed suit on 20 April.

Continuous learning about the virus and caution on the economy front is warranted, as epidemiologists frequently discuss the possibility of a second wave outbreak. In this context, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) strongly advocates for mass testing and contact tracing, to help with the lifting of containment measures and to pre-empt any second-round effects. The challenges and economic costs of rigorous and diligent testing, tracing, and isolating are less than the heavy consequences of another lockdown.

The most recent economic forecast of the European Commission projects the deepest recession in the EU’s history. According to the prediction, the EU economy is expected to shrink by 7.4 percent this year, and the Eurozone economy by 7.7 percent. This is broadly consistent with the most recent GDP estimates published by Eurostat for the first quarter of the year. At -3.8% q/q [Chart 2a], Q1 constitutes the Eurozone’s weakest performance on record so far, even worse than the weakest quarter of the 2008 Financial Crisis.



Source: Eurostat, April 30 2020 (LHS); European Commission Spring 2020 Forecast (RHS).

The first two quarters of 2020 will show a dramatic economic contraction, in contrast to the national account figures economists are accustomed to seeing. Also, some V4 national authorities have proceeded by further slashing their initial estimates. For example, the National Bank of Slovakia revised its baseline to -9.3% from -4.5%. Realizing this, and the implications for the European economy and financial markets, on 30 April the European Central Bank (ECB) introduced a new series of non-targeted pandemic emergency longer-term refinancing operations (PELTROs) to further ease liquidity conditions and contribute to preserving the smooth functioning of money markets. But the question many are asking is, what is the shape of the economic bounce-back and timing of returning to ‘normalcy’ (whatever that may mean) beyond the first cataclysmic half of the year?

As long as a systemic solution is lacking (medical solution or bullet-proof strategy to prevent repeated waves), consumption and investment activity are set to stay muted. Moreover, after having experienced such a heavy hit to confidence, consumers, investors, and firms will likely remain vigilant for some time. Different reopening regimes may continue to weigh down trade activity and the smooth functioning of value chains. In sum, it will take further efforts on parts of governments and other economic agents across society, a little faith, and more time, to jumpstart the recovery. Over the medium term, going ahead with the much-needed reform efforts, in the areas of digitalization, green transition, and completing the integration of capital markets have the potential to place the region at a brisker recovery pace.

**III. The (Dis)Information Environment**

**Konev Statute removal in Prague Triggers Threats and Retaliation from Moscow**

The [decision of municipal authorities in Prague](#) to remove the statue of Ivan Stepanovic Konev, a World War II Red Army commander who liberated Prague, from a square in the Prague 6 District triggered a wave of retaliatory actions from the Russian Federation, resembling the 2007 hybrid campaign against Estonia. Marshal Konev led the Red Army forces which liberated Prague in 1945, however, he also led the crushing of the anti-Soviet 1956 Hungarian Uprising. Moreover, in 1968, Konev chaired the Soviet military delegation sent to Prague to prepare the military invasion of Czechoslovakia. Following the decision to remove the icon last year, various Russian and pro-Russian media outlets [started a concerted campaign](#) falsely describing this decision as illegal and criminal with the intention of stoking anti-Russian sentiment.

Two days after the statue was removed from the square in April, [the Czech Embassy in Moscow](#) and the Czech consulate in St. Petersburg were attacked by masked vandals. In a highly unusual move, the [Russian Duma passed legislation](#) retroactively criminalizing the removal of any historical monuments related to WW II. This move led Russia’s Investigative Committee, which handles investigations into major crimes, to [open a criminal case](#) over the “suspected public desecration of symbols of Russia’s military glory“. These physical attacks and criminal procedures against Czech local representatives were followed by cyberattacks (see the Security section).

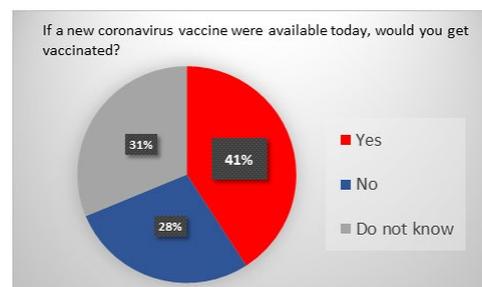
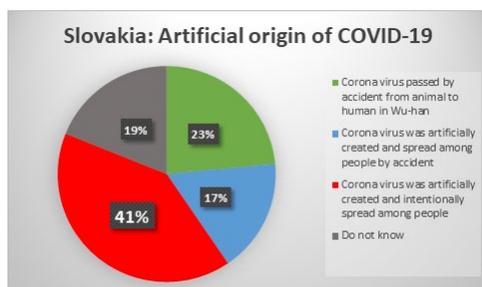
In this campaign of pressure and retaliation, perhaps the most shocking element was the news that a suspected Russian intelligence operative had arrived in the Czech Republic and was driven straight to the Russian Embassy in Prague. Some sources claim he had the deadly poison ricin in his suitcase. While this was not confirmed, Prague 6 District mayor Ondrej Kolar, who has been receiving death threats since the decision to remove Konev statue, and mayor of Prague, Zdenek Hrib [were placed under police protection](#) and remain in an undisclosed location.

**New Slovak Government Manifesto targets Hybrid Threats and Disinformation amid widespread trust in Conspiracy Theories**

The new [Slovak government manifesto](#), adopted in the Parliament on 29 April amid the COVID-19 epidemics, indicates a significant shift in the approach of Slovak authorities to hybrid threats and disinformation operations, with a new emphasis on cooperation with civil society in countering these threats. Unlike the previous manifesto, the importance of countering hybrid threats and the impact of disinformation is highlighted in many chapters – Justice, Defence, Internal Security, Education, and Culture. The manifesto foresees several practical steps to be taken in this area, with the most important step being the development of an Action Plan on countering hybrid threats and disinformation, and developing capacities to oversee and coordinate its implementation.

The lack of central coordination and lack of capacities to counter disinformation were highlighted in the [first complex analysis of hybrid threats in Slovakia](#) carried out by GLOBSEC in 2018. Such a pledge is overdue, but still welcome, since Slovakia is particularly vulnerable to various types of conspiracy theories and the impact of disinformation is significant. According to [the 2019 GLOBSEC Trends opinion poll](#), more than half of the Slovak population believe in various conspiracy theories. Capitalizing on such sentiments, some far-right political leaders are [spreading hoaxes regarding the COVID-19 pandemic](#) and warn of the alleged plan to microchip the population under the pretext of vaccination.

As [recent polls show](#), this disinformation campaign is already having an impact, since only 41% of Slovaks would agree to get vaccinated against the Coronavirus. Moreover, 40,6% believe the Coronavirus was artificially made and intentionally spread among the population.



#### IV. The Brussels Decisions

##### EU-Western Balkans Summit

The EU-Western Balkans Summit was organized via video conference due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Summit was supposed to be a highlight of the Croatian Presidency of the Council of the EU and mark a symbolic 20th anniversary of the first EU-Western Balkans Summit held in Zagreb. The “EU once again reaffirmed its unequivocal support for the European perspective of the Western Balkans”, however the summit [declaration](#) avoided mentioning either a clear enlargement message or a negotiations timeframe.

The EU has prepared a significant package of over EUR 3.3 billion to support the Western Balkans in tackling COVID-19 and the post-pandemic recovery. Emphasizing that the EU’s support in times of pandemic goes far beyond what any other partner has provided to the region, the EU leaders did not shy away from mentioning that this financial assistance deserves public acknowledgment. This message was explicitly aimed at Serbia’s President Vučić who had prematurely announced the “death of European solidarity” while praising Chinese assistance.

During the after-summit [press-conference](#), the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen announced that “once we put behind us this immediate phase of the pandemic, the EU will present the investment plan later this year – it will focus on necessary transport and energy infrastructure, but also the Green new deal and digitalisation.” The EU leadership also called on its Western Balkan partners to progress towards full alignment with EU foreign policy positions, notably on issues where major common interests are at stake, and to act accordingly.

- *Alisa Muzergues, [The EU-Western Balkans Summit signals commitment to the region but lacks enlargement ambition](#), GLOBSEC, 14 May 2020*

#### V. Security Implications

##### Roma Communities

The vulnerability of the Roma communities in the current COVID-19 pandemic can in many ways be considered the most symptomatic case of how decades’ long inability/unwillingness to find systemic solutions have caught up with countries across the EU, putting these communities, as well as the societies at large at risk. In Slovakia, the absence of thorough testing when the state of emergency was declared, coupled with a poorly managed information sharing and reporting system, led to entire communities being cut off from the outside world. The Slovak government’s measures to contain COVID-19 amongst its Roma communities has brought criticism from human rights groups, including Amnesty International and Open Society Foundations, for enacting disproportionate and militarized measures that would only lead to further stigmatization. Mandatory testing in the presence of the Slovak Armed Forces was solely enforced for Roma communities. A yet unresolved [case of a police officer allegedly attacking children playing outside the quarantined zone](#) in one of these communities is aggravating some of the existing fears and mistrust on both sides.

At the time of reporting, several communities have been released from lockdown and the armed forces have been taken off duty. The government has now started isolating the infected patients from the healthy ones, but only after a month of entire communities being completely cut off.

Similar government methods to contain the spread of COVID-19 by quarantining Roma communities have also been put in place in Bulgaria, Romania, and Greece. Roma communities in Hungary have experienced economic stigmatization. There have been reports of discriminatory layoffs of Roma employees in response to COVID-19. The Roma in Hungary fear further discrimination from the weakened economy caused by COVID-19.

Initial tests have shown that the members of these communities have not necessarily developed antibodies and until the virus is suppressed with a vaccine and a building of collective immunity, the inability to isolate those infected in a timely and effective manner can cause the numbers to rise again. In the case of a second wave hitting Slovakia or the region, the Roma could continue to be among the most vulnerable and similar discriminatory measures might be re-enacted.

## **Proliferation of Cyber Attacks**

The Czech Republic has faced several cyber-attacks in March and April, following the removal of the Konev Statute in Prague. Three hospitals were attacked, two of which thwarted the attacks, as did the Prague airport and a regional power distributor. The Czech cybersecurity agency, NUKIB, [has said](#) the attacks were thought to be the work of a "serious and advanced adversary" and warned that computer systems of the country's hospitals are at risk.

While the attribution in cyberattacks is always problematic, some experts believe there are [traces pointing to Russian involvement](#). Additionally, reports say that Chinese IP addresses utilized in the attack have also been traced. The Russian Embassy in the Czech Republic has denied all accusations in connection to the recent cyber-attacks.

The United States Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is currently the only foreign government representative to have issued a statement condemning the attacks. Ondrej Kolar, mayor of Prague 6 district, has appealed to the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, for the European Union to condemn Russia for the attacks on an EU member state. The Prime Minister of the Czech Republic, Andrej Babiš, has called for an investigation into the poisoning plot against Prague's Mayors. The Czech Republic has a history of foreign cyber-attacks targeting its Foreign Ministry in 2017 and 2019, with Russia accused of being behind both attacks. Amid the condemnations against Russia, the President of the Czech Republic, Miloš Zeman, has agreed to attend the postponed Victory Day celebrations in Moscow.

Poland experienced similar phenomenon during this crisis with a cyber-attack on its main defence academy's website. On 22 April, the website of War Studies Institute in Warsaw was attacked with the posting of a fake letter in the name of the schools' rector, calling on Polish soldiers to fight "American occupation" on Polish soil. Polish government officials allege that the attack was conducted by Russia to weaken the Polish-U.S. alliance.

As the attacks continue on V4 countries, and Russian diplomacy aggravates the situation in the Czech Republic, it is important to consider the polarising potential these developments have on the population. GLOBSEC has already mapped the vulnerability of V4 countries to disinformation (GLOBSEC Trends) and Slovakia's readiness to defend against cyber-attacks ([GLOBSEC Cyber Readiness Index](#)), mutual dynamics which should be accounted for when evaluating the security risks not only for the individual countries, but for the region as a whole.

In the case of Slovakia, there is an unresolved issue of defining a new defence and security strategy, since proposed documents from 2017 have not yet been approved in Parliament, making them obsolete. Slovakia's Minister of Defence Jaroslav Naď and the Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivan Korčok reportedly aim to create new documents altogether for their ministries, after the situation with coronavirus stabilizes. Countering hybrid threats, including strengthening cyber defence capabilities are expected to be of critical priority for the new government.

## **The Debate on Contact Tracing Apps**

Many European countries now regard contact-tracing apps as essential tools in the struggle to contain the coronavirus. However, this has led to a debate over privacy which has proven to be divisive, even among computer scientists, programmers, and privacy advocates. Now policy-makers must wade in a heated debate that has already divided the tech community.

The debate is focused on whether a centralized or decentralized contact-tracing app is better suited to protect the privacy of citizens who use it. A centralized approach, which has been adopted by the UK, stores the movement and contact data in a centralized state-controlled server. Decentralized systems, such as the jointly led Google-Apple contact-tracing app keep the data on the phones themselves.

The effort to create a European contact-tracing app, despite EU encouragement, has not been done in unison. Many member states, including Poland and the Czech Republic, have already developed their own apps. In Slovakia, the Constitutional Court has stopped the law that would allow to develop such an app, justifying that it would lack transparency to users and safeguards against abusing the collection of data on mass scale. However, a Europe-wide project is underway to create a common app with inter-operational ability with existing apps. The [Pan-European Privacy-Preserving Proximity Tracing or PEPP-PT](#) project is a primarily German-led project that has been working to develop a centralized app for use throughout Europe. However, internal disagreements led to one group, now known as DP-3T, splintering off to develop a decentralized app. This schism led to another group,

GesundZusammen, criticizing DP-3T in an open letter. The group argues that PEPP-PT's centralized approach better protects the privacy of consumers. They argue that this is because a centralized app would keep the data safe from exploitation in the central hub, while a decentralized model would ensure that all the data collected by the apps would remain with the tech companies which develop the phones themselves, primarily Google and Apple.

The privacy implications of contact-tracing apps remain controversial. Although most European leaders have vowed to adhere to privacy regulations and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), ensuring that privacy is upheld in practice is far more difficult. With no consensus in the tech community, member states are free to decide their course of action. Europe will likely implement a patchwork of different apps with different standards and regulations.

### **Borders Under COVID-19, A Fractured Response**

Due to their early response, the Visegrád countries are some of the earliest in Europe to ease restrictions placed on their borders during the COVID-19 lockdown. The V4, in cooperation with the Balkan states, have a particular sense of urgency in negotiating the slow reopening of their internal borders for the rapidly approaching agricultural production and national holiday seasons.

#### **Czech Republic:**

According to [Foreign Minister Tomáš Petříček, the Czech Republic is currently engaged in extensive negotiations with neighboring states and all borders are projected to be fully open from July](#). It seems that on the topic of Slovakian and Austrian borders an agreement between governments will come quite easily, but the Czech government anticipates a much slower process of political negotiation with Poland and Germany. Following border relief, the government intends to allow citizens to travel abroad from August, a shift from the current travel guidelines providing for ventures only out of necessity.

The Association of Czech Travel Agencies has lobbied the Czech government to come to an agreement with countries that have managed to relatively isolate COVID-19, such as Croatia and Slovakia to allow for the travel of citizens to and from destinations between these nations. The proposed ["Corona Corridor" to the Adriatic Coast](#) comes as Croatian officials reconsider the opening of recreational facilities such as marinas, campsites and resorts. Swift policy implementation by the Czech government would prove beneficial to the Croatian tourist economy and allow Czech citizens the reprieve of summer holidays.

#### **Poland:**

As many EU member states begin the gradual ease of restrictions, [the Polish border opened for German, Lithuanian, Czech and Slovakian residents near the border on May 4<sup>th</sup>](#), with no mandatory two-week quarantine (past strict lockdown). For all other countries a two-week quarantine will be required.

#### **Hungary:**

The border crossings on the Serbian-Hungarian border, which opened on 24 April, were among the first transit points in the CEE to open in the face of the pandemic. The provision of essential travel for commuting workers or citizens who have land to farm across the border was considered a critical motion in the maintenance of the Hungarian Economy. On 4 May, the easing of restrictions continued with the first flights being serviced from Budapest. Business professionals from 6 countries including [citizens of the Czech Republic, Poland, the Republic of Korea, Austria and Slovakia](#) may now freely enter Hungary for business purposes.

#### **Slovakia:**

Slovakia, in comparison with their V4 counterparts, have taken a much more conservative approach [Seeking a sort of 'little Schengen' the country will open its border gradually under thorough negotiation with Austria and the Czech Republic](#). This approach comes in opposition to a full reinstatement of the Schengen Border code at a coordinated EU level, as Slovakia seems intent on keeping control of border restrictions as a sovereign process. As the number of infected individuals in the region is gradually declining, the relaxation of the border regime is becoming a greater topic within the Slovak government and with its neighbors. While the Slovak government has espoused great concern for extenuating measures, [Prime Minister Igor Matovic has said, "if the surrounding countries reach our level, they are willing to open their borders completely with us"](#).