

Hungarian-Slovak relations through the eyes of football stadiums

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Abstract

Slovak-Hungarian relations have long been burdened by a different view of the common past. While Hungary and Slovakia cooperate as good and reliable partners in international relations and despite friendly relations between their governments, deep-seated tensions between the two nations is regularly displayed when it comes to football matches. The goal of the article is to map the political expressions of relevant actors at mutual football matches. It analyzes in more detail the behavior and political or ideological expressions of national football associations, clubs, players or fans during two international matches between Slovan Bratislava and Ferencvárosi TC (Budapest) in 2022. The conclusions show that the matches were seen by some spectators as an expression of rivalry between Hungarians and Slovaks. Despite the efforts of UEFA, national football federations or the clubs themselves, the spectators presented political attitudes that bore the signs of aggressive nationalism or chauvinism.

Keywords: Ferencvárosi TC; ŠK Slovan Bratislava; nationalism; football; spectator's behaviour.

1. Introduction

Relations between Slovaks and Hungarians have long been burdened by mutual historical injustices and by the fact that Slovakia has a sizeable Hungarian minority in its southern parts. Aside from historical disagreements, new ones are being created by nationalist politicians that revive mutual enmity in parts of both societies. Irresponsible public statements and use of symbols by nationalist politicians can have many consequences, but this study is going to focus on one in particular – hostile expressions of spectators during mutual football matches between the top football clubs in both countries – ŠK Slovan Bratislava and Ferencvárosi TC (Budapest).

The aim of the paper is to analyse the behaviour of football fans during two matches between ŠK Slovan Bratislava and Ferencvárosi TC in the 2022 Champions League qualification. Emphasis is placed on the political dimension of the sports rivalry between the two teams,

perceiving the historical and political context of problematic Hungarian-Slovak relations. A specific attention is dedicated to security measures and the influence of the UEFA¹ on the peaceful course of matches. The importance of these two sporting events, that took place on July 20 and July 27, 2022, for research on relationship between politics and sport can be found in several of their features:

1. Matches between Hungarian and Slovak clubs or national teams are generally considered risky due to strained international relations and UEFA regularly punishes teams of both nations for racist behaviour or national intolerance. Foreign commentators often refer to the situation in the audience not as rivalry, but as hatred (Hooligans.cz, 2012; Černák, 2022; Vráblik, 2022; Staško, 2022).
2. The analysis deals with the matches of the two historically most successful teams within both countries, where football is the most popular collective sport. From the point of view of the media, politicians and the public, both teams represent not only the club, but also the nation (FB Green Monsters, 2022; Černák, 2022).
3. The football confrontation between Ferencvárosi TC and Slovan does not happen often at the competitive level, therefore it is attractive for relevant actors on both sides, such as media, politicians, fans or experts from various spheres. Before the matches in 2022, the two clubs last met in 1992. During these historic matches, there is a record of harsh and controversial intervention by the Slovak police against Hungarian fans and manifestations of national intolerance on both sides. Strong emotions prevailed not only in the media and the public, but also in the sphere of politics and diplomacy, especially on the Hungarian side.
4. Both clubs have die-hard fans² and hooligan groups with a violent nature and a nationalist or even neo-Nazi ideological background. The matches were thus a challenge for the security forces, the organizers, but also UEFA.

2. Methodology

Since its inception, football has been marked by tribalism, protest, military propaganda, political expressions or various interpretations of masculinity (Power, 2020). It is an important platform for creating or maintaining socio-political differences and restrictions using both local character and global influence. Football players and fans have the opportunity to express their identity in different groups, either from the position of a dominant group defining normative cultural norms, or alternative groups that criticize these norms and celebrate their difference.

Although some fans refuse to associate with politics, they are not isolated from the political and social development. Their behaviour in stadiums correlates with broader political and social

¹ UEFA is the non-profit umbrella organisation for 55 national football associations across Europe (UEFA, 2018).

² For the purposes of this study, it is not necessary to insist on the distinction between different profiles of fans, such as ultras, hooligans or spectators, discussed in various studies (Smolík & Dordevic, 2023; Kossakowski, 2020; Viñas & Spaaij, 2013; Frostdick & Marsh, 2011). We will mostly use a general term fan, although sometimes we will emphasize the more violent nature of some groups of spectators (ultras or hooligans).

changes or development (Doidge et al., 2020; Kossakowski, 2020; Testa, 2009; Spaaij & Viñas, 2005; etc.). Using the example of Spain, Viñas and Spaaij (2013) argues that sport is a microcosm of society and that football in particular has always been, and still is, a reflection of political and cultural conflicts within society. Similarly, Alberto Testa explains how in Italy the growth of neo-fascism in the stands reflected the political and economic crisis of the 1990s. Fans become politicized especially when there is a growing sense of injustice or a demand for a more extensive change in social relations at the national or global level (see Dean, 2017; Smolík, 2008). Moreover, the basic feature and driving force of fandom at international matches is nationalism, which provide the individual important emotions, values or benefits, such as a sense of belonging and exceptionality, collective identity, power, fame or success (Harrison & Boyd, 2018).

On the other hand, Jonathan Dean (2017) draws attention to a certain inconsistency of political attitudes or expressions between fans and political elites, since fandom is characterized by emotional experience, while we often expect cold and rational actions and decisions from politicians. This might explain the possible difference in the statements or expressions of football fans and the political elite, even though they share the same nationality and patriotism. According to Danny Fitzpatrick and Paddy Hoey (2022), the separation of citizens from politics in the 1990s, indicated by a decrease in voter participation or membership in political parties or increasing distrust of politics and institutions, is accompanied by an increase in (political) activism in other spheres of social and cultural life (including fans), which are otherwise considered non-political or depoliticized. People use new forms of participation (e.g., signing petitions, demonstrations or boycotts) and arenas where they can provide their political and ideological ideas. The football stadium thus becomes a modern social Agora (Testa, 2009), where, regardless of political correctness, ideological views and direct actions are also expressed. Considering this changes, the public seems to be more moderate in their attitudes and expressions than fans.

Analysing the relations between Slovak and Hungarian fans during mutual matches we assume that fans' attitudes and expressions are not immune to the historical or current political and social context, but at the same time we perceive a difference in how they are evaluated and interpreted by fans, the political elite or public. This represents a limitation of the research results, as the relations between Slovaks and Hungarians cannot be described only through the attitudes and behaviour of their football fans. However, it can clarify the narratives being used and indicate the emotions and moods between members of both nations.

The analysis focuses on the statements of the clubs themselves, fans from various groups (ultras and hooligans), UEFA, but also the media and political representatives from both sides. The data are drawn from the official websites of football clubs and national associations, UEFA and Hungarian and Slovak media. An important primary source were more or less official accounts of fan groups on social networks Facebook or Youtube (e.g., Green Monsters, Ultras Slovan Official) and various discussion forums and fanpages (hooligans.cz, ultras.sk, Ultras Magazine, supporters.cz). However, information coming from both camps had to be verified by other sources for an objective description of the events. The study only presents facts that can

be reliably confirmed using data collection techniques, data processing and analysis. Part of the information was also verified by a direct participant of both meetings in Bratislava and Budapest, who was in the ultras sector of ŠK Slovan fans and by the observation of the authors of the article, who monitored the arrival of Ferencvárosi TC fans in Bratislava and their transfer to the stadium. As both authors are Slovaks, they also used sources describing some controversial events from abroad to reduce the possible bias coming out of their nationality. Moreover, they preventively avoided popular and journalistic description of controversial events from both Slovak and Hungarian sources, apart from those coming from football fans of analysed clubs.

3. History of changeable relations between Slovakia and Hungary

During the communist dictatorship in both Czechoslovakia and Hungary nationalist sentiments were ideologically undesirable and under strict control. This changed radically after the fall of the regime. Nationalist ideas became vibrant in both societies and they had influence on significant part of the electorate. In Slovakia, “immediately after the collapse of the communist regime, a broad, catch-all national movement emerged [...], dominating other sectors of civil society in terms of mobilisation power” (Malová, 2003, p. 51). It opposed government policies concerning liberal conditions for ethnic minorities and demanded “policies supporting Slovak national identity, ranging from the language law to the formation of an independent Slovakia” (Malová, 2003, p. 58).

For the purpose of evaluating the influence on the behaviour of football spectators during matches, we try to divide Slovak-Hungarian relations, even if only very roughly, into four historical phases. These phases concern the whole societies, but we pay special attention to the relations between the governments of the two countries, assuming that these relations also reflect the wider events in each society. We identify the following phases: 1. from the creation of the Slovak Republic in 1993 to the end of 1998, 2. from 1999 to the spring of 2006, 3. from 2006 to roughly the end of 2010, and 4. from 2011 to the present day.

The first phase begins with the establishment of the Slovak Republic in January 1993 and is associated with the revival of nationalist ideas in Slovakia and Hungary after 1989. Even the atmosphere and incidents at the first matches of the European competition between Ferencvárosi TC and ŠK Slovan Bratislava in 1992 clearly demonstrate the national tension between the countries. Parties with nationalist elements ruled in both states. In Slovakia it was mainly the radical right-wing Slovak National Party (SNS), which was the smaller coalition partner; in Hungary it was primarily the main ruling party Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF). From the first days of their mutual relationship, there were disputes such as different attitudes towards the completion of the Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros hydroelectric power plant project, which ended up at the International Court of Justice in The Hague. Only in 1994, after the short-term ousting of the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) and SNS from power, the centrist government of Jozef Moravčík, together with the new Hungarian left-wing

government of Gyula Horn, began the serious preparation of basic treaty between Slovakia and Hungary (Sándor, 1996). After early elections in the fall of 1994, HZDS and SNS returned to power, but they showed an effort to finalize and ratify the treaty. The Hungarian government was against it to explicitly put the inviolability of Slovak borders in the treaty, since, as it argued, it had already implicitly committed itself to this by signing the final document of the KBSE in Helsinki (Wlachovský, 1996). In 1995, the treaty was finally signed, but the feeling that it was too accommodating towards the Hungarian minority in Slovakia subsequently led to the adoption of a strict law on the state language of the SR against minorities as well as efforts to reduce teaching in minority languages. These actions of the Slovak representatives met with strong opposition from Hungarians in Slovakia and international criticism (Sándor, 1996). Until the 1998 election, Slovak parties, even the opposition ones, behaved relatively coldly towards Hungarian parties, and government officials tried not to come into contact with them at all. These minority parties therefore tried to communicate with partners abroad instead (Dostál, 1996). Slovak-Hungarian relations remained very tense. More open disputes did not occur mainly because of the efforts of both states to become members of the EU and NATO, for which such behaviour would be unacceptable. This entire period from the establishment of the Slovak Republic to the 1998 elections can therefore be characterized as the first phase of mutual relations with strong nationalism, problematic topics and poorly defined mutual relations between states.

The beginning of second phase relates to the government of Mikuláš Dzurinda (1998-2006), in which Hungarian Coalition Party (SMK) became a coalition partner. The presence of Hungarian minority party in government gradually improved the mutual relations between Hungary and Slovakia. One of the reasons for this was Slovakia's effort to catch up with its neighbours in EU and NATO integration. Hungary was interested in the joint entry of both countries into the EU as well, since it would facilitate the contacts of Hungarians on both sides of the border. In the years 1998 to 2002, the first government of Viktor Orbán was in power, consisting of Fidesz, Independent Smallholders, Agrarian Workers and Civic Party (FKgP) and MDF, which were no stranger to nationalist values. However, successful entry into the EU was a priority for it. Symbolic friendly steps between the two governments were mainly the joint reconstruction of the Mária Valéria Bridge between Slovak Štúrovo and Hungarian Ostrihom in 2001 (TASR, 2021). In 2004, the second government of M. Dzurinda also established the J. Selye University in Komárno with Hungarian as the language of education. In 2004 both states joined the EU together and national disputes receded into the background. We can therefore perceive the years 1998-2006 as a period of improving relations.

The third phase begins in 2006 when the first government of Robert Fico and his party SMER-SD took office in Slovakia. In it HZDS and the nationalist SNS also returned to power. Thanks to SNS chairman Ján Slota's return to power³, among others, Slovak-Hungarian relations soon found themselves in a new phase of deterioration – no longer as hostile as in the nineties, but noticeably worse than before. In the period 2002-2010, the Hungarian government

³ In 1999, Ján Slota made himself visible in the opposition with a public call to get into tanks and go and raze Budapest to the ground, while he called the Hungarians scumbags (SME, 1999).

was in the hands of leftist and liberal forces and tried to suppress national passions. In August 2006 in Slovakia, Hungarian student Hedviga Malinová reported that a nationally motivated attack had been committed against her, which was publicly questioned by SMER-SD politicians, especially the Minister of the Interior R. Kaliňák. On the contrary, SMER-SD politicians began to blame the student for making the attack up and at the same time defaming Slovakia (SITA, 2006). This case was subsequently publicly discussed and investigated for over a decade. Hedviga Malinová moved to Hungary after this experience. In 2007, the new opposition nationalist movement Jobbik in Hungary founded the Hungarian Guard, which was a paramilitary organization in the style of citizen patrols and its stated goal was national self-defense. The Hungarian Supreme Court only legally dissolved it in 2009 (TASR, 2009). In 2007, the Slovak parliament adopted a resolution on the inviolability of the so-called Beneš decrees, on the basis of which Hungarians in Slovakia were temporarily deprived of their civil rights after the WW2 and many were transferred out of the state. Hungarian President László Sólyom subsequently arrived unannounced in Komárno and held talks with several representatives of the Hungarian minority, which caused outrage in Slovakia (Korda, 2007). When in 2009 Sólyom wanted to make a similar journey at the invitation of the mayor of Komárno and come there to unveil the statue of King Saint Stephen, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic handed over a diplomatic note to the Hungarian embassy in which Sólyom was denied entry to the territory of the Slovak Republic for the whole day and the president was not allowed at the border, which in turn caused outrage on the Hungarian side (TASR, 2019a). Relations also worsened when, in 2008, Ján Slota made several verbal attacks on the Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs, calling her a lady with messy hair, for which her Slovak counterpart, Ján Kubiš, apologized to her (Žitňanský, 2008). In 2010, the right-wing Fidesz won the Hungarian parliamentary elections with a constitutional majority, and one of its first acts in parliament was to approve the granting of Hungarian citizenship to Hungarians from neighbouring states (Kurucz, 2012). The party did so even before the creation of its own new government and at the same time just before the Slovak parliamentary elections, to which the outgoing government of Robert Fico reacted with outrage and quickly adopted a law depriving Slovak citizens of their citizenship automatically if they accept the citizenship of another state. Although the law outraged the SMER-SD and especially the SNS, it also helped them in the last weeks of the election campaign to raise a topic that suited them more than being held accountable for their own governance. Nevertheless, right-wing opposition came to power after the Slovak elections. The new government included Slovak-Hungarian reconciliation party Most-Híd and its new course was to try to improve mutual relations despite the nationalist tendencies of Orbán's new government in Hungary. This concludes the second period of deteriorated Slovak-Hungarian relations lasting approximately in the period of 2006-2010.

The fourth phase follows the last wave of Slovak-Hungarian disagreements in 2006-2010. The relations between the two countries slowly and gradually returned to a more friendly level. Therefore, we can define the fourth phase in terms of time from approximately 2011 to the present. It is the longest phase in terms of time and it is weakly defined since the improvement

in relations was rather gradual and in many ways it was a pragmatic decision of the governments of both states to see their neighbour as an ally rather than an enemy. The Hungarian government was led by Fidesz throughout this period, and after initial steps such as handing out passports to Hungarian minorities in neighbouring states, it began to focus less on finding an enemy in its immediate neighbours and more on cooperating with them – e.g., within the Visegrad group – against European policies and institutions. This was also helped by the government of the SMER-SD party in Slovakia in the years 2012-2020, which, instead of criticism, was ready to be inspired by the Fidesz party in many ways. During this period, there was also a significant reduction in ethnic tension in Slovakia, when first in the years 2012-2016 the radical right-wing SNS did not get into parliament and SMER-SD tried to avoid ethnic issues. And subsequently even the SNS got into the government, but as a coalition partner with the Hungarian minority party Most-Híd and it also began to avoid anti-Hungarian attitudes. This can be partially attributed to the replacement of Ján Slota at the head of the SNS by Andrej Danko, who is a much younger politician. Under his leadership SNS tried to move away from anti-Hungarian rhetoric and closer to the political center. This phase of friendly relations continues even after the elections in 2020, when the new main government party OĽaNO does not hide its admiration for some of the successes and attitudes of Viktor Orbán's government. The current Slovak government takes a relatively conciliatory approach to more problematic steps of its Hungarian counterpart such as the purchase of historical buildings in Slovakia (Hajčáková & Onderčanin, 2021) and Orbán's wearing a football scarf with an outlining the so-called Great Hungary. Since 2020, the SNS and Hungarian minority parties are absent from the Slovak parliament. On the other hand, since 2016, the extreme right-wing (K)ĽSNS has also been there, but it is an unacceptable partner for other parties, and in addition, its anti-Hungarian rhetoric is only a relatively marginal ideological element. Far-right nationalist parties have been present in the Hungarian Parliament for a long time – first Hungarian Justice and Life Party (MIÉP), later Jobbik and currently especially Mi Hazánk Mozgalom, but they are not part of government coalitions. During this phase, two competitive interstate matches were played between Slovakia and Hungary as part of the qualification for European Championship in 2019. And although this period was characterized as a more friendly phase of the relations between the governments of the two states, during the football matches in Trnava and Budapest, mainly football hooligans showed relatively significant hostility between the two nations, whether in the form of racist expressions or political provocation (Bušša & Struhár, 2022).

4. Hostile nationalist rhetoric in both states

Anti-Hungarian nationalist rhetoric in Slovakia is summarized by Nociar (2012). He reminds that criticism and hatred of everything Hungarian is typical for the majority of the Slovak extreme right, but that this rhetoric is also spreads to the anti-Hungarian sentiments of the wider society. He distinguishes two kinds of anti-Hungarian rhetoric – historical and

contemporary criticism. Different arguments are interconnected and routinely combined in the anti-Hungarian campaign, but the most frequent is the argument of territorial claims (Nociar, 2012; Pytlas, 2013). Historical criticism nationalistically abuses problematic periods of history. The first such period is the arrival of Hungarian tribes in Central Europe interpreted as a barbarian invasion ending the idealized golden period of Slovak history. The second is the period between the Hungarian Revolution (1848-1949) and the beginning of the First World War, which is associated with the assimilation pressure. And the third problematic period is the time between the end of the First World War and the beginning of the communist dictatorships, which is interpreted as a period of efforts to undermine (Czecho)Slovak independence, the reversal of the Trianon Peace Treaty and military threatening. According to Nociar (2012), the current criticism refers to the period after the revolutions of 1989 and mainly refers to accusations of Hungary making territorial claims on its neighbours. Hungarian political elites and parties in Slovakia “allegedly serve Hungarian plans to revise the Treaty of Trianon and to annex the Slovak territory” (Nociar, 2012, p. 13). They are portrayed as irredentists, chauvinists and revisionists. The criticism perceives far-right movements in Hungary as a threat to the territorial integrity of Slovakia.

Juhász and Krekó (2012) state that the nationalist discourse in Hungary, regarding Slovakia and the Slovaks, is also strongly influenced by history, especially the Treaty of Trianon. This also applies to the relationship with other neighbouring countries such as Romania and Serbia. However, relations with Slovakia have deteriorated more after the fall of communist dictatorships compared to relations with other neighbours, which were already problematic in the 1980s. Some far-right groups even operate with territorial issues and topics of statehood, and Slovakia is a frequent subject of interest in this context. “In sum, according to the far right discourse, Slovakia is practically a non-existent state, an inherent part of the Greater Hungary. The reason for the Slovak ‘aggression’ is that the Slovaks are envious of the 1000-year-old history of Hungary” (Juhász & Krekó, 2012, p. 21). Slovakia is verbally underestimated as a young state with an inferiority complex. The national identity of the Slovaks is supposed to stand only on purposeful distortion of history and their symbols, specifically the flag, are supposed to be stolen from the Hungarians. The Hungarian nationalists often use the word “tót” to refer to Slovaks, a word with negative connotations (Juhász & Krekó, 2012).

5. Hungarian-Slovak relations and football

Football is the most popular team sport in both countries, which inevitably leads to media and political attention. The connection between politics and sport in Hungarian-Slovak relations can be illustrated by the support of Slovak football clubs by the Hungarian government and politicians (Szoczi, 2021; Sólymos et al., 2021). The Hungarian government has been financially supporting the Slovak club DAC Dunajská Streda (or its football academy) for almost ten years. The club is also called Ferencváros of Felvidék and has been perceived as a club of ethnic Hungarians for many decades (Sólymos et al., 2021). Even though the club did not achieve

significant football success until 2014, its players and fans were frequent targets of hate or even attacks by nationalist hooligans from other Slovak clubs. On the other side, there were several police interventions against DAC fans in the past, also due to their ultranationalist or extremist attitudes (e.g., Červený, 2019; FB Police Force, 2018). In 2014, DAC Dunajská Streda was bought by an influential Slovak businessman of Hungarian origin, Oszkár Világi, a friend of Viktor Orbán⁴. Since then, the club has gradually developed into one of the strongest teams of the highest Slovak competition – Fortuna League.

Because of ethnic and political particularity of DAC Dunajská Streda club, both its players and fans were participants in nationalistic incidents at football stadiums that also affected political situation in Slovakia or diplomatic relations between countries. For example, in November 2008, Slovak police cracked down hard on DAC Dunajská Streda fans from Slovakia and Hungary, injuring some of them. In response, Hungarian citizens burned the Slovak flag in front of the Slovak embassy in Budapest. Both incidents increased the ongoing diplomatic tension to such an extent that it was resolved at an informal meeting in Komárno by the highest representatives of both governments, Prime Ministers Róbert Fico and Ferenc Gyurcsány (Smolík, 2017). The outcome of the meeting was the Call for Dialogue, which included the rejection of extremists on both sides and any demonstration of radicalism and nationalism (Euractiv, 2016; SITA, 2008). However, despite the declarations of politicians, manifestation of extremism and national intolerance from the football and hooligan environment have not disappeared. In 2018, Slovak specialized anti-extremist unit NAKA intervened against the Felvidéki harcosok group (Warriors from Upper Hungary) from Dunajská Streda, charging 15 detainees with the crime of founding, supporting and promoting a movement aimed at suppressing fundamental rights and freedoms (FB Police Force, 2018). Support for the accused was expressed not only by the home fans of DAC Dunajská Streda, but also by the ultras fans of Ferencvárosi TC (Komjáthy Petőcz, 2018). The predominant Hungarian nationality of the DAC Dunajská Streda fanbase and the participation of fans from Hungary at home football matches triggered further political tension in the following year. In 2019, members of Slovak parliament amended the Law No. 63/1993 Coll. on state symbols and their use, enforcing a ban on playing or singing the anthem of other states if their official delegation is not present at the event. Dušan Tittel, then a member of the Slovak National Party, defended the parliamentary proposal by referring to events before football matches in Dunajská Streda, when only the Hungarian anthem was played and sung (Hlucháňová, 2019; Sivý, 2020). Representatives of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia protested and Most-Híd political party even threatened to leave the government coalition, which emphasizes the degree of importance of this topic for the political representation of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia (Bušša & Struhár, 2022). Slovak National Party, the coalition partner of the Most-Híd party, eventually backed down and the law was modified. The ban on playing or singing of the anthem of another state at various events (e.g., masses, school events, sports matches) has been lifted.

⁴ Viktor Orbán, along with the top political representatives of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia, also participated in the opening ceremony of the new stadium in Dunajská Streda in 2016.

6. Context of mutual matches between ŠK Slovan Bratislava and Ferencvárosi TC in 2022

Sports competition between Hungarian and Slovak representatives is not immune to the outlined historical and political context of Hungarian-Slovak relations. Systematic investigation of the football matches held between the Hungarian and Slovak teams (national or club) shows that the political representatives or football unions of both countries adopted policies and measures against expressions of racism, xenophobia or political provocations. Hungarian and Slovak football associations (MLSZ and SFZ), the police and the UEFA usually mark the football matches between Slovakia and Hungary as high risk. These were mostly played in front of sold-out stands, accompanied by nationalist and xenophobic expressions from fans of both sides (e.g., Bušša & Struhár, 2022). UEFA explained the high risk of matches by the historical rivalry between the two countries and violent hooligans on both sides (UEFA, 2019a). However, managers of teams and players led their fans to conforming behaviour, calling for restraint and polite encouragement before and during the matches. They are strongly motivated by multinational football organizations that severely punish hate speech in stadiums, either with financial fines or by banning the organization of matches with the participation of spectators (ŠK Slovan, 2022c). This was the case during mutual matches at the UEFA Euro 2020 qualifying tournament, when the Hungarian and Slovak national teams were punished for hateful or political expressions of spectators (Bušša & Struhár, 2022).

The analysis of mutual matches between ŠK Slovan Bratislava and Ferencvárosi TC confirms their risky nature influenced by the nationalist sentiments of fans. Both teams represent the capitals and are the most successful clubs in their countries. They have a rich history and a wide fanbase, including hooligan groups from the extreme right. The rivalry of ŠK Slovan and Ferencvárosi TC has a noticeable political dimension, too. Slovan is owned by one of the richest people in Slovakia, Ivan Kmotřík⁵. In the past, he allegedly had extraordinary relations with government politicians, especially in connection with the construction of a new stadium at Tehelné pole and its planned sale to the state. However, he refuses any links to politicians (Vašuta, 2022). The connection of the Hungarian club to politics is more apparent. The president of the club, Gábor Kubatov, is one of the 4 vice-chairmen of the ruling Fidesz party and a long-time member of parliament. As already mentioned in the previous paragraphs regarding the support of the club DAC Dunajská Streda, Hungarian politicians use football as a tool to spread patriotism or nationalism within or beyond the borders of the country. Not surprisingly, Orbán's government financed the construction of Ferencvárosi TC home stadium in 2014 and after Ferencvárosi TC's victory against ŠK Slovan Bratislava, the team was even publicly congratulated by the long-time Prime Minister and leader of the Fidesz party, Victor Orbán.

⁵ He is currently the president of the club as well.

As of today, UEFA records 4 mutual matches in European cup competitions, while there were no mutual matches during communism⁶. Two matches took place in September 1992 and two matches 30 years later, in July 2022. Although our analysis focuses on the other two matches from 2022, it is important to briefly mention the matches from 1992, taking place at a time of strained Hungarian-Slovak relations as was explained in previous part. On September 16, the first of the two planned matches was performed in Bratislava. Ferencvárosi TC was supported not only by die-hard fans from Budapest, but also by many Slovak Hungarians, which highlighted the political and ethnic context of the football event. Although there is evidence of several violent clashes before the match, unexpected problems arose when several thousand Ferencvárosi TC fans from southern Slovakia appeared in the home sectors of the stadium⁷. In the second half, the riots escalated, which culminated in a harsh intervention by the police against the sector of Hungarian fans from Budapest (Mareš, Smolík & Suchánek, 2004)⁸. Violence and vandalism from both camps continued in the streets of Bratislava even after the match. Interpretations of what happened at the stadium differ; in any case, the police intervention (using the antiterrorist commando) had diplomatic consequences due to the misuse of the topic and tense atmosphere by politicians and the media (Černák, 2022; Staško, 2022; Vráblik, 2022). Both the Hungarian government and the parliament described the intervention as brutal and unjustified; many media saw it as a manifestation of national intolerance towards Hungarians. UEFA, however, rejected the Hungarian club's request for annulment and fined both teams – ŠK Slovan for insufficient organizing services and Ferencvárosi TC for fan disorder (Černák, 2022). UEFA called the return match in Budapest as a risk and for security reasons, the official trip of Slovak fans was not organized (Staško, 2022). According to many observers, this match was full of hatred from Ferencvárosi TC fans, as a consequence of police intervention in Bratislava (Hooligans.cz, 2012; Černák, 2022; Vráblik, 2022; Staško, 2022).

7. The behavior of fans at the ŠK Slovan Bratislava – Ferencvárosi TC matches⁹ in 2022

Thirty years later, the matches of the 2nd round of Champions League qualification were also defined as risk, even as an extreme risk by the Slovak Police (FB Slovak Police, 2022). In addition to fears of nationalistic provocations and violent fans, a new threat emerged in the form of efforts to revive mutual hatred from 1992. With the aim of attracting and mobilizing nationalist or patriotic fans, the events of 1992 were revisited by the media and some Ferencvárosi TC fans. Ultras group Green Monsters published an emotional video of the

⁶ There were only two friendly matches between Ferencvárosi TC and ŠK Slovan Bratislava that took place shortly after the World War II., in Budapest and Bratislava. About 20 thousand spectators came to Tehelné pole in Bratislava, but there are no information about any violent incident.

⁷ For illustration, in 1992 as well as now, fans of the already mentioned club DAC Dunajská Streda supported Ferencvárosi TC in mutual matches.

⁸ Some Slovak commentators call the intervention of police as a shame or “festival of primitive nationalism“ (Vráblik, 2022).

⁹ ŠK Slovan Bratislava won the match in Budapest 2:1, but lost the return match in Bratislava 1:4.

Slovak police forces intervention, while the video ends with the text “We will not forget. We will arrive” (YouTube Green Monsters, 2022).

A post on the official Facebook page of Green Monsters ultras group frames the fight between the clubs as a confrontation of nations and interpret the action of the Slovak police from 1992 as a “political message of Hungary” (FB Green Monsters, 2022). They consider themselves as fighters for the whole of Hungary and call on fans to bring Hungarian flags. Almost all their posts about analysed matches are very aggressive and hostile towards Slovan and Slovakia. On the other side, most likely due to UEFA’s strict judgement of political and provocative speech, the Hungarian club did not directly comment on the events of 1992, although in a post-match report on their official Facebook profile they posted a photo of the home sector with the huge text “We do not forget, 1992”.

However, before the matches, both teams called on their fans to give up any expressions (banners, symbols or posters) that contradict the legislation, incite intolerance or encourage the suppression of human rights (ŠK Slovan, 2022b; Ferencvárosi TC, 2022). ŠK Slovan officials even met with various fan groups, including the hooligan USP (Ultras Slovan Pressburg), before the return match at Tehelné pole stadium. They adopted a joint communiqué in which they called on Slovan supporters to resist the provocations of rival fans, to refrain from shouting nationalist slogans and insults or using nationalist banners (ŠK Slovan, 2022a; ŠK Slovan, 2022c). As can be seen from several statements of ŠK Slovan’s representatives and fans, behind these calls was mainly the club’s fear of penalties from UEFA, including the closure of the stadium for European matches (FB Ultras Slovan, 2022a). At the same time, ŠK Slovan took measures to prevent Hungarians or Slovakia’s Hungarians from entering the stadium like Slovan supporters, as was the case in 1992. Tickets were only sold to those who had attended Slovan’s previous matches, i.e., presumed Slovan fans. As the club explained, they prevent the “purchase of tickets for risky fans directly from Budapest, from other regions of Hungary or from the southern regions of Slovakia” (ŠK Slovan, 2022a). The club argued with security reasons when it tried to prevent the risky mixing of fans of Slovak and Hungarian clubs. However, another legitimate goal of Slovan was to gain a clear fan superiority in the stadium, unlike in 1992, when there were up to 10,000 Ferencvárosi TC fans out of 32,000 (Černák, 2022; hooligans.cz, 2012). Because of increasingly strict security measures at stadiums or during fans’ move to and from the stadium, hooligan activities are concentrated on pre-match confrontations. In the centre of Budapest, almost a hundred Ferencvárosi TC’s hooligans marched together with hooligans from Slask Wroclaw (and later also with Motor Lublin, Zalaegerszeg and Rapid Wien) looking for Slovan fans. That evening they also broke the glass on the Slovan club’s bus. After the event, they published photos of themselves posing with the banner “Where are you, bitches? Fuck Slovan!” and a video where they showed hatred towards Slavs and Slovakia (FB hooligans.cz, 2022a). However, most of the Slovan fans and hooligans (together with hooligans from Wisla Kraków and Ruch Chorzów) did not arrive in Budapest until a few hours before the match, when the Hungarian police already had it under control. According to information from both camps, a fight should have been arranged before the return match in Bratislava, but eventually they did not meet. Hooligans from Ferencvárosi TC, Rapid Vienna and allegedly also DAC

Dunajská Streda (according to sources from the Slovan ultras fans) sent a photo at a shopping center 20 km from Bratislava. Slovan hooligans, in turn, published photos from night events in the city centre, looking for Ferencvárosi TC fans. They also hung a banner with the text “Atilla the Hun was gay” on one of the access roads to Bratislava, trying to dishonour the national hero of Hungary. Both sides explained the situation in the same way, that the opponent was afraid of the confrontation and was only trying to gain success on social networks (FB hooligans.cz, 2022b; FB Ultras Slovan official, 2022c, FB hooligans.cz, 2022c). In this context, it should be noted that the agreed battles (so-called *ustavka*) usually take place in more remote places so they are not disturbed by the interventions of the police forces. Therefore, the marches of hooligans in Budapest or Bratislava are considered rather as a pre-match provocation or a demonstration of strength than a real interest in a confrontation.

With regards to security precautions of police during both matches it is worth mentioning the statement of hooligans from the USP hooligan group. They claimed that their most prominent members were being constantly monitored by the Slovak police, what had a negative impact on the possibility of any radical action (FB Ultras Slovan, 2022c). The police, describing the match as extremely risk, actually checked the marching Slovan hooligans in the city centre and confiscated the prohibited pyrotechnics. It indicates the systematic work of police forces before risk matches. They do not limit themselves only to ensuring order during the match (or shortly before and after it), but also adapt to changes in the tactics of hooligan groups that direct their activities outside the stadium. As already indicated, due to the preparedness of the police, there were no significant incidents shortly before or after the match. The events in Budapest and Bratislava were secured jointly by the policemen of both countries (TASR, 2022a), what points to the international cooperation of police forces during high-risk matches. Slovan fans travelled to Hungary by bus accompanied by Hungarian and Slovak police vehicles. In Budapest, they moved to the stadium on foot under strict security measures. On the other hand, the Hungarian fans in Bratislava were transferred from the train to prepared buses, which transported them directly to the stadium. Fans entered their own separated sector after a multi-step security check, which also includes the use of personal identification systems. This way, the organizers and the police could prevent both the possible confrontations between fans in the streets or various incidents in the stadium. According to our interviewee from the environment of hooligan groups, these measures prevent contact between hostile groups to such an extent that they make the stadium a “sterile environment”.

8. Political expressions of fans at the ŠK Slovan Bratislava – Ferencvárosi TC matches in 2022

Although the matches themselves took place without significant violent incidents, both sides did not avoid political expressions and national intolerance. These were subsequently punished by the UEFA organization. In the Hungarian sector, at the first match in Budapest, a banner with the text “Stolen land, stolen symbols, no history, fuck Slovakia” appeared. This banner,

together with anti-Slovak shouts, was considered by UEFA to be “racist behavior” and “provocative messages of an offensive nature” (UEFA, 2022a). Slovan Bratislava, whose fans chanted anti-Hungarian slogans and spread national intolerance (e.g., “*hungarian whores*”, “*bit the Hungarian in the head*”), were also punished (Mikloš, 2022).

Already before the rematch in Bratislava, UEFA banned the Slovan banner with the text “1848, 1920, 1992, 2022 – Our history, our victories” (FB Ultras Slovan, 2022d). The banner referred to historical and current football confrontations between Slovakia and Hungary, which also have certain impact on contemporary bilateral political relations. The number 1848 refers to the defeat of Hungary in 1848-1849 (the suppression of the Hungarian uprising by the Austrian monarchy), the number 1920 to Hungary’s loss of territory by the acceptance of the Treaty of Trianon in 1920. Years 1992 and 2022 respond to the football defeats of Ferencvárosi TC in the mutual confrontation with ŠK Slovan in 1992 and 2022.

Similar to the match in Budapest, UEFA punished both clubs even after the rematch in Bratislava. ŠK Slovan’s official website published the organization’s complaints towards the home fans. It objected to the hooligan flag from the Slovan’s friendly club Austria Vienna, which was inspired by the war flag of the Nazi regime during the Second World War. It also rejected the display of the “Totenkopf” symbol with the slogan “*Meine Ehre heisst treue*” used by the Nazi paramilitary organization SS (Schutzstaffel) during World War II (ŠK Slovan, 2022d). Ferencvárosi TC was fined for several violations of UEFA Disciplinary Regulations, e.g., acts of damage (broken seats), lighting of fireworks or throwing of objects, but also for the racist behaviour of its fans. UEFA considers incidents of racism seriously and therefore it ordered both clubs to close the stand where the die-hard fans gather and put up a banner reading “#NoToRacism” at the next European match. Both teams were also fined tens of thousands of euros (UEFA, 2022a, UEFA, 2022b).

However, the matches in 2022 did not have diplomatic consequences. It is related not only to stricter rules regarding political provocations in stadiums, but also to the political elites in both countries, who approached the incidents less emotionally. Even though in 2022 there were politically controversial statements and topics between the countries, such as the purchase of Slovak heritage-protected buildings and land in Slovakia or different countries’ attitudes towards the Russian-Ukrainian war, the matches between Budapest and Bratislava did not provoke significant reactions from politicians or media. The only reaction from a higher official came from the Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, Ivan Korčok, but he did it unofficially, only through his Facebook account. Using clear but diplomatic language, Korčok criticized the Ferencvárosi TC fans’ banner, which questioned the legitimacy and symbols of Slovakia: “*We are not going to bring any politics into this, because every sane individual will form their own opinion on it*”. “*I also believe that our Hungarian partners, with whom we are aiming for good mutual relations, did not have a good feeling when they saw these insulting slogans against Slovakia*” (TASR, 2022b). On the Hungarian side, Hungarian Prime Minister Victor Orbán only congratulated the Hungarian team on the victory, without directly mentioning ŠK Slovan or Slovakia.

In summary, both matches took place without violent incidents. However, despite the efforts of the organizers, the fans did not avoid expressions of racial and national intolerance. However,

the political representatives of both countries did not transfer the fans' national tension to political or diplomatic grounds, and the matches did not disrupt the current mostly constructive relations between Slovakia and Hungary.

9. Conclusion

Different perceptions and interpretations of the development and nature of Slovak-Hungarian relations burden mutual relations even today. However, it turns out that due to the influence of various factors, such as the entry of both countries into the EU and NATO, cross-border economic cooperation or a certain deviation of the far right from the topics of Slovak-Hungarian nationalist conflicts, the relations between the countries consolidated. While the far right began to prefer topics in which Slovaks and Hungarians have similar interests (e.g., anti-immigrant rhetoric, critical attitude towards the European Union), governments of both countries chose to see each other more as regional ally than a threat to their national interests. Except for marginal diplomatic disagreements, there are no serious interstate disputes that would lead Slovak-Hungarian relations to the tense atmosphere of the first half of the 1990s.

However, the relations between the political elites of Hungary and Slovakia may not reflect the atmosphere in society as was explained in methodological part of the study. A specific but useful way to identify the mood of population is the research of football fans as a target group. Although the higher level of nationalism or patriotism of this social group must be considered when drawing conclusions, research on football fans brings some knowledge not only about attitudes, but also about emotions and moods between members of both nations. The aim of the study was the analysis of two football matches between ŠK Slovan Bratislava and Ferencvárosi TC (Budapest) in 2022 from the perspective of spectators' political manifestations and behavior during the matches. It turns out that unlike the 1992 mutual matches, in 2022 there were no significant fan violence or more serious post-match diplomatic conflicts.

A deeper analysis indicates a better preparedness of the clubs and the police for the event. Their security measures minimized the possibility of fan clashes before, during and after matches, as well as hate speech between fans. An important role in this context is played by the UEFA organization, which not only takes preventive measures to eliminate racial and national intolerance, but also severely punishes any manifestations of it in stadiums. However, UEFA, despite its strong influence on the behaviour of clubs and fans in the stadium, does not have the capacity and competence to modify the persistent nationalist or even hateful attitudes of some fans. Although it is not clear whether the number of hostile fans has increased or decreased since the events of 1992, the matches between the national teams of both countries in 2019, as well as the analyzed matches between Slovan and Ferencvárosi TC in 2022, show that at least some fans maintain long-term mutual dislike or hostility. This study does not give a definitive answer what is the gap in perception of Hungarian-Slovak relations between fans and the public. We can only assume that higher level of nationalism among fans leads to more hostile expressions towards rival fans. However, based on our research we conclude that fans'

violent or hostile behaviour and expressions are immune to the development of interstate relations (e.g., moderation of political elites) or the measures of relevant football actors. This finding agrees with Jonathan Dean's statement about the difference between fans and political elites and offers for further research an issue of the relationship between football fans and (political) elites in relation to people's changing attitudes towards mainstream politicians and institutions.

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