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**The United States' Foreign and Security Policy
in East-central Europe between 2009–2019**

Ph.D. dissertation

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Introduction

The research on the security policy nexus of transatlantic relations has a rich international literature. Despite the differences, the U.S.-European relationship is often identified as a security community or one with shared values and interests, composing the core of the liberal international order built on values that are deemed universal. The United States is the founder, operator and defender of the liberal international order, thus the leader and hegemon of the Western alliance today.

With the end of the bipolar world, East-central Europe was awarded with the true opportunity of Euro-Atlantic integration, and although most countries in the region have already gone through some of the widened and deepened integration processes, they still bear signs of “otherness.” Due to their formal membership in the Western security community and frontier situation, East-central European countries face the internal and external pressures of the liberal international order at once, hence they are particularly worthy of attention by the hegemon maintaining the order – as it was already proven by two world wars and a Cold War.

The research issue, its actuality and relevance

Nowadays the liberal international order shows signs of crisis. In addition to the realist and critical theories, liberal scholars also see crisis, explained by the Trump Administration’s practice sometimes contradicting the values deemed universal. However, the structural problems of international order date back earlier and are closely linked to the hegemon’s behaviour and to the lack of cohesion between the order’s core and brim.

Michael W. Doyle, author of the democratic peace concept, already wrote in 1983 that the disproportionate increase in the military burden of the hegemon upholding the order and an economic fallback throughout the order may shake American society’s trust in the international order.¹ These were exactly the issues highlighted by Donald J. Trump as businessman in 1987 and as U.S. presidential candidate in 2016. As one of main scholars on the liberal international order, G. John Ikenberry wrote in 2009 that U.S. hegemony is no longer capable of underpinning the order. According to him, it is not the liberal nature of the order but U.S. hegemony that is in decline:² in 2011 he confirmed that there is a power shift

¹ DOYLE, Michael W.: Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs. *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, Vol.12. No.3. (Summer 1983), ISSN 0048-3915, p.233.

² IKENBERRY, G. John: Liberal Internationalism 3.0: America and the Dilemmas of Liberal World Order. *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol.7. No.1. (March 2009), ISSN 1537-5927, pp.78–80.

going on in the world though this does come with an open, rules-based order.³ In the wake of the decade Ikenberry was also writing about crisis albeit understood as a “crisis of success”, indicating the end of the Cold War as a watershed when the Western liberal order’s small and homogenous network gained new members bringing differing ideas and expectations in thus making multilateral cooperation more difficult. The order thereby became “less Western”, its members did not have a shared idea on past and future,⁴ while the conflict of the future is expected to be between those who urge the order’s renewal (the expansion of multilateral governance) and those who are less cooperative (thinking in spheres of influence).⁵

Today the challenges of the liberal international order and the U.S. efforts in addressing them directly relate to East-central Europe. The internal problems of the order affect our region’s countries more than those in Western Europe: experienced in East-central European matters, Daniel Fried⁶ wrote in the Summer of 2019 that while East-central Europe is equally penetrated by political uncertainties regarding the liberal order, the vulnerability of societies in the region is greater due to their historical burdens and ongoing transitions.⁷ External challenges also manifest themselves here first: the international power shifts compel the United States to deal with the political headway of potential rivals, re-entering into a competition for East-central European nations. Though basically a European issue, the crisis in Ukraine is a matter of U.S.-Russian geopolitical dispute, keeping Washington’s attention on the issue of NATO’s collective defense and on East-central Europe itself.

The relevance of the research issue comes from the intensive professional and public debate on the crisis of the liberal international order and on the answers to its internal and external challenges. Both the Obama and the Trump Administration’s foreign and security policy tried to find a solution to renew the United States’ weakening hegemony. The performance of both is highly debatable. The literature on the Obama Administration is rich but does not come to consensus on the theoretical classification of President Obama’s foreign and security policy. The most popular solution to the dilemma was offered by the use of the term “pragmatist” and the partial identification of realism, thereby giving impetus to views

³ IKENBERRY, G. John: The Future of the Liberal World Order. *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.90. No.3. (May/June 2011), ISSN 0015-7120, pp.67–68.

⁴ IKENBERRY, G. John: The end of liberal international order? *International Affairs*, Vol.94. No.1. (January 2018), ISSN 1468-2346, pp.9–10. and pp.18–21.

⁵ IKENBERRY, G. John: The Future of the Liberal World Order. p.63. and p.68.

⁶ U.S. career diplomat, former Ambassador to Warsaw (1997-2000) and assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs (2005-2009).

⁷ FRIED, Daniel, *et. al.*: *The United States and Central Europe: Tasks for a Second Century Together*. GLOBSEC and Atlantic Council, June 2019, ISBN 978-1-61977-591-6, pp.7–8.

such as President Obama was a “pragmatist”⁸, a „principled pragmatist”⁹, or using “realist language.”¹⁰ The thought of realism was suggested by Barack H. Obama himself as well, emphasizing his admiration of the late George H. W. Bush’s¹¹ realist mindset.¹² At times the realist characterization came from liberal authors, with partial agreement from conservatives¹³ and none from realists on its validity.¹⁴ Looking it from Walter Russell Mead’s typology on American foreign policy traditions, there is a more unified view that President Obama followed the Jeffersonian tradition,¹⁵ which however is closer to the liberal end of the scale, and Mead himself saw the competition of the liberal Jeffersonian and Wilsonian traditions within the Obama Administration.¹⁶

There are few Hungarian scholars offering comprehensive analysis on the Obama Administration’s foreign and security policy based on theories of international relations or Mead’s traditions. Yet the spread of pragmatist and realist terms is present here as well: according to Tamás Magyarics, President Obama’s foreign and security policy was “realist

⁸ SINGH, Robert: *Barack Obama’s Post-American Foreign Policy. The Limits of Engagement*. Bloomsbury Academic, New York, 2012, ISBN 978-1-78093-038-1, p.47. or CROSTON, Matthew D.: Hard Power in a Soft Package: The ‘True’ Conservatism of Obama Leadership in Foreign Policy. *Journal of Global Analysis*, Vol.3. No.1. (January 2012), ISSN 2041-1944, Online: <https://journalofglobalanalysis.com/jga-vol-3-no-1/> [September 24, 2019] p.12.

⁹ KUPCHAN, Charles & JENTLESON, Bruce: Obama’s strong suit. *The World Today*, Vol.68. No.8/9. (October/November 2012), ISSN 0043-9134, p.15.

¹⁰ GELB, Leslie H.: The Elusive Obama Doctrine. *The National Interest*, No.121. (September/October 2012), ISSN 0884-9382, p.19.

¹¹ OBAMA, Barack: *The Audacity of Hope. Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream*. Crown Publishers, New York, 2006, ISBN 978-0-307-23769-9, p.309.

¹² GOLDBERG, Jeffrey: The Obama Doctrine. *The Atlantic*, April 2016, ISSN 1072-7825, pp.73.

¹³ DUECK, Colin: *The Obama Doctrine: American Grand Strategy Today*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2015, ISBN 978-0-19-020262-0, or LIEBER, Robert J.: *Retreat and Its Consequences. American Foreign Policy and the Problem of World Order*. Cambridge University Press, New York, 2016, ISBN 978-1-316-50671-4, or DUECK, Colin: The Accommodator: Obama’s Foreign Policy. *Policy Review*, No.169. (October/November 2011), ISSN 0146-5945, pp.13–28. or NAU, Henry R.: Obama’s Foreign Policy. *Policy Review*, No.160. (April/May 2010), ISSN 0146-5945, p.29. or KAUFMAN, Robert G.: *Dangerous Doctrine. How Obama’s Grand Strategy Weakened America*. University Press of Kentucky, Lexington, 2016, ISBN 978-0-8131-6720-6, p.32. or FEITH, Douglas J. & CROUSEY, Seth: The Obama Doctrine Defined. *Commentary*, Vol.132. No.1. (July/August 2011), ISSN 0010-2601, p.16. or LASHNER, Kevin J. & RINEHART, Christine Sixta: The Shadowboxer: The Obama Administration and Foreign Policy Grand Strategy. *Politics & Policy*, Vol. 44. No.5. (October 2016), ISSN 1555-5623, pp.850–888.

¹⁴ WALT, Stephen M.: Obama Was Not a Realist President. *Foreign Policy*, April 7, 2016, Online: <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/04/07/obama-was-not-a-realist-president-jeffrey-goldberg-atlantic-obama-doctrine/> [April 17, 2018]

¹⁵ CLARKE, Michael & RICKETTS, Anthony: Shielding the Republic: Barack Obama and the Jeffersonian Tradition of American Foreign Policy. *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, Vol.28. No.3. (2017), ISSN 0959-2296, p.495. and p.495., and HOLLAND, Jack: Obama as Modern Jeffersonian. In: BENTLEY, Michelle & HOLLAND, Jack (eds.): *The Obama Doctrine: A Legacy of Continuity in US Foreign Policy?* Routledge, New York, 2017, ISBN 978-1-138-83122-3, Online: <http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/95843/3/03.CHAPT3%20Holland.pdf> [September 29, 2019] pp.40–53.

¹⁶ MEAD, Walter Russell: The Carter Syndrome. *Foreign Policy*, No.177. (January/February 2010), ISSN 0015-7228, p.64.

internationalist” that „gave up the liberal agenda” at least its proactive practice.¹⁷ Zoltán Peterecz called it „pragmatist-realist [...] which spiced as it is with American idealism, it is not utterly soaked with ideology,”¹⁸ while Gergely Varga viewed it to be „basically free from ideology, pragmatist, realist [...] paired with the fact that it lays increased emphasis on international consultations and cooperation.”¹⁹ A similarly nuanced view was held by István Balogh who deemed President Obama to be a „liberal realist”, as his foreign policy was built on pursuing national interests, complemented by the intention to spread liberal values.²⁰

In the case of the Trump Administration, the challenge stems from the President’s unconventional behaviour which can be regarded as his personal trademark too: this has led to the thought that Donald J. Trump is not only an “outsider” but a populist with empty promises. His foreign policy is characterized by “inconsistency” and as U.S. foreign policy falls under the President, Donald J. Trump’s persona is a re-occurring component in the Trump Doctrine’s definitions. Having difficulties appointing diplomats, the President was thought to be influenced by his close environment. Such interpretations compare him to a mad ruler surrounded by incompetent appointees and opportunists.²¹ Yet according to a more restrained and widely held view, the President does receive professional support: of “adults in the room”²² concept refers to John F. Kelly, H.R. McMaster, James N. Mattis and Rex W. Tillerson as well-prepared experts aiding Donald J. Trump thereby keeping the Administration operational. This however was disaffirmed by practice, as the experts have left the Administration. Believers of a consistent Trump Doctrine also hold differing views. Due to his business background, some hold the President’s policy “transactionalist”²³, meaning that instead of established customs he rather goes by new deals, keeping only the end result in sight. According to Jeffrey Goldberg, however, the Trump Doctrine is merely the denial of the Obama Doctrine²⁴ which is understandable in light of the hitherto performance of the Trump campaign and presidency.

¹⁷ MAGYARICS, Tamás: „Don’t Do Stupid Stuff” Barack Obama realista internacionalista külpolitikája. *Külgügyi Szemle*, 2017. ISSN 2060-4904, pp.5–6.

¹⁸ PETERECZ, Zoltán: A fantom Obama-doktrína – Az amerikai külpolitikai doktrínák hosszú múltja és kérdéses jövője. *Külgügyi Szemle*, 13. évf. 3.sz. (Fall 2014), ISSN 2060-4904, p.104.

¹⁹ VARGA, Gergely: Obama európai körútja. *Nemzet és biztonság*, 2009/4. (May 2009), ISSN 1789-5286, p.4.

²⁰ BALOGH, István: Változás az amerikai külpolitika filozófiájában és gyakorlatában? *MKI-tanulmányok*, June 26, 2012. ISSN 2060-5013, pp.3–5. and p.9.

²¹ EVANS, Richard: The Madness of King Donald. *Foreign Policy*, June 13, 2017, Online: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/06/13/the-madness-of-king-donald/> [June 17, 2018]

²² MANN, James. The Adults in the Room. *The New York Review of Books*, October, 2012, Online: <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2017/10/26/trump-adult-supervision/> [June 17, 2018]

²³ HADAR, Leon: The Limits of Trump’s Transactional Foreign Policy. *National Interest*, January 2, 2017, Online: <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/the-limits-trumps-transactional-foreign-policy-18898> [June 17, 2018]

²⁴ GOLDBERG, Jeffrey: A Senior White House Official Defines the Trump Doctrine: ‘We’re America, Bitch!’. *The Atlantic*, June 11, 2018, Online: <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/06/a-senior-white-house-official-defines-the-trump-doctrine-were-america-bitch/562511/> [September 17, 2018]

Reviewing and understanding the last decade's U.S. foreign and security policy is particularly important from an East-central European viewpoint, as the reception of Barack H. Obama and Donald J. Trump in the region differed. The 2008 Obama mania was mainly confined to Western Europe where even in 2016 President Obama's popularity was higher than in the Republic of Poland or Hungary²⁵ where President Trump was regarded better than overall in Western Europe,²⁶ a difference which is still present in 2020.²⁷ Daniel Fried reminded in 2019 that the East-central European mindset is different from that of Western Europe, being more conservative regarding social values, more defensive of national sovereignty, and often looking at national values in conservative light. According to Fried, so far the United States has failed to fully understand East-central Europe's security sensitivities, and Washington should firstly make itself aware of this and correct course.²⁸ The literature on the relationship between the United States and East-central Europe in this regard is relatively scarce, as it mostly deals with the chronological review of relations. Currently, there is no extensive analysis in Hungarian examining the Obama/Trump Administration's foreign and security policy affecting East-central Europe in light of theories.

Aims of the research

The aims of the author's research are the following:

- 1) Reviewing the liberal and conservative variants of internationalism within the system of international theories, relying on the main international literature dealing with the theoretical understandings of U.S. foreign policy.
- 2) Identifying the main views within the scholarly debate on the theoretical classification of the Obama and Trump Administration's foreign and security policy between 2009 and 2019 through the review of the relevant international and Hungarian literature.

²⁵ WIKE, Richard *et. al.*: As Obama Years Draw to Close, President and U.S. Seen Favorably in Europe and Asia. *Pew Research Center*, June 29, 2016, Online: <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2016/06/Pew-Research-Center-Balance-of-Power-Report-FINAL-June-29-2016.pdf> [October 30, 2019], pp.23–24.

²⁶ WIKE, Richard *et. al.*: Trump's International Ratings Remain Low, Especially Among Key Allies. *Pew Research Center*, October 1, 2018, Online: <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2018/10/Pew-Research-Center-U-S-Image-Report-UPDATED-2018-10-01.pdf> [October 30, 2019], p.32.

²⁷ WIKE, Richard *et. al.*: Trump Ratings Remain Low Around Globe, While Views of U.S. Stay Mostly Favorable. *Pew Research Center*, January 8, 2020, Online: https://www.pewresearch.org/global/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/01/PG_2020.01.08_US-Image_FINAL.pdf [January 20, 2020], p.14.

²⁸ FRIED, Daniel, *et. al.*: *The United States and Central Europe: Tasks for a Second Century Together*. p.8 and p.10.

- 3) Revealing the main international developments in political and military security within the the security relationship of the United States and East-central Europe during the research period.
- 4) Assessing the American and East-central European understandings of these international developments, relying on the relevant primary sources (national security strategies and government declarations) published throughout the research period as well as secondary sources (views of experts).
- 5) Positioning the United States' foreign and security policy (particularly regarding East-central Europe) of the research period on internationalism's liberal-conservative axis within the theories of international relations.

Hypothesis

The main hypothesis and the subsequent operational (testable) hypotheses are the following.

The security relationship of the United States and East-central Europe between 2009 and 2019 followed the line of the political (liberal and conservative) variants of Washington's internationalism, defining the U.S. response to the liberal international order's internal and external challenges as well as its East-central European reception.

The dissertation interprets the political and security relations between the United States and East-central Europe through the theory of liberal/conservative internationalism in American foreign policy, pairing them with the foreign and security policy of the Obama/Trump Administration. The author assumed that due to the differing relation of these types of internationalism to the operation of the liberal order, geopolitics and great power competition, their East-central European reception also differs. The following operational (i.e. actually testable) hypotheses stem from the main hypothesis:

1) The Obama Administration's strategy followed internationalism's liberal branch.

The author assumed that the Obama Administration's foreign and security policy followed the logic of liberal internationalism. To support this, the dissertation undertook the task of taxative presentation of liberal characteristics, highlighting: (1) the optimistic view regarding the liberal international order's future; (2) the idea of global challenges and community; (3) the desire for cooperation aimed at absolute gains instead of power competition; (4) the

intention for strengthening multilateralism and international institutions; (5) the urge to spread democracy with liberal methods, and (6) the restraint from using military force.

2) The Trump Administration's strategy followed internationalism's conservative branch.

The author assumed that during the research period the Trump Administration's foreign and security policy (debated in international literature), followed the logic of conservative internationalism. To support this, the dissertation undertook the task of taxative presentation of conservative characteristics, highlighting: (1) the unsure view regarding the liberal international order; (2) the emphasis on power competition; (3) the intention for reaching relative gains on the frontiers of the liberal international order; (4) lack of desire for universal democracy-export; (5) the defense of the nationstate's sovereignty and the critical stance towards international institutions, and (6) the increased role of military force in the pursuit of interests.

3) The liberal/conservative internationalism of U.S. foreign policy was traceable in the politization of relations within the Western order, which was well represented by the deterioration/improvement of political relations between the Obama/Trump Administration and the East-central European countries.

The author assumed that in the Obama/Trump Administration's foreign policy the relationship with East-central European countries have fallen under political effects, i.e. the East-central European reception of Washington's stance was determined by the parties' liberal/conservative political orientation. To support this, the dissertation reviewed: (1) the development of Washington's political attention to East-central European countries; (2) the liberal/conservative nature of Washington's initiatives to strengthen the liberal international order involving East-central Europeans, and (3) the differing, ideology-based transatlantic interpretations of East-central European (mainly Hungarian and Polish) internal and external challenges.

4) The geopolitical neglect/appreciation of the Western order's frontier in U.S. security policy is in line with the liberal/conservative variants of internationalism, which was well represented with regard to East-central Europe during the Obama/Trump Administration, generating weaker/stronger transatlantic defense cooperation.

The author assumed that in the Obama/Trump Administration's foreign policy the development of Washington's strategic attention to and military presence in East-central Europe was determined by Washington's liberal/conservative view of power competition and use of hard power. To represent this, the dissertation reviewed: (1) the transatlantic interpretations of the United States' role in the European security system, and; (2) the changes in U.S. military presence and defense cooperation in East-central Europe.

Applied research methodology

Since the research is theoretical in nature, the theories of international relations play a defining role in it. The author relied on the liberal/conservative variants of internationalism, as both set faith in the liberal international order and differ only in their methods. Through the liberal/conservative variants of internationalism objective system-level and subjective state decision-making analysis was available alike: the dissertation applied the two variants to review American foreign policy while assessing their East-central European reception as well, considering the given government's liberal/conservative foreign policy mindset. The dissertation primarily followed Henry R. Nau's goal-toolset matrix of American foreign policy traditions.

The dissertation aligned to Oskar Halecki's term of "East-central Europe" because it was specifically meant to reveal the geopolitical hardships of the West's frontier. Authors of the regional security complex Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver followed a similar logic in outlining the region: according to them, East-central Europe can be positioned around a Western European core showing Western security agenda toned by uniquely East-central European traits.²⁹ In Hungarian literature, Péter Tálás also followed Halecki's outline.³⁰ The dissertation only takes liberty by highlighting the military and political sectors of security, as these compose the main dimensions of security studies research, and narrows the examination of "East-central Europe" to the Visegrád states due to the practical reason of length.

The dissertation applies the decision-making and comparative approach of foreign policy analysis: on the one hand, it interprets the U.S. administration's foreign and security policy rhetoric and practice through the prism of liberal and conservative internationalism, on the other hand it evaluates their decisions from the viewpoint of East-central European countries. The author takes notice of the following characteristics of international relations research: firstly although the descriptive analysis of events cannot aim for the precision of forecasts in natural sciences, it can attempt to interpret the cause-effect relationships, and secondly, although it strives for scientific objectivity in its observations, it does not exclude the possibility of stating normative viewpoints.³¹

²⁹ BUZAN, Barry & WÆVER, Ole: *Regions and Powers. The Structure of International Security*. Cambridge University Press, New York, 2003, ISBN 978-0-521-81412-6, p.343., p.353. and pp.365–367.

³⁰ TÁLAS, Péter & HÁDA, Béla (szerk.): *Regionális biztonsági tanulmányok*. Nemzeti Közszolgálati Egyetem, 2014, ISBN 978-615-5491-38-2, p.57.

³¹ EGEDY, Gergely: *Bevezetés a nemzetközi kapcsolatok elméletébe*. HVG-ORAC Lap- és Könyvkiadó Kft., Budapest, 2011, ISBN 978-963-258-136-1, pp.56–57.

As its first step, the dissertation presents the basic theoretical problem and at the same time determines the theoretical framework of research in detail. In reviewing the liberal and conservative variants of internationalism in U.S. foreign policy, as well as the role of hegemon and frontier in the case of the United States and East-central Europe respectively, the dissertation relies on the relevant literature in international relations theory and the main publications by historians with a focus related to the subject.

Secondly, the dissertation collects and processes the publicly available primary and secondary sources dealing with political and security relationship between the United States and East-central Europe. The examination during the collection and procession of data relies on qualitative-analytical methods: on the one hand, it overviews the United States' and the East-central European countries' foreign and security policy strategies, main governmental documents and statements (speeches by presidents, heads of government and ministers) issued during the research period, as well as the non-official statements by key government officials. On the other hand, it analyzes and compares the various primary sources, and through their interpretation it reconstructs the governments' foreign and security policies in light of framework theories. Subsequently, it collects, organizes and processes the relevant secondary sources, i.e. the specific and general publications dealing with the research topic (analyses and reports of research institutes, periodicals and news articles), underpinning its observations.

Thirdly, the dissertation compares the U.S. administrations' foreign and security policy statements and measures during the research period, especially their East-central European reception, relying on the qualitative-analytical method mentioned above, and lastly, it draws its conclusions regarding the hypotheses.

Research results

1. Basic theoretical problem and framework

In Chapter 2 the author reviewed the literature on liberal internationalism and found that today's international order operates along the Kantian triangle, though liberal theorists say it shows signs of crisis highlighted by internal political-social and external power pressures. The United States has an important role in operating the system as a hegemon, hence the author reviewed the international literature on American foreign policy traditions. As a result, the author identified the main lines of U.S. foreign policy along Mead's traditions and Nau's goal-toolset matrix with the characteristics of liberal/conservative internationalism.

According to the literature outlining East-central Europe, the region can be characterized by otherness and provisionality in geographical, historical and socio-political aspect alike.

The desire to be part of the West is a re-occurring idea in East-central Europe hindered internally by political and social backwardness and Kundera's tragedy of having differing set of values than the West, while Halecki's role of the West's frontier keeps the region under external power pressure. The author showed the geopolitical schools dealing with the region, which is set into the role of a crush-zone by the Anglo-Saxon and Russian views alike.

The author reviewed the position of East-central Europe in U.S. foreign policy, as well as the reasons and types of atlanticisms in the region. Politically speaking, East-central Europe tends to lean toward Washington, although according to Charles Gati, even for Washington it was a "forgotten region" viewed only in the context of U.S.-Russian relations. Due to the varying security perceptions, atlanticism in the region is not unified: from the Visegrád states, Warsaw's atlanticism is strong whereas that of the others is instinctive and tied to conditions. The "Old and New Europe" divide following the turn of the millennium set East-central Europeans in a distinctive position but was not sustainable, while NATO and EU enlargements led East-central Europe in Gati's words to a "check mark syndrome."

2. East-central Europe and the Obama Administration's strategy

In Chapter 3 the author evaluated President Obama's foreign policy with a taxative identification of its liberal traits. The Obama Administration was aware of the international power shifts yet its foreign policy was characterized by the optimist view of absolute gains. It believed that the main transnational challenges are global in nature and thus it was in everyone's interest to collectively address them, and that the other major actors would play a constructive role on the multilateral fora. President Obama followed a liberal, modern Jeffersonian foreign policy which meant the application of "smart power" or rather the utilization of soft power and the restraint from using force. As "leading from behind" in Libya and the "red line" in Syria showed, President Obama was only willing to apply military force with the approval of international law or reliable political legitimacy in hand.

The Obama Administration set global challenges in the forefront of transatlantic relations, offering a renewed partnership for Europe meaning an increased role and greater responsibility alike. East-central European allies faced a similar situation after President Obama modified the missile defense plans in Czechia and the Republic of Poland. The U.S. attitude was described by "benign neglect": Washington set aside the "Old and New Europe" divide and saw equal members of NATO in East-central European allies, expecting their participation in global challenges just like that of Western European partners.

In addition to President Obama's initiative to "reset" U.S.-Russian relations, NATO's new Strategic Concept regarded the Russian Federation a strategic partner. While condemning the idea that the "Near Abroad" is a Russian sphere of influence, Washington did not think in terms of geopolitical competition and zero-sum games and yet was sensitive to the prevalence of liberal values. The crisis in Ukraine brought a geopolitical opposition in which the Obama Administration was concerned about factors that were not realist (international power) but liberal (domestic governance).

3. East-central Europe in the Obama Administrations's foreign policy

In Chapter 4 the author examined the Obama Administration's foreign policy concerning transatlantic relations which displayed traits of liberal internationalism. The President's liberal foreign policy provided the basis for Western Europe's Obamania albeit disproportionate transatlantic defense burden sharing was still an issue. The Visegrád states urged the maintenance of a strong transatlantic security bond, however, most of them expected the fallback in U.S. attention towards Europe due to international power shifts. Even Warsaw highlighted the relevance of having a more enhanced European foreign policy which was a sign of weakening atlanticism among conservative American analysts.

The Obama Administration supported the strengthening of the Eastern Partnership advocated by the V4, as the program advances a "Europe whole" through liberal internationalist themes (democratic values and soft power), moreover, through greater European engagement. Washington tried to involve the East-central European allies into democratic transition enterprises: these countries have had experiences the sharing of which could help post-Soviet nations and the countries going through the 2011 Arab Spring in their efforts for democratic transition. The V4 were apt to the U.S. proposal as indicated by government-supported institutes, agencies and programs. Nevertheless, they were sharing President Obama's optimism less in the case for North African societies' democratic transition.

Washington's liberal internationalism caused diplomatic problems in East-central Europe. While it focused less on the region in geopolitical sense, it showed increasing interest in countries' domestic political processes which led to political-ideological disputes. It was felt that democratic peace is indeed only possible among liberal democracies: the U.S.-Hungarian disputes for example not only aggravated bilateral relations in an unprecedented way but dominated them as well. Meanwhile, in addition to official diplomatic channels, the Obama

Administration described the state of democracy and civil society in East-central Europe harshly within the public space.

4. East-central Europe in the Obama Administration's security policy

In Chapter 5 the author identified the U.S. decisions regarding military presence in East-central Europe between 2009 and 2016 as well as the U.S. reactions to relevant international political developments. In addition to the Obama Administration's "pivot/rebalance" to Asia policy, the change in the United States' global military footprint was determined by the scarcity of resources. The Pentagon planned to pull 12,500 troops out of Europe between 2012 and 2014 and give more emphasis to rotations advancing the allies' efforts for developing capabilities and interoperability. The Obama Administration did not intend to introduce a meaningful increase of U.S. military presence in East-central Europe.

The United States' defense relations with V4 countries continued earlier tendencies: while Budapest and Bratislava showed limited intention of advancing exercises and defense procurement, Prague and Warsaw were more active. The latter urged an enhanced U.S. military presence in East-central Europe: the permanent deployment of U.S. troops to Polish soil was achieved in 2012, though this meant only 10 U.S. personnel at the Łask Air Base. The missile shield components represented a more substantial form of permanent military presence, though Washington was guided by financial and technological considerations in this regard as well. The missile defense changes announced by President Obama in the fall of 2009 served this purpose, whereas for the Polish leadership the shield was more about Russian threat.

Washington started to take Russian threat more seriously with the crisis in Ukraine. Barack H. Obama was talking about a "competition of ideas", Anders Fogh Rasmussen about a "wake-up call" and Philip M. Breedlove about a "new paradigm", referring to the adherence to the principles of the liberal international order, the decrease in NATO members' defense budgets and the status of post-bipolar security respectively. Washington opted for a more dense rotation of forces leading to a persistent presence with joint exercises, trainings and developments financed through the European Reassurance Initiative. The alliance increased its activity via the NATO Response Force, the Readiness Action Plan and the allies' pledge to reverse course from decreasing defense spending. The measures approved at the 2014 Wales Summit turned into deterrence at the 2016 Warsaw Summit, increasing the number and mobility of allied troops. Thus East-central Europe's geopolitical problem resurfaced.

5. East-central Europe and the Trump Administration's strategy

In Chapter 6 the author evaluated President Trump's foreign policy with a taxative identification of conservative internationalist traits. Instead of fora of cooperation and joint global challenges, the 2017 U.S. national security strategy sees a global arena and competition with revisionist power. Donald J. Trump also intended to focus on domestic nationbuilding, though rather following a nationalist-populist Jacksonian line. The intention of defending national sovereignty is a constant theme in his thinking and is supposed to achieve the fine-tuning of the international order. In contrast to the accusation of isolationism, the President pursues an active foreign policy: armed forces play a distinctive role in his diplomacy, hence the will to utilize (and to finance) them also increased.

According to the Trump Administration's Europe strategy, the liberal international order is under internal and external pressures thus the United States and Europe need to pull together against the revisionist powers. The 2018 U.S. national defense strategy states that great power competition poses the number one challenge to the United States. Despite the intention of enhancing the Western alliance, it is rather transatlantic quarrels that tend to surface under the Trump Administration, although these are not new problems. Similarly to the Bush-era, comparing the U.S. national security strategy to the EU global strategy brings the differences between conservative and liberal internationalist thinking to light.

Meanwhile, U.S.-Russian relations show signs of an arms race aimed at deterrence as reflected by gloomy prospects of arms control agreements, U.S. nuclear strategy and the will to arm allies. The latter, along conservative internationalism, focuses on the West's frontiers, including East-central Europe playing an accentuated role in Washington's Europe strategy.

6. East-central Europe in the Trump Administration's foreign policy

In Chapter 7 the author examined the Trump Administration's foreign policy regarding transatlantic relations showing a conservative U.S. stance. Ambassadors to Europe expressed conservative messages. In contrast to Western Europe, East-central Europe was free from serious diplomatic quarrels, showing improvement after the Obama Administration. The V4 and overall the East-central European countries received special attention most visibly reflected by bilateral meetings with the U.S. President: in 2019 all V4 heads of government visited the White House, which was not even the first time for heads of state from countries of U.S. strategic importance. The meetings were urged by U.S. attention to East-central Europe and boosted by conservative political concordance.

One of Donald J. Trump's most controversial statements was NATO being obsolete and U.S. support for collective defense being conditional, yet in open diplomacy the V4 took over the President's logic suggesting that it is actions not words that matter in judging his performance. In parallel to President Trump's critique of transatlantic burden sharing, the Administration supported initiatives advancing collective defense and deterrence. The V4 could even be pleased for U.S. remarks on certain problematic issues: for example, the German-Russian project of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline bothers East-central Europeans in part due to their own energy and economic security and in part due to the political double standards when it comes to sanctioning Russian economic actors.

As a separate gesture, the basis of President Trump's Europe strategy was announced in the form of a speech in Warsaw. The event reflected political-ideological divide in Europe: the V4 countries are more keen to preserve the Judeo-Christian values of the West and open to the idea of existential civilisational threat coming from the East. The latter referred to the 2015 migration crisis where the V4 argument, echoing Oskar Halecki's thought of the frontier defending Western civilization, was valid under the Trump Administration. Meanwhile, the Trump Administration's new approach was felt in democracy issues as well: due to geopolitical considerations, Washington became more lenient towards Budapest and Warsaw, judging the lack of U.S. attention and the political criticisms of previous years inappropriate and counterproductive respectively. Following the logic of conservative internationalism, the Trump Administration prioritized issues important for U.S. security and in certain cases was more permissive towards Budapest and Warsaw whom it did not criticize via public channels.

7. East-central Europe in the Trump Administration's security policy

In Chapter 8 the author explained that developers of the Trump Administration's foreign and security policy did not only believe in the durability of geopolitics and power competition but in the importance of East-central Europe and local allies as well, echoing the Anglo-Saxon geopolitical school's thesis on the frontiers. Setting the East-central European countries in the forefront raised the idea that Washington does not look at Europe that is in union: there is a pessimistic view regarding the coherence of European strategic culture among U.S. conservative foreign policy experts who would rather address security challenges through cooperation with nationstates. The V4 countries share the U.S. view that there is a geopolitical competition going on in the world: although the risk of conflict coming from competition had been raised from Hungarian and Slovak side, both were pleased that Washington grants strategic attention to East-central Europe.

The Trump Administration not only continued but enhanced U.S. deterrence initiatives against a possible Russian aggression. Though having a negative echo in the press, the 2018 NATO summit was successful in its achievements, as the allies approved further decisions to advance deterrence and military mobilization. The latter reflected the main direction of U.S. efforts through the European Deterrence Initiative: Washington renewed its defense cooperation agreements with the V4 countries whose interest in the procurement of U.S. defense articles increased. Warsaw was leading the purchase of arms, however, its 2018 renewed proposal for a permanent U.S. military base on Polish soil continued to be rejected by Washington (albeit the number of U.S. rotation increased by 1,000 troops). While the Trump Administration displayed continuity with its predecessor's policy regarding the military presence in East-central Europe, the U.S.-Russian arms race, especially in a wider geopolitical context, has led to the mutual neglect of treaties underpinning European security.

8. Conclusions

The results of testing the operative hypotheses stemming from the main hypotheses were the following. In addition to the taxative identification of liberal and conservative internationalist traits in U.S. foreign and security policy between 2009 and 2019, the author proved that the Obama Administration's strategy between 2009 and 2016 followed the branch of liberal internationalism whereas that of the Trump Administration between 2017 and 2019 followed the branch of conservative internationalism. Through the taxative display of liberal/conservative variants of internationalism during the research period, the first and second operational hypothesis was affirmed.

The author evaluated the United States' political attention towards East-central European countries between 2009 and 2019, identified and evaluated U.S. foreign policy initiatives aimed at strengthening the liberal international order while involving East-central European countries, along with the ideological transatlantic interpretations of East-central European (mainly Hungarian and Polish) internal and external challenges. The author proved that during the research period the liberal/conservative nature of the Obama/Trump Administration's internationalism was visible, as well as their differing reception in East-central Europe, and was reflected by the deterioration/improvement of Washington's political relations with East-central European countries.

The author identified and evaluated the overall transatlantic interpretations of the United States' role in the European security system between 2009 and 2019, along with the U.S. military presence and defense cooperation in East-central European countries. The author

proved that during the research period the liberal/conservative traits of internationalism were visible in U.S. security policy regarding East-central Europe under the Obama/Trump Administrations, as well as their differing East-central European reception as indicated by the deterioration/improvement of Washington's political relationship with East-central European countries. Through the confirmation of these operative hypotheses the basic hypothesis was confirmed as well.

New scientific results

The dissertation provides scientific results for the relevant Hungarian literature firstly via the interpretation of U.S. foreign and security policy between 2009 and 2019 within theoretical frameworks.

- 1) The author is the first to compare the foreign and security policy practices of the Obama and Trump Administrations between 2009 and 2019 based on solid theoretical grounds.
- 2) The author proved that the Obama Administration's foreign policy followed the logic of liberal internationalism – a position scantily discussed in Hungarian literature.
- 3) The author proved that the Obama Administration pursued a foreign and security policy towards East-central Europe between 2009 and 2016 that was taxatively following the logic of liberal internationalism.
- 4) The author is the first to introduce the concept of conservative internationalism into Hungarian literature, thereby enriching the discourse on the Trump Administration's foreign policy in Hungarian literature.
- 5) The author proved that the Trump Administration pursued a foreign and security policy towards East-central Europe between 2017 and 2019 that was taxatively following the logic of conservative internationalism
- 6) The author proved that between 2009 and 2019 East-central Europe could continued to be characterized as “the West's frontier”, confirming the timeliness of Anglo-Saxon and Russian geopolitical thinking regarding East-central Europe.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions of the dissertation, in the period characterized by the liberal international order's crisis and the return of geopolitical competition, the following issues' examination along U.S. foreign policy theories and traditions are recommended:

- 1) In case of the success/failure of U.S. initiatives to renew the liberal international order, what kind of operational principle would the Western transatlantic community understood as the order's core follow?
- 2) Will the liberal international institutions and multilateral fora continue to provide a unified structure for U.S.-European cooperation, or are we heading towards a cooperation built on the conservative bilateral cooperations and imperial-like structures?
- 3) Is the identification and management of liberal international order's internal and external challenges only possible in case of transatlantic concord? Should we expect change in transatlantic relations if liberal foreign policies re-occur on East-central European and/or American side?

Practical use of the research results

The research and scientific results can help with orientation points for those who would like to understand the foreign and security policies of the United States and East-central European countries in the post-Cold War world and today:

- 1) The liberal/conservative internationalist interpretation of U.S. foreign policy offers a possibility to draw a thorough picture of the United States' relationship with other countries that is in line with the domestic sources of foreign policy decision making, i.e. the liberal/conservative nature of political forces inside the government.
- 2) Conservative internationalism's contribution as a theoretical support in understanding may be particularly useful in the case of the Trump Administration, as it goes beyond the popular and over-simplifying explanations, and offers a framework for coherent thinking.
- 3) Through the overview of East-central European historical and geopolitical characteristics, the dissertation can be useful for those in education and/or research who would like to receive a thorough view of the reasons and possible consequences of East-central Europe's position within the liberal international order.

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The author's bio

Gábor Csizmazia was born in Szombathely on February 25, 1987. He pursued his university studies at the University of West Hungary where he graduated in International Studies in 2010. He began his Ph.D. studies in the Doctoral School of Military Sciences at the National University of Public Service in 2012 with his research topic being U.S. foreign policy, transatlantic relations, and the United States security relationship with East-central Europe in particular. Hence his Ph.D. dissertation deals with the latter topic.

He has been an assistant lecturer at the National University of Public Service since 2014 teaching and providing consultations in Security Studies, International Relations Theories, U.S. Foreign and Security Policy and American Foreign Policy & Transatlantic Relations. In addition to education, he also participated in the administrative support of the university: he co-organized the European Security and Defence College cyber security course (2015, 2017) and regularly welcomed foreign including American delegations as an international desk officer.

In accordance with his education and research profile, he has participated in relevant Hungarian and international programs: he spent an internship at the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies (2014), participated in the Marshall Center's security seminar on the security challenges of NATO's Eastern Flank (2016), and in the Marshall Center Scholars Program (2018). He pursued part of his research at the George Washington University (2018) in the United States of America as a guest researcher.

His publications in Hungarian and English primarily deal with the United States' foreign and security policy directly related to East-central Europe. He regularly holds lectures in summer universities, conferences and workshops, and offers expert's view in media.