

ATHENA

FOREIGN POLICY SPEECH

MSc Course

"The EU and the Post-Soviet Space"

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Actor, former Minister of
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Foreign Policy Speech
The EU and the Post-Soviet Space
Dr. Olga Burlyuk
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Situation

It is 2027, two months after the parliamentary elections in Slovakia. It was won by the Smer-SD party and Robert Fico became Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic for the fifth time. The last few years have been very turbulent - Russia won the war against Ukraine and, with the help of Iranian, Chinese and North Korean troops and their economic assistance, they also managed to conquer Moldova and the Baltic States. There is currently a war going on in Poland - and it is already January 2025, when the first bomb fell on Polish territory.

Fico's pro-Russian government justified capitulation to Putin as a way of 'keeping the peace', which provoked a swift but polarized public reaction. Slovakia remains deeply divided, fed by widespread Russian disinformation that serious media find difficult to counter.

Protests in response to Fico's statement are currently taking place across multiple regions of Slovakia. Milan Kňažko, a well-known Slovak actor, politician, former Minister of Culture, and former candidate for the Slovak presidency, is speaking at one of the protests. He was also one of the most prominent figures in 1989, actively protesting and leading the "Public Against Violence" movement. His speech aims to unite citizens, remind them of their values and encourage them not to give up.

NB: *I am also addressing two years. The first is 1968, when Warsaw Pact troops entered what was then Czechoslovakia. The second year is November 17th, 1989, which is a very important day for Czechs and Slovaks because it was the beginning of the Velvet Revolution. Students, actors, and artists, followed by other groups of society, began protesting against the communist regime at the time. Large strikes caused the resignation of the communist federal government.*

Dear people of Slovakia,

I stand before you today, not as a politician or an actor, but as a fellow citizen—one of you. It was here, in this square, that we stood together in 1989. We shook our keys, lit our candles, and demanded freedom. And together, we won.

But today, the shadow of tyranny looms once again, and I must ask: have we forgotten what we fought for?

Russia occupies Ukraine. Moldova has fallen. The Baltic States are under siege, and Poland has been fighting since January 2025. These nations are fighting for their freedom, their democracy, their future. And yet, our government has decided to capitulate. Without a fight, without protest, they are ready to hand over our country.

Most of you probably do not remember the year 1968. But I do remember those days very well. Back then, under the guise of "defending the state," our leaders invited Russian troops onto our soil. What followed was not protection—it was occupation. For twenty long years, we lived under oppression, fear, and stolen dreams. Once tyranny enters, it does not leave willingly. Do we want to repeat that mistake? Do we want to return to that darkness?

I have seen what happens in such darkness. In those days, my father was a political prisoner. He shared a cell with fellow prisoner, who once said that "people are like a flock of rams." But I say to you today: we must not remain a herd. Every one of us must know our rights and stand together to defend them. I say, freedom is like air—natural, necessary, life-giving. But what is freedom if we let it slip through our fingers?¹

[Light a candle and hold it high]

Let me light this candle, as it represents hope. It is the same light we carried in 1989, a light that burned away decades of darkness. Tonight, I ask you to light this candle with me. Let its flame remind us that even the smallest light can pierce the deepest darkness.

[Pause for a moment]

That light has guided us through moments of silence and strength. In 1968, we were silenced by force. In 1989, we found our voice. And now, in 2027, it is up to us to ensure that voice is not silenced again.

Look around you. See how our light grows as we stand together. This is who we are—Slovaks who refuse to surrender. Thirty-five years ago, in this very square, we proved that even the impossible could be achieved. Hundreds of thousands of us stood together for our rights, our dreams, and our future—and we won.

Today, we still have the chance to act, to resist, to stop the descent into darkness. Don't let fear paralyze you or division weaken you. Together, we can protect what so many fought and sacrificed for.

[Holds up keys, jingling them softly.]

And just as the candle represents hope, these keys represent defiance. Thirty-seven years ago, we shook them, and their sound echoed across Europe, declaring that we would be silent no more.

Now, I ask you: raise your keys with me. Shake them! Let their sound carry through this city and ring out to Moscow. Let them hear that Slovakia remembers!

[Pause as the sound of keys builds, then gesture for the crowd to stop.]

This ringing of keys is the sound of a people who refuse to live in fear. A people who refuses to surrender. Together, we will stand against tyranny. Together, we will protect our freedom.

Thank you.

References:

¹Sloboda a Solidarita. *Nežná SaS: Milan Kňažko spomína na 17. november 1989*. YouTube video, Posted November 21, 2012.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NIYZXYJj6q0&t=980s>.