

Dissertation topics for study admissions 3rd degree in Faculty of International Relations of the Bratislava University of Economics and Business for the academic year 2026/2027

Title:

The Middle-Income Trap in Central and Eastern Europe: The Role of Structural Transformation and Foreign Direct Investment

Supervisor:

prof. Ing. Martin GREŠŠ, PhD.

Annotation:

The dissertation focuses on the middle-income trap phenomenon in Central and Eastern European countries, with particular attention to post-socialist economies. The aim is to examine the extent to which structural transformation processes and foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows have influenced these countries' capacity for long-term economic convergence with advanced EU economies. The research integrates theoretical frameworks of the middle-income trap with advanced quantitative empirical analysis of key growth determinants. Special emphasis is placed on the historical context of transition, sectoral shifts, and the qualitative aspects of investment. The dissertation contributes to existing literature by offering a region-specific perspective and deriving policy implications for the region.

Thesis objective:

The main aim of the dissertation is to identify and analyze the determinants contributing to the middle-income trap risk in Central and Eastern Europe. The thesis specifically focuses on assessing the role of structural transformation and foreign direct investment in long-term convergence dynamics and evaluating the sustainability of the current growth model.

Title:

Science Diplomacy as a Tool for Countries' Economic Growth

Supervisor:

doc. Mgr. Boris MATTOŠ, PhD.

Annotation:

Science diplomacy, as a new phenomenon combining science, technology, and diplomacy to address global challenges, can significantly contribute to the economic growth of countries. States with a well-developed scientific and technological base and an effective science diplomacy framework have been able to substantially strengthen their economic performance through innovation, technology exports, and the attraction of foreign investment. This dissertation will analyze the economic benefits of science diplomacy in selected countries that serve as examples of its successful use for economic development. It will also focus on the possibilities of applying proven strategies in Slovakia, with the aim of increasing its innovation potential and strengthening its position in international economic relations.

Thesis objective:

The objective of this dissertation is to analyze the economic advantages of science diplomacy in selected countries that serve as examples of successful use of science diplomacy for economic growth, and to explore the possibilities of applying proven strategies in Slovakia in order to enhance its innovation potential and strengthen its position in international economic relations.

Title:

Mainstream, Alternative and the Economy: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Czech and Slovak Media

Supervisor:

doc. Dr. Tomáš Imrich PROFANT

Annotation:

The doctoral project forms part of a broader research programme focused on the analysis of economic discourses in mainstream and alternative media in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Its aim is to systematically examine how selected print media construct economic reality, what types of economic discourses they produce, and to what extent it is analytically possible to distinguish between “mainstream” and “alternative” approaches to economic issues. The project is theoretically grounded in post-structuralist critical international political economy and methodologically draws on critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, van Leeuwen), qualitative content analysis, and qualitative interviews. The PhD researcher will contribute to the development of a theoretical framework of economic discourses, the construction of analytical categories, and the analysis of media texts from Czech and Slovak newspapers and magazines (MF Dnes, Ekonom, Deník Referendum, Denník N, Zem a vek). Particular attention will be paid to the question of whether systematic differences exist between mainstream and alternative media. The project also includes conducting and analysing interviews with journalists, focusing on their reflection on their own discursive production and their relationship to dominant economic discourses and their alternatives. The contribution of the doctoral project lies in deepening the empirical analysis of economic discourses in the Czech and Slovak media environment, identifying mechanisms of legitimation of economic claims, and elaborating the relationship between media discourse, economic ideology, and the political effects of discourses in the public sphere.

Thesis objective:

The aim of the doctoral project is to critically analyse and compare mainstream and alternative economic discourses in selected Czech and Slovak print media in order to identify their key discursive patterns, modes of legitimation, and differences in the construction of economic reality, as well as to assess how these discourses are reflected and interpreted by the journalists who produce them.

Title:

Analyzing the results of the EU4Environment program in the context of water stress and sustainable water management in the Eastern Partnership countries

Supervisor:

doc. Ing. Kristína BACULÁKOVÁ, PhD.

Annotation:

The EU4Environment programme aims to help six partner countries safeguard their natural capital and improve people's environmental well-being by supporting environmental measures, green growth and putting in place mechanisms to better manage environmental risks and impacts. Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine face structural water scarcity, limited data on actual water withdrawals and more frequent droughts due to climate change. Water stress is therefore increasing in these countries. The EU4Environment initiative was intended to contribute to innovative solutions in the field of water management planning, focusing innovatively on so-called nature-based solutions to improve the country's ability to capture and slowly release water, thereby mitigating the effects of drought. One year after its official closure, it is possible to assess whether individual potential plans have actually been implemented in practice or have remained at the declarative level. Assistance in the field of water management reflects the Union's efforts to expand relations with the Eastern Partnership region beyond the political level.

Thesis objective:

The aim of the work is to empirically evaluate the operation of the EU4Environment programme in the context of water management in the Eastern Partnership countries. The thesis focuses on the analysis of declared programmes and measures and their real application in practice in the countries concerned. It assesses the monitoring of water data, the concept of water policies and their change over time. It examines the EU approach to water stress issues in the complexity of EU-Eastern Partnership relations.

Title:

Digitalization of Trade Finance and Its Impact on the Sustainable Integration and Competitiveness of SMEs in International Trade

Supervisor:

Dr. habil. Ing. Eva JANČÍKOVÁ, PhD.

Annotation:

The dissertation addresses the digitalization of trade finance and its significance for the position of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in international trade. It focuses on assessing the contribution of digital trade finance instruments to improving SMEs' access to finance, increasing operational efficiency, and strengthening their competitiveness. At the same time, it identifies the risks, barriers, and institutional aspects associated with this transformation. The research includes an empirical investigation of the use of digital trade finance instruments by SMEs. The findings will contribute to a better understanding of the role of digital trade finance in international trade and will enable the formulation of recommendations for enterprises,

financial institutions, and policymakers in supporting sustainable development and SME competitiveness.

Thesis objective:

The aim of the dissertation is to assess the impact of the digitalization of trade finance on the sustainable integration and competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in international trade, identify related opportunities and risks, and formulate recommendations for the effective use of digital trade finance instruments.

Title:

The regulation of autonomous weapon systems and its economic consequences in international economic relations

Supervisor:

JUDr. Lucia BOCKOVÁ, PhD.

Annotation:

The rapid development of autonomous weapon systems (AWS) based on artificial intelligence is fundamentally altering the nature of modern armed conflicts and influencing states' economic decisions regarding defence, technological investment and the operation of the global arms industry. How these technologies are regulated internationally and regionally directly impacts defence budgets, business competitiveness, the trade of military equipment and the geopolitical balance between major global economic players. This dissertation will therefore examine the relationship between AWS legal regulation and the economic strategies of states, using a political-economic analysis of defence budgets, research and development investments, trade flows and industrial policy in the field of military technologies.

Thesis objective:

The dissertation aims to identify the economic consequences of the legal regulation of autonomous weapons systems for states, the defence industry and international economic relations. On this basis, it will propose regulatory mechanisms that are legally sustainable and economically effective.

Title:

Foreign Direct Investment, Economic Growth and Environmental Impacts: An Empirical Analysis of Selected Countries

Supervisor:

prof. Ing. Mgr. Renáta PITOŇÁKOVÁ, PhD.

Annotation:

The thesis focuses on the analysis of the relationship between foreign direct investment, economic growth and environmental quality in a selected country or group of countries. The main objective is to empirically examine the impact of FDI inflows on economic growth and environmental impacts expressed through CO₂ emissions. The research tests the validity of the theoretical concepts of Pollution Haven Hypothesis and Pollution Halo Hypothesis, which explain the possible environmental consequences of foreign investments. Empirical analysis will be carried out using econometric methods based on time or panel data, while the relationships between foreign direct investment inflows, economic growth and CO₂ emissions will be analysed. The results of the research will make it possible to identify the nature of the impact of foreign capital on the environment and at the same time provide a basis for the proposal of economic and policy measures aimed at more efficient use of foreign investments supporting sustainable economic growth.

Thesis objective:

The aim of the thesis is to analyse the relationship between foreign direct investment (FDI), economic growth and environmental impacts in the form of CO₂ emissions in selected countries and to econometrically quantify their mutual relationships.

Title:

Water Security as a Factor of Economic Differentiation: An Analysis of Structural Inequalities, Regulation, and Competitiveness

Supervisor:

PhDr. Michael AUGUSTÍN, PhD., MPA

Annotation:

This dissertation examines water security as a factor of economic differentiation within a selected geographical region or set of cases. It is based on the assumption that the asymmetric distribution of water resources constitutes a structural inequality that is further shaped by differing regulatory regimes, pricing mechanisms, and investment capacities of states. Drawing on a political economy perspective, the study analyses how the interaction between natural inequalities and public regulation affects cost structures, investment attractiveness, and the competitiveness of economies. The dissertation aims to contribute to the broader debate on environmental determinants of competitiveness by situating water security within a political-economic analysis of structural and regulatory asymmetries across selected geographical contexts.

Thesis objective:

The objective of the dissertation is to examine how the interaction between structural inequalities in the distribution of water resources and differing regulatory regimes contributes to economic differentiation and influences competitiveness.

Title:

Visegrad Group Countries in the European Union: Economic and Political Aspects

Supervisor:

PhDr. Peter CSÁNYI, PhD.

Annotation:

The thesis traces the transformation of Visegrad cooperation from a tool to promote European integration to a format dominated by national interests and criticism of the EU. The thesis will also examine the impact of politicization on the dynamics of regional cooperation within the V4 and its ability to act as a unified actor in the EU. The theoretical part of the thesis will be devoted to defining the concepts of politicization, populism, Euroscepticism and nationalism in the context of European integration. It is based on the theory of political discourse and the examination of how the topic of European integration turns into an object of political conflict in the V4 countries. The empirical part of the thesis will focus on statements made by political leaders of the V4 countries, recurrent narratives and their use in political struggles. Particular attention is paid to the so-called "Visegrad effect", i.e. the way in which the V4 countries reinforce Eurosceptic attitudes and weaken the mechanisms of cooperation within the EU.

Thesis objective:

The aim of the dissertation thesis is to develop a theoretical framework for understanding the process of politicization of European integration in Central Europe (specifically in the V4 countries) and to contribute to the broader academic debate on the future of the EU in conditions of increasing political polarization. The results of the analysis can be used to assess the stability and direction of Visegrad cooperation.

Title:

Political and economic determinants of new populism in the Visegrad Group countries after the 2008 financial crisis

Supervisor:

Mgr. Tetyana ZUBRO, PhD.

Annotation:

The thesis focuses on the analysis of the political and economic determinants of new populism in the countries of the Visegrad Group (V4) following the global financial crisis of 2008. The rise of populism poses a significant challenge to the stability of democratic institutions, the quality of governance, and the trajectory of European integration in Central Europe. Examining the consequences of the crisis provides a better understanding of why political narratives based on the criticism of elites, globalization, and supranational structures, including the European Union, have gained strength. The results of the research will contribute to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of populist politics in the region and provide an analytical basis for the development of public policies aimed at strengthening democratic resilience and socio-economic stability. The methodological framework of the research will be based on a comparative analysis of processes in the Visegrad Group countries, using a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods.

Thesis objective:

The aim of this paper is to identify the key political and economic factors that contributed to the rise of new populism in Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Hungary in the aftermath of the global financial crisis and its economic and social consequences.

Title:

The Position of Turkey in the Contemporary Global Economy and Politics

Supervisor:

doc. PhDr. Rudolf KUCHARČÍK, PhD.

Annotation:

Turkey represents a significant actor in the contemporary international system, whose position is shaped by its strategic geographical location at the crossroads of Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, as well as by its economic and political potential. In recent decades, Turkey has sought to strengthen its role in the global economy and international politics through an active foreign policy and the expansion of trade relations. This paper focuses on the analysis of economic and political factors shaping Turkey's position in the contemporary world system, while also identifying the main opportunities and challenges influencing its future development and international influence.

Thesis objective:

The aim of this paper is to analyze the position of Turkey in the contemporary global economy and politics within the context of its geopolitical and economic dynamics. The paper also evaluates the key factors influencing its role in international relations and the global economic system.

Title:

Foreign Investment Protection in Times of Armed Conflict

Supervisor:

Dr. habil. JUDr. Ing. Katarína BROCKOVÁ, PhD., LL.M.

Annotation:

The effects of armed conflict on the protection of foreign investments is an area of international law, which, in connection with the current geopolitical situation, is gaining momentum in the European context. Modern international investment law as an area bordering and interacting with several thematic areas of international public law, especially international humanitarian law, is constantly developing dynamically, and the legal regime for the protection of foreign investments is far from a stable monolithic whole. Many issues that arise in connection with the protection of foreign investments in the territory of the state affected by the armed conflict require further investigation.

Thesis objective:

The aim of this thesis is to analyse the existing legal regime for the protection of foreign investment in the event of an armed conflict on the territory of the host state.

Title:

The political economy of oil and gas in Europe amid a new geopolitical order: supply shocks, security, and policy responses

Supervisor:

prof. Bruno Sergio SERGI, PhD.

Annotation:

Europe's role as a major importer of oil and gas influences its domestic policies, industrial competitiveness, and international relations. The Russia-Ukraine conflict and reduced Russian pipeline supplies prompted a strategic shift toward LNG, leading to faster infrastructure development and long-term deals with non-Russian providers. Iran's instability and military actions threaten European energy security and prices by risking Strait of Hormuz blockades, affecting global oil markets. Consequently, Europe's LNG imports hit record highs in 2025-2026 as it aimed to refill storage and replace pipeline supplies. REPowerEU aims to end Russian energy imports by 2026, boost renewables and electrification, strengthen the grid, and plan for future renewable growth amid geopolitical issues. These initiatives now face the challenge of balancing energy security and transition goals while considering the environmental impact of increased LNG dependence amid heightened geopolitical uncertainty.

Thesis objective:

1. Security versus decarbonization tradeoffs: Member states racing to shore up supplies by building LNG terminals and expanding storage are buying short term security at the risk of locking in new fossil fuel infrastructure.

Research question: How do member state measures to secure gas supplies (LNG terminals, storage expansion) affect the pace and direction of Europe's decarbonization efforts?

2. Geopolitical and institutional coordination: When the EU speaks with a unified plan, bilateral scrambles for supplies ease; fragmented national deals amplify market uncertainty.

Research question: To what extent does EU-level coordination reduce fragmented bilateral supply deals and market volatility, and how do external exporters and private contracts shape that coordination?

3. Socio economic and environmental consequences: A rapid pivot to LNG may stabilize supplies but raises lifecycle emissions and methane leakage risks, and pushes up industrial energy costs unevenly across regions. Where social protections are weak, higher bills deepen energy poverty.

Research question: What are the distributional, competitiveness, and environmental impacts of a rapid shift to LNG, and which governance measures best mitigate harms?
