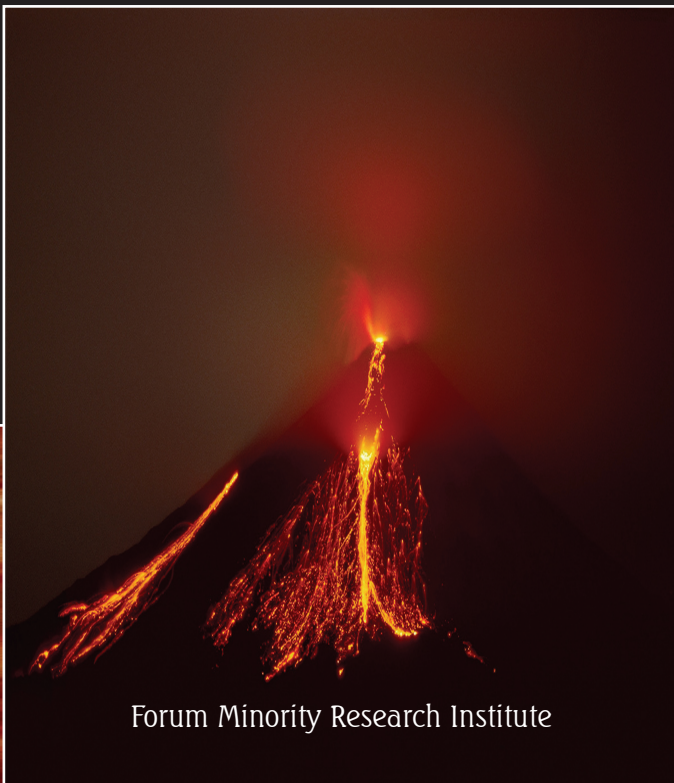# NATIONAL POPULISM AND SLOVAK – HUNGARIAN RELATIONS IN SLOVAKIA 2006 – 2009

Edited by: Kálmán Petőcz

Forum Minority Research Institute

National Populism and Slovak – Hungarian Relations
in Slovakia 2006 – 2009

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Content

INTRODUCTION

Political development in Central European countries took a peculiar turn after their accession to the European Union in 2004 but especially after a series of national elections in 2005 and 2006. They put in driver's seat politicians whose mode of expression, style of pursuing political goals and attitude to political opponents was – to say the least – unusual for suave politicians from Western European saloons. Analysts, journalists and civic activists openly began to speak of the rise of new populism. The new phenomenon was examined thoroughly; countless publications were issued on the topic, various conferences, seminars, workshops and discussions were organized focusing on populism, its theoretical foundation, its methodological grasping, its *modus operandi* and its impact on voters.

The present publication is one of the outputs of a project titled *Challenging National Populism and Promoting Interethnic Tolerance and Understanding in Slovakia* that was carried out by the Forum Institute for Minority Research in Šamorín. Its main goal was not to make just another contribution to the theoretical discourse for we believe that the phenomenon of populism has been relatively thoroughly described by a great number of authors. A partial list of their works is included in the bibliography at the end of this publication.

The principal ambition of the collective of authors of this book was rather to examine a specific form of populism that is frequently referred to as national populism. In Slovakia, the nationalist scion of populism emerged in the mid-1990s and was closely related to the name Vladimír Mečiar. In his study that forms part of this publication, Peter Učeň poignantly defined what was at the heart of the new type of populism. What is relevant from the perspective of our approach is that Vladimír Mečiar managed to convince a critical mass of the Slovak electorate that he was the best safeguard able to protect Slovakia (and the Slovak nation) against the triple threat of national doom: first, against the Czechs regarding the constitutional model of the dying Czechoslovak federation and just division of its common goods; second, against the Hungarians regarding Slovakia's territorial

integrity and political sovereignty and elimination of discrimination against Slovaks on ethnically mixed territories; finally, against multinational corporations, international institutions and all capitalists from abroad who in conspiracy with ethnic Hungarians and other internal enemies of the state (i.e. political opposition and non-governmental organizations) tried to undermine economy, security and political independence of the young and fragile Slovak Republic. Such a self-created image of the nation's saviour from the threefold peril served him as a disguise for an uncompromising, sometimes even merciless exploitation of political and economic interests.

After the parliamentary elections of 2006 brought to power the ruling coalition of SMER-SD – SNS – ĽS-HZDS, many analysts gained an impression that Slovakia was again embracing national populism as the key vehicle of political campaigning and rivalry we remember from the 1990s. Is it truly so, or are we dealing with some 'softer' and harmless version of national populism that produces smoke rather than fire?

The Slovaks eventually parted with the Czechs and today it seems that their mutual relations have become stabilized and actually better than in the time of federation; however, the two remaining constituents of the national-populist message continue to be strongly present in the country's political discourse. Multinational corporations and 'evil' capitalists from abroad along with the 'internal enemy' – i.e. ethnic Hungarians, journalists, political opponents and non-governmental organizations – continue to undermine the internal integrity and external security of the state. Or so it would appear judging from the excessively tense rhetoric of Slovak government officials.

What are the chances of eliminating the last remaining items of the national-populist arsenal in Slovakia? We believe that one of viable paths to tackling the issue is a much more active approach of the democratic political elite, including civil society activists, to issues of Slovak–Hungarian reconciliation and understanding and the status of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia. These issues come always handy when incumbent administration's officials need to divert attention of the general public from key issues, such as Slovakia's future development, handling of public funds, prevalence of corruption, or moral impeccability of public figures. We also believe it makes a world of difference whether ten percent of the population who happen to be members of the Hungarian minority feel at home in Slovakia or whether the government treats them as an alien element, as the Fifth Column that is abused by Hungarian politicians to undermine the state's sovereignty.

We do not share the view of some members of Slovakia's democratic intellectual elite that national populists must first be defeated by other

weapons, such as exposing their hypocrisy, corruptness and incompetence. Unfortunately, we are convinced that the critical mass of Slovak voters perceives the problem in the following way: these guys may well be a bunch of corrupt thieves, too, but they at least defend our national interests. That is why we sincerely believe that the current situation cannot and will not improve in the long term without a massive information campaign exposing the actual *status quo* of ethnic and minority issues in Slovakia, which includes promoting multicultural education in schools and emphasizing intercultural dimension of the public service media's performance.

Therefore, this publication features not only theoretical treatises but mostly analyses of such aspects of the issue that may be helpful when seeking practical measures aimed at generally improving interethnic relations in Slovakia. Although it focuses primarily on Slovak–Hungarian relations, only a fool fails to see that escalated tensions between the majority population and the Roma or – if we choose to make the forecast even trickier – immigrants and members of other cultures may cause much greater problems in the future. Before it happens, it is extremely important that Slovak and Hungarian democrats face the issue of their mutual relations like men because it will no doubt make them better equipped for tackling future challenges together.

Kálmán Petőcz

PETER UČEŇ:
Approaching National Populism

The primary interest of the project for which this text has been produced rests with the consolidation of a political nation in Slovakia, a country with a sizeable ethnic minority. The project and its carriers see the world from the liberal-democratic perspective. Thus they conceive populism as an obstacle disruptive (rather than facilitating) potential of which is to be tackled in an effort to bring up the conception of a political nation for a free, yet heterogeneous society. They rightly assume that populism is at odds with the liberal democratic values and perceptions in various regards. When it comes to the concept of national populism, there is, however, a great deal of uncertainty as to the meaning of populism and its relationship to nationalism.

The ambition of this introductory text is largely methodological: it strives to offer a number of useful concepts possibly contributing to the success of the venture. Also, it tries to provide some clues regarding the relationship among the concepts hopefully shedding some additional light and dissipating existing confusion. The text will address the term of 'national populism' trying to dissect and examine it conceptually. Warning against its improper use, it will advocate the utility of the term in analysing Slovak post-communist politics.

National Populism at Large

The expression and concept of 'national populism' originates in the scholarship and journalism on the so-called radical or extreme right in Western Europe which in the post-war decades started to challenge the mainstream consensus in some Western European polities.

Often considered a sort of anti-democratic extremism, even an offshoot of fascism, the extreme/radical right[1] came to be studied per se around

1980s and 1990s, when their political presence proved to be sustainable and its access to power attainable. Various approaches have attributed to the parties concerned – in different ways, combinations, and with various degree of accuracy – a range of defining features, such as extremism, nationalism, anti-democracy, xenophobia, racism, authoritarianism, protest, populism, economic neo-liberalism, welfare chauvinism, anti-immigrant attitude, and the like.

Why, then, did national populism become so common a shortcut for the politics of the radical right? That 'given' name certainly reflects the nature of the threat the parties in question pose to the mainstream politics. Hence it also speaks volumes about those who have bestowed the name rather than about solely the referent itself – the parties of the radical, populist, authoritarian and nationalist right.

While none of the above attributes of the radical right has been new to European politics, upsetting novelty of the radical right was a combination of those attributes and their resonance among some segments of electorate. In order to understand the nature of the radical threat, we have to see into a number of assumptions underlying the post-war European consensus.

In a typical Western European polity, the left (the Socialists or Social Democrats), by and large, converged with the right (the Christian Democrats or the Conservatives) on liberal democratic norms of the form and contents of their respective national politics, on the welfare state as the basis for eliminating social unrest in societies (social equalisation as an addition to the equality of rights), and on a gradual and negotiated transfer of some prerogatives from the nation-states (and their governments) to the supranational level of the European Union.

A full account goes far beyond the scope of this text, but it might be useful to introduce some facts testifying the nature of the radical right challenge: In terms of citizenship, they started to call for its reinterpretation in nativist terms; it defied the notion of citizenship as a result of merely legal procedures. That was more than just a response to the influx of immigrants from diverse cultures to western societies. Relative to the form and contents of politics, the radical right came to employ in its appeals the whole range of topics that were considered off-agenda until then, such as 'sanctity' of liberal rights removed from the sphere of popular vote. Finally, concerning European integration, it was persistently portrayed by the radical right as a danger to the true national interest.

As for 'national populism', populism became a shortcut for all anti-liberal elements of the radical right politics, namely its disregard for established norms of political conduct, denigration of elites and the way they represent

popular interests as failing or even treacherous. Nationalism, then, was identified as a threat to certain 'supranational' tools envisaged as furtherance of the socio-economic development of European nations. In doing so, the mainstream intuited the two most serious challenges to their legitimacy.

To sum up, except for being 'the right' – that means despising the idea that all people be equal as the result of the state intervention – the radical right also espoused nationalism and populism in their criticism of established actors, norm and ideas within European polities. Interpreting the political in terms of then national and juxtaposing the people and elite, the radical right posed a serious threat to the 'regular' way of doing politics in the societies at issue.

Going back to the helpful concepts, in his important contribution Mudde (2007) draws a line between the radical and extreme parties (of the right) and defines the core ideology of the populist radical right.

According to his argument, the populist *radical* right (PRR), being nominally democratic yet challenging *some* key elements of *liberal* democracy, such as constitutional protection of minorities, should be for the purposes of analysis segregated from the *extreme* (right) parties. The latter are known to attack the *sancta sanctissima* of democracy itself, its popular sovereignty *heart*. Not only PRR ought to be confused with the extreme right; it also belongs to the different class than the Right which is radical, but not populist. Finally, he provides arguments for treating differently also other populist parties which are not radical right.

Regarding ideology, Mudde first defines PRR as a form of nationalism. Its essence is an expression of a nationalist persuasion called nativism. Then he identifies the ideological core of the PRR as a combination of nativism, authoritarianism, and populism.

Nativism stands for "an ideology, which holds that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group ('the nation') and that non-native elements (persons and ideas) are fundamentally threatening to the homogenous nation state. The basis for defining (non-) 'nativeness' can be diverse, e.g. ethnic, racial or religious, but will always have a cultural component" (Mudde 2007, 19, original emphasis).

Concept of nativism analytically covers nationalism, xenophobia, (and also racism, as nativism can, but need not, include the racist attitudes), anti-immigrant stances as well as the welfare chauvinism from the above list of traditional characteristics of the radical right. Hence, it is true essence of the PRR which therefore can be narrowly defined as the politics of nationalism[2].

Another core ideological feature of PRR is *authoritarianism* understood as "the belief in a strictly ordered society, in which infringements of author-

ity are to be punished severely. In this interpretation, authoritarianism includes law and order and 'punitive conventional moralism'… It does not necessarily mean an antidemoctratic attitude, but neither does it preclude one" (Mudde 2007, 23, our emphasis). Authoritarian nature of the PRR politics explains, among other things, many secondary and derived characteristics of PRR linked to its organizational forms and leadership style.

The final indispensable ideological core concept of PRR is *populism* conceived as "a thin-centred ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people" (Mudde 2007, 23, our emphasis).

Even intuitively, it is not hard to understand how and why this ideological combination – a version of 'identity politics' promoted by the PRR – is so alien to the European liberal-democratic mainstream.

In the context of Slovakia, only the Slovak National Party (SNS), and the defunct true Slovak National Party (PSNS), can be classified as the populist radical right. Given that SNS does not exhaust the class of Slovak political forces that espouse both populism and nationalism, we have to continue our search for the meaning of the Slovak national populism in other quarters as well.

Populism in Focus

Traditionally, populism used to be conceived as politics alien and inimical to liberal democracy. In the recent decades an attitude has slightly shifted towards seeing populism more as a phenomenon, in one way or another, pertaining to democracy: as its 'inextricable companion', its shadow, its pathology, or an eternal possibility within it. Before offering our preferred definition of populism, various approaches need to be mentioned here at least in passing.

Against the backdrop of rather authoritarian rule exercised by some 'classical' populists in *Latin America* in the middle of the 20th century, populism used to be defined resorting to cumulative generalisations drawn from 1) the contents of (social and economic) policies of populists, 2) social composition of constituencies supporting them (namely multi-class coalitions), and, 3) the way populist leaders appealed to those constituencies. Populism was presented as an authoritarian anti-western politics engaged in statist and redistributive socio-economic policies ('socialism') and as a

direct appeal to the heterogeneous masses in an attempt to attract popular support across various societal and class divides.

Cumulative as they were, such approaches often produced all-encompassing definitions trying to cover all traits of populist politics. Those concepts largely failed the test of empirical reality when, for example, some populist leaders in the 1980s and 1990s adopted neo-liberal economic measures. In direct opposition to economic interventionism of the classic populists of the 1950s, neo-populists successfully combined neo-liberalism with populist appeals to masses.

Efforts to define populism leaning against policies and social demography survived the shift of the focus of populist studies from Latin America to the *West European radical right*. While the 'old' spirit often persisted, the change of the focus also entailed a shift in the outlook. Originally, also the radical right populism had been primarily characterised in terms of policies and social support; the whole industry has been build around the analysis of 'demand' and 'supply' aspects of the radical right parties' emergence and success.

Research into the western radical right, however, stimulated theorising on populism as such – preferably without being preoccupied with policies and political demography. The endeavour has yielded, *inter alia*, conceptual returns which resigned on global ambitions, hence localised their definitional efforts in the context of modern liberal democracies of the West. These studies seem to have inspired the consensus on that populism has primarily something to do with (or has something against) democracy which is commonly referred to as liberal and representative. Marked by noteworthy inroads into social theory and theory of democracy[3], some of the new conceptualizations apparently reacted to the seemingly vanishing conclusiveness of the policy- and social support-based definitions.

Given the notable differences in the policies and the social support between the Latin American and West European populists, the shift also reinforced the belief that the workable way of conceptualizing populism should mainly rely on the analysis of the way populists address the people.

Hence, characteristics of populism as a *political style* and a "set of distinct arguments" (Blokker 2005, 378) came to define the area of populist studies. Blokker summarised the arguments at issue as following: "The distinctive set of populist arguments includes an absolute prioritization of the people, its political participation (however defined) and its sovereign will, anti-élitism and an antiestablishment attitude, a claim for radical freedom and 'direct democracy', a reenchantment of the alienated people (an alienation which is deemed the result of the artificial constructions of legal-

rational institutions) through the unification of the people with political power, combined with a disdain of formal institutions and pluralist representative democracy, and an organic and undivided vision of the 'people'" (Blokker 2005, 378).

Rather than rejection of democracy, or its pathology, populism is then to be seen, in line with this reasoning, as democracy's distinct reinterpretation – a "particular style of argumentation" (Blokker 2005, 386-7). It is assumed to rest on a "rather one-sided and particular view of democracy, emphasising its emancipatory, redemptive features" (Blokker 2005, 379) related to the popular sovereignty heart of democracy.[4]

In this view, populism is not an ideology in itself. Event though it may be able to provide the "core superstructural, politico-philosophical premises", it fails "to include the 'translation' of the latter into a set of institutions, such as those found in liberalism as a political doctrine and its institutional derivations" (Blokker 2005, 378).

Accentuation of 'impracticality' of populism as ideology constitutes a major difference relative to the most recent thought within the studies on populism, which has expressed itself in concepts that unlike previous 'global' definitions, or populism-as-political-style arguments, seek to define the phenomenon in a 'restricted' way. They see it simply as the distinct interpretation of the political, and, thus, as a *distinct political ideology*, and only then as a complex socio-political phenomenon of a multifaceted nature with numerous characteristics.

The above-mentioned Mudde's definition falls into this tradition along with a bit more elaborated argument by Stanley (2006). Stanley considers populism to be "an ideology characterised by four core concepts the interaction of which delineates a distinct interpretation of the political". These are concepts as follows: "The existence of two homogeneous units of analysis: 'the people' and 'the elite' (the units of the political); the antagonistic relationship between the people and the elite (the structure of the political); the idea of popular sovereignty (the normative justification for preferring the interests of the people over the elite)", and "the positive valorisation of 'the people' and denigration of 'the elite' (the moral justification for this preference)".

The author holds that "populism should be regarded as a distinct ideology in that it conveys a particular way of construing the political" (Stanley 2006, 1).

Under this approach, populism, being so-called 'thin-centred' ideology with a small number of core concepts, is an easily combinable set of ideas. It is typically encountered in ideological appeals of the populists in combi-

nation with other 'thin' ideologies (e.g. nationalism) or more complex ones such as socialism or conservatism. Due to its restricted class of core concepts, populism is not what one would refer to as a practical ideology capable of providing a complex political programme for contemporary politics (should one choose to address Blokker's doubts above).

Even though for some it may come as a bit of disappointment to define populism as 'merely' ideology, not very dominant one into the bargain, the research undertaken within this school, however scant so far, seems to suggest noteworthy advantages. For example, it naturally expects populist ideology to be identified in party messages in a combination with elements of other ideologies. Thus, in term of analysis, it does away with both a need to spot 'pure' and 'true' populist parties and with a drive to cumulate all possible characteristics of populist politics under one heading.

In practical terms, treating populism as a distinct ideology means trying to recognise the presence of its core concepts in the messages of parties and leaders; identifying the manifold forms those concepts may assume; and finally, disentangling their interplay with components of other ideologies present in those messages.

Put otherwise, identification of the core concepts facilitates analytical treatment of diversity within populism. Variety which the core concepts themselves may manifest gives a promise of successfully accounting for an array of real-life cases of populism. While all 'populisms' have to be similar in sharing the four basic concepts, they may (and indeed will) differ in their manifestations and relative weight. Populist arguments are at variance as to how they define the people and elite (who belongs to it, who does not, and why so) and what is the exact form of their antagonistic relationship (how elites may harm people). Being far from complete, the list of possible distinctions should also include the means to be used to restore the primacy of people in the political realm. All of above metamorphoses of the populist core concepts are to be found in 'real-life populisms' combined with ideological elements of other ideologies, into the bargain.

Even though better conceptualizations may arise in times to come, this one seems to be particularly well equipped for carrying on case and comparative studies needed to cope with the proliferation of 'populisms' in post-Communist world.[5]

As we have seen, the populist radical right proved to be too exclusive a concept to embrace the empirical wealth of post-Communist national populism in Slovakia. As it will be showed later, populism, in turn, is too inclusive to meet the task.[6] Therefore, the next territory to be explored is that of nationalism.

Nationalism Under Suspect

All normative statements in favour of nationalism share the conception of the nation as an *ethical* community. "The discourse of nationalism asserts that humanity is divided into distinct nations, each with its own separate past, present and destiny. Human beings can only fulfil themselves if they belong to a national community, the membership of which remains superior to all other forms of belonging – familial, gender, class, religious, regional, and so on" (Özkirimli 2005, 2).

A discussion of the two main theoretical traditions explaining the emergence of nationalism, that is 'ethnicist' and 'modernist' ones, falls beyond the scope of this text. Our approach in this text remains within the modernist school[7] exemplified by the famous Gellner's definition of nationalism as "*a political doctrine which holds that the political and national unit should be congruent*" (Gellner 1983, 1, our emphasis).

The definition calls for thinking of the ways how the congruence can be achieved in practice. Generally speaking, 'adjusting boundaries to the ethnic' and 'filling boundaries with the appropriate ethnic' come out as the two basic paths. The first path evokes the processes such as redrawing boundaries, separation, irredentism, or territorial autonomy, if none of the previous is attainable. The second one refers to the creation of a unified nation by assimilating ethnic minorities.

This way of treating nationalism could be very useful for the sake of the project, along with another definition of nationalism, which is practical and thus amenable to operationalisation. Jonathan Hearn suggests that *"[n]ationalism is the making of combined claims, on behalf of population, to* identity*, to* jurisdiction *and to* territory" (Hearn 2006, 11, original emphasis). The author further specifies that one can speak of nationalism when all three kinds of claims are present. Articulated by "smaller social groups in the name of a larger population", the claims seek to evoke common identity (on the basis of biology, descent, culture, language, history, religion). They attempt at "translating identity into laws" on a specified territory (all quotations Hearn 2006, 11). "The crux is that there needs to be a real place where jurisdiction can secure identity" (Hearn 2006, 12). We find it useful that *operationalisation* embraced in this project be based on the logic of the claims in the name of population: *who makes the claims*, *on behalf of which group*, and *what is their nature*.

Another useful tool of analysing nationalism is relational typologies which treat nationalism according to the way nationalists define their relationship to other (not only) ethnic groups. Brubaker (cited in Hearn 2006, 122–123)

makes an enlightening distinction between: (1) *nationalizing nationalism* of previously marginalised nations which "seeks to use state power to consolidate its 'ownership' of the state"; (2) *homeland nationalism* of the kin-state which "seeks to protect and support the interests of its co-nationals who are marginalized minority within another (usually neighbouring) state"; and (3) *minority nationalism* "in which marginalized groups demand state recognition and certain cultural and political rights on the basis of their nationhood".[8]

Inspired by the relational approach, Deegan-Krause identifies several types of nationalism among Slovaks after 1989. Even though not including the nationalism of Slovak Magyars, his enumeration is worth quoting in full:

> "*Peripheral nationalism against a domestic majority: Czechs*. Some Slovaks viewed the position of Slovaks within the common Czechoslovak state as peripheral and subordinate to the position of Czechs. Some of these Slovaks sought a formal renegotiation of the relationship between the two republics or even the dissolution of the common Czechoslovak state.
>
> *Peripheral nationalism against regional or global institutions: the West*. Some Slovaks believed that Slovakia's territorial and cultural integrity stood at risk in the face of closely interrelated threats from the European Union, NATO, and their member states as well as by their foreign economic actors.
>
> *Peripheral nationalism against a foreign state: Hungary*. Some Slovaks sought to combat what they perceived to be a threat of Hungarianization faced by Slovaks in the Hungarian-majority areas near the country's southern border and by Slovaks still living in Hungary.
>
> *State-building nationalism against a homeland minority: Hungarians*. Some Slovaks supported state-building efforts to expand the use of Slovak as an official language in the realms of administration, education, and culture primarily at the expense of offerings in the Hungarian language.
>
> *State-building nationalism against a non-homeland minority: Roma*. Some Slovaks saw the country's large Roma population as a barrier to an integrated Slovak state. Proposed solutions ranged from the assimilation of Roma into Slovak society through language and cultural instruction to the formal dissimilation of Roma and their isolation away from Slovaks and other groups.

> *State-building nationalism against co-nationals: Non-nationalist Slovaks*. Some Slovaks argued that the process of building of a truly Slovak state faced its greatest danger from those members of the Slovak group who were insufficiently conscious of or loyal to the Slovak nation. These suspicions of disloyalty led to calls for a variety of measures that ranged from the increase of national consciousness to withdrawal of "anti-Slovak Slovaks" from public life." (Deegan-Krause 2004, 658–659).

To sum up this section, the essence of nationalism is based on exclusion and inclusion. Its principal political expressions include making statements on who belongs to the nation and who does not. *Setting up criteria for and emphasising implications of (not)belonging to the nation are quintessential to nationalist politics along with the means of achieving the congruence of the ethnic and the political,* if one is to remain within the modernist approach to nationalism. Therefore, similarities and differences in expressions of nationalism among various suspects of national populism in Slovakia should be meticulously examined within the framework of this project.

Post-Communist National Populism in Action

Having separated in the sections above the populist radical right, populism and nationalism as concepts, the natural goal of this section is to outline how those got intermingled in post-communist Slovakia, thus resulting in both 'movement' and 'situation' of national populism. As it has been stressed throughout this text, but perhaps should be repeated, to grasp national populism in Slovakia we should treat separately nationalism and populism of individual actors in order to understand their affinities.

Before embarking upon this task it would be useful to revisit traditional explanations of (re)emergence of nationalism and populism under post-communism. We will resort to Blokker as an illustrative example even though we can't help to object to his approach of treating nationalism and populism interchangeably, or, more precisely, considering populism largely as a political style of nationalism. Blokker (2005) presents the explanations at issue as falling into two broad categories – *modernizatonist* and *historical-determinist*.

The former approach understands emergence of the phenomena in question as "as a radical form of protest against the degradation of the quality of life and widespread social dislocation and unemployment", and as "a direct result of the 'valley of tears' that characterizes the post-communist transformation from a communist, centrally planned system, to a democratic, market society. The 'social costs' of the transition and the still 'incomplete' nature of modernization make a large number of 'modernization losers' susceptible to mobilization by populist movements" (Blokker 2005, 371).

The latter group of explanations rests on assumption that "populism and its naturalist, exclusivist portrayal of the nation is the result of the re-emergence of deeply, culturally ingrained perception of social belonging, and of the foundations of the polity, in which the social whole is considered prior to the individual, and in which local culture is valued differently from Western culture" (Blokker 2005, 371).

A normative conclusion on which both groups of explanations inevitable converge is that in order to overcome populism and nationalism, post-communist societies are bound to political modernisation. That would mean adopting western liberal-democratic political institutions and its notion of citizenship based on 'civic nationalism'.

Appealing as it is, this kind of normative assumptions usually lacks a 'roadmap' for arriving at the desired destination. Western liberal democracies are remarkably diverse in terms of institutions and their operation. We believe that the essence of their 'liberal-democraticness' is to be identified in the underlying political culture. Moreover, as far as of political culture is concerned, the lack of 'roadmaps' and 'blueprints' becomes even more frightening than it is in the case of the institutions.

Nevertheless, we consider crucial that this project address the remedies most often proposed by the liberal scholars – civic nationalism and constitutional patriotism. The project should attempt to assess the realistic avenues for 'arriving' at the 'normatively desired' state of things against the backdrop of various conditions facilitating the success of the national populism in the country.

Framework for the Post-Communist Populism

We propose a classification of the post-communist populist politics which, after elaboration, could hopefully aspire to provide a ground for a more fruitful treatment of the 'radical politics' in societies in question. Thus, in

terms of this project, it could also enhance the understanding of national populism.

This crude classification, departing from the populist premises, and taking into account a temporal dimension, rests on distinguishing between the two 'populist situations' following the fall of Communism – *transition populism* and *transformation populism*.[9]

Transition populism refers to the anti- and illiberal politics reacting to and benefiting from the immediate consequences of transitions (understood as abrupt political acts of departing from communism), their grievances, injustice, and unfulfilled expectations, which provided a space for various "radical" ways of popular mobilisation. *Transformation populism*, in turn, rising towards the end of the first transformation decade, thrives on mobilising disenchantment with the experience of "life under post-communism". It feeds itself on long-term injustice of the change of order.

Various forms of marriage between nationalism and populism took place within both situations. But first, let's enumerate all actors which adopted populism as a part of their politics in the period of the *transition populism*:

– *Radical Left*: Unreformed communist parties and the radical splinters from the reformed ones. Their ideology was a combination of populism, authoritarianism and anti-capitalism. Nationalism usually served to underline their anti-capitalist message. With the exception of parties such as the (anti-German) Czech KSČM, it was articulated more in terms of a protection against the capitalist world order rather than stressing the danger posed by some particular nations.

– *Post-communist radical right*: Slovak SNS, Romanian PRM, Serbian SRS, Polish LPR and the like. Those are the counterparts of the Western populist radical right. Their defining ideology is a blend of nativism, populism and authoritarianism. The form of their nativism is, however, not a carbon copy of Western PRR; it is more targeted against indigenous minorities than against foreign immigrants. Nevertheless, we still tend to believe they are the part of the PRR family.

– *Some communist successor parties*: namely in countries where departure from Communism could be seen as the pre-emptive move by the communist elites to retain their grip on power; Bulgarian Socialist Party – BSP, Party of Social Democracy in Romania–ŻPDSR. These parties combined sentiments towards the era of 'real socialism' and social demagoguery related to post-transition deprivation of all kinds with authoritarianism, populism and nationalism.

– *National populists proper*: new parties with no organization continuity with either the Communists or the pre-Communist nationalist right, such

as Slovak HZDS or Croatian Democratic Community–ŻHDZ.[10] Parties in this category thrived on mobilisation of immediate injustice of transitions along with populist justifications for authoritarian encroachments, all wrapped in nationalist themes.[11]

As for the transformation populism, it came to influence the second decade following the departures from Communism. It brought in the two groups of political actors embracing populism as the means to break in and/or dominate the political competition in their societies:

– *New ('centrist') populism:* SOP, SMER in Slovakia, National Movement Simeon II (NDSV) in Bulgaria, New Era (JL) in Latvia, Res Publica (RP) and Labour party (DP) in Lithuania.
– *'Mainstream populism':* Alliance of Young Democrats–Hungarian Civic Union (Fidesz–MPP) in Hungary, Law and Justice (PiS) in Poland, and fight against the establishment put up by the Romanian President Traian Basescu.

Regarding '*centrist populists*', as a rule, the concerned parties are newcomers mobilising discontent with under-performing and morally failing post-communist establishment. Their true ideological stance is 'anti-establishment' which overshadows other ideological components present.[12] Particularly in their initial periods, they shy away from ideological pledges or even label ideology as harmful to true democratic politics. Their appeal contains numerous references to common sense and rational solutions on which political decision-making should be based: "In their appeal they blame the entire establishment, in all its manifestations since regime change, for misrepresentation, immoral conduct, and poor governance. They offer "to square the transition circle" by increasing living standards, safeguarding Western orientation, stopping radicals, and fighting corruption – all tasks in which the previous establishment failed. The central themes of their message are curbing corruption, improving responsiveness, and promoting economic development… In a true populist vein, their tough anti-establishment appeal is directed against *all* previous configurations of the ruling elite (although in some cases, proponents of the new anti-establishment politics may have been part of this elite)" (Učeň 2007a, 54).[13]

An imperfect heading '*mainstream populism*' refers to the politics of radicalisation which unveils itself within the parties commonly considered to be a part of a mainstream. Unlike previous, they have often been in place since the aftermath of the regime changes as separate parties or their parts.

This brand of populism appeared on the Right – either conservative (Fidesz, PiS) or self-styled (Basescu). They can be considered a reaction to the same disillusionment with traditional parties as was the case with 'cen-

trist populism' using it for their advantage, yet in a different way. Their defining characteristics is the tendency to dispense with (or even dispose of) some liberal-democratic norms of political conduct for the sake of pro-grammatic radicalism and a political domination. Typically, they act in polarized polities with adversarial pattern of political competition – charac-teristics to which they purposefully contribute.

'Mainstream populists' are 'populistic' because they treat the competing elites in a populist manner as wrongdoers and enemies of the nation/people. Their populism ascends 'on the top' of their traditional ideologies. With cen-trist populists they share denigration of post-communist elite, but, being a part of establishment, they apply this judgement only to their political rivals.

In their diction they ask, in more or less explicit form, for revocation of initial 'transition pacts' between the parting communists and ascending new elite which often decisively shaped the ground for departure from Com-munism in respective countries. They blame those pacts for de facto failure of revolutions and for post-communist societies being dominated by the com-munists turned democrats and capitalists. They emphasise that influence as the reason for malaise affecting the societies concerned. They call for a renewal, for a restoration of the possibility of attaining the revolutions' goals, in terms of decommunisation and moral revolution. Various kinds of moral and institutional overhauls (namely the lustration) are suggested to do away with the dominance of the 'postcommunists' and their liberal accomplices.

As for Basescu, his anti-establishment drive is free from nationalist (nativist) appeals. Fidesz and PiS, in turn, in their – politely said – 'con-servative nationalism' in various regards resemble the populist radical right's vision of politics. Yet, their disdain for liberal limits is still con-strained by the international concerns, and their nationalism is, largely for the same reasons, not a full-fledged nativism.[14] They, namely Fidesz, are phenomena in development with various possible trajectories to take.

Implications of the Chosen Classification

It is argued here that exactly the latter two groups of parties of the transi-tion populism category – the communist successor parties and 'proper' national populists – represented a crux of national populism as a movement in 1990s. While different in various regards, namely the extent of the favourable reference to the previously existing regimes – their appeals bore similarity as to the symbiosis of social demagoguery, populism and nation-alism. "The national populist parties address the people as members of a national community, and contend that their misery is caused by external

enemies and treacherous local anti-national elites who push through reforms demolishing the living standards of the masses" (Učeň 2007a, 53).

It must be admitted that calling the group of new parties (HZDS, HZD) 'national populist' is the consequence of the lack of a better term. So far we have not come across a suitable name for these new, truly post-communist, forces. We like to say that in the populated world of post-communist 'unorthodox' politics there are parties which are 'more populist than anything else' along with parties which are 'more anything else than populist'. The 'national populists proper' are, along with the 'centrist populists' of the transformation populism period, indeed, 'more populist than anything else': "National populists 'feature nationalism as a prominent element of their electoral appeal and claim to represent the interests of an often mythical and idealized national collectivity,' but they refrain from radical actions, and 'in ideological terms, nationalism is often supplemented by a broader non-nationalist policy agenda aimed at specific groups . . . or social groups disadvantaged by economic reforms . . . rather than being the party's only *raison d'ętre*'" (Učeň 2007a, 53 quoting Pop-Eleches 2002, 6).

In no way the parties in question should be understood an attempt to restore Communism. On the contrary, they represent a special way of adjusting ambitions of elite to the new political order in an illiberal mode: When in power, the national populists resort to authoritarian style adjusting of the rules to their advantage, but they certainly cannot be considered foes of democracy. They accept democracy, but in a populist manner try to legitimise its extreme majoritarian versions. Typically, their dominance in the 1990s was brought to an end by opposition coalitions of largely orthodox parties leaning toward the liberal-democratic mainstream (Učeň 2007a, 53).

To sum up the post-communist national populism as we see it, it was a blend of social demagoguery (in terms of the criticism of the impact of transition on living standards of the people), authoritarianism, nationalism and populism. Each party at issue blended this mix in a different way, but what they had in common was the 'illiberal staple'. Thus we hold that *national populism was* the *politics of illiberalism under the post-communism* for elites in search of not only power but often also of the people and the state. *Its quintessence was making the national a presentable container for populism- and social demagoguery-fed drive for power, and to make it, along with populism, to provide justifications for its inevitable authoritarian excesses*. Thus there are the reasons for 'national populists proper' stealing the 'right' to be labelled 'national populist' from the populist radical right. Parties such as HZDS were truly unique novelty the post-communist party politics brought into the attention of political science.

Finally, in addition to identifying the embodiments of national populism, the 'situation' of national populism should be addressed as well. Owing to the shared 'staple', national-populist moment was capable of materialising in some polities also in the form of alliances of various 'unorthodox' parties. Political coalition of the populist radical right with national populists took place in the 1990s in Romania (PRM and PDSR) and Serbia (SRS and SPS). In Slovakia, in addition to stable cooperation of the HZDS and SNS, also the radical left element was involved in the form of the Slovak Workers' Association (ZRS).

Slovak National Populist Moment

By way of example, let's illustrate our views of the post-communist national populism on the case of Slovakia.

The reason for which in the aftermath of the regime change any successful opposition politics in Slovakia had to be based on a message addressing social impact of economic changes brought up by the transitions and the widespread feeling among the Slovaks that the institutional/constitutional arrangement of the Czechoslovak Federation was not fair, were obvious. Slovak political elite were divided on how to response to those perceptions. While its 'federalist' and 'civic liberal' part held it was necessary to withstand the bad weather by consistently sticking to the line of economic liberalisation and preserving existing constitutional arrangements, a national(ist) opposition rose within their ranks.

In general, Slovak opposition outside of the VPN reacted both to social deprivation (SDĽ) and to a perceived unfairness of the form of the state (SNS, KDH). But it was Vladimír Mečiar, heading the opposition within the (nominally) civic liberal camp, who mixed the 'remedy' of national populism for all Slovak ails. First, he successfully *combined the social and the national aspects of the Slovaks' disillusionment with the new order* in his (party's) appeal to the people making the national interpret the social. Second, he *added a strong populist ingredient* to the movement by both *defining the people* (members of the *Slovak* nation affected by the post-transition deprivations) and *pointing out the harmful elite* which, ill-serving or betraying the people was to be blamed for those deprivations. Finally, he provided a *suggestion for a solution* (a "bearable transition") appealing to a noteworthy number of Slovaks, that meant taking (some) economic and political power to 'Slovak hands', those hands being the hands of people that understood the needs and would not fail the people – Vladimír Mečiar himself and his Movement for Democratic Slovakia.

What originated as a skilful opposition strategy for winning the power, soon (after the 1992 election victory), developed into a massive political campaign and later into a version of the rule and governance[15] with the broad consequences. Quite naturally, even though not without problems – both parties went through internal clashes and splits before the alliance of the radical right and national populism was possible – HZDS allied in furthering its political project for Slovakia with the SNS. In terms of combining national and social criticism, though, the SDĽ never became more than an occasional tactical ally of the HZDS. And it was not necessary either as for a sizable part of the Slovak electorate the 'combined' appeal of HZDS was far more convincing than nationalism of SNS (not speaking about KDH) and defensive 'socialism' of SDĽ.

In any case, nationalism was crucial to the success of HZDS project, but their interpretation of the national was different from the nativism of SNS. To be sure, within the HZDS there were various wings, among them, along with 'reform socialists' of the 1968 veneer, and ideologically disinterested pragmatists, also the nativist one. Nativist intelligentsia, which rallied around Mečiar in sizeable numbers, aspired to articulate a distinctive doctrine or ideology of the Slovak national project,[16] but it was Mečiar himself who was deciding on the balance of wings' influence and accentuating the desired messages to address the electorates.

As convincingly argued by Deegan-Krause, quintessential to Mečiar's success was the capability to cement the nationalism and party choice (for HZDS) on one side, and to make this link largely independent from the version of nationalism voters preferred. The crux of author's argument is that while in the aftermath of the regime change all types of nationalism (listed in the previous section) existed among Slovaks lacking any particular pattern, by the end of the 1990s Slovak nationalism converged around the pattern which was carefully manipulated and politicised for the sake of the interest of the ruling group: "*At the beginning of the decade*, Slovakia's nationalists shared a sense of fear for the future of the Slovak nation, but they disagreed about the real source of the threat. Some saw Czechoslovakia as dominated by Czechs and therefore sought independence, some worried about Hungary and Hungarians living in southern Slovakia, and some feared that European integration would undermine Slovakia's culture" (Deegan-Krause 2004, 651). "*By the end of the same decade*, Slovakia's nationalists were more likely to see the threats to their country coming from all sides at the same time, and many speculated that enemies of the Slovak nation were actively working together in their attempt to undermine Slovakia's sovereignty" (Deegan-Krause 2004, 652).[17]

It is essential for understanding Slovak national populism that national-ism(s) in Slovakia had been a subject to manipulation and politicisation[18] and that the politicisation was not the job of the nativist SNS. Rather it was Vladimír Mečiar and his Movement for Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) who were in charge. SNS was a willing ally for the reasons of opportunity to shape national politics and the access to political spoils. But it was Mečiar who had been deciding on who posed a threat to the Slovak nation and what the nature of the threat was. *The essence of politicization of Slovak nationalism was accentuating those versions of nationalist feelings which seemed opportune to the ruling groups' interest*, namely to justify its for-eign and domestic policy actions (often failures). Deegan-Krause sum-marised the findings of his research, based on analysis public opinion polls, as follows: "The polarization of anti-Czech peripheral nationalism traces a sharp rise in 1992 and 1993, followed a year later by a nearly identical pat-tern for anti-Hungarian nationalism and two years later by anti-Western peripheral nationalism. The *timing is significant because it closely matches changes in the electoral strategies of Slovakia's political parties*. Content analysis of party programs for the 1992, 1994, and 1998 elections indicates a distinct set of shifts in the frequency of references to various national issues… [t]he focus of programs shifted from an emphasis on issues relat-ed to peripheral nationalism (primarily against the Czechs) in the 1992 elec-tion, to a greater emphasis on state-building nationalism (much of it stated in general terms but clearly applicable only to Hungarians) in the 1994 elec-tion campaign, and then back toward a renewed emphasis on peripheral nationalism in 1998 (this time directed toward the West)" (Deegan-Krause 2004, 685–686, our emphasis).

The flexibility advantage of the HZDS national populism was thus obvi-ous. The SNS, being, by and large, consistent in its nativist nationalism, looked at the Mečiar's 'ever changing nationalism' with both envy and dis-dain; indeed, conflicts were not infrequent.

Having stated that nationalism was a key element of success of what we termed 'national populism', we should also address the question *what makes populism and nationalism to combine so well*. Drawing on Blokker (2005) we suggest it is their *shared emphasis on centrality of the people and on the emancipatory claims related to the popular sovereignty*.[19] When con-ceptually separated, nationalism and populism do the job differently. While populism claims to deliver people from the subjugation to the elite, nation-alism calls for emancipation in national terms, that is, more often than not, asserting the state rights, deliverance from the suppression of other ethnics, nations, and curbing the influence of ethnic minorities and non-nationals.

When the 'marriage' takes place, as it was the case with a number of post-communist societies, the people is interpreted in the national (not necessarily strictly nativist) terms, and the populist and nationalist 'exclusion from the people' may converge in case of (anti-national) elite or (disloyal) minorities. "At least part of the program of national populists is about the mobilization of the people around the idea of *national emancipation* and *collective autonomy*, and consists of a critique of existing institutions and the defenders of the status quo as failing to represent the 'true' people and its sovereignty. The populists claim to more fully represent the national will and interest and therefore the people" (Blokker 2005, 384, original emphasis).

Regarding another usual companion, the *authoritarianism*, national populism perceived as a criticism of liberal democracy as failing to secure superior – nation-related – goals and concerns, entails also offering other means to ascertain those goals instead. The nature of national populist illiberalism can be derived from the assumption that "[i]nstitutional democracy based on the rule of law and legal proceduralism is always open to the political critique of serving *particular* social forces (in Eastern Europe often reformulated as foreign, alien forces) rather than the social whole… More importantly, pluralism, parliamentary negotiationism and compromise, and institutionalized conflict can be portrayed as structurally incapable of representing the societal, organic whole and therefore as undermining the real interests of the people. From the populist point of view, legalism and the rule of law hinder the full realization of the rule of the people" (Blokker 2005, 381–382, my emphasis).

The logic described above provides for explanations of the 'more-than-a-normal' degree of authoritarianism in a political conduct of the national populism in power. In the Slovak context, authoritarian-prone national populism in Slovakia was the result of both its inherent logic and the exigencies of the struggle for (retaining the) power – the latter possibly strengthening the former.[20] The lesson is that any mixture of nationalism and populism, owing to their inherent assumptions, can hardly be free from an authoritarian conduct.[21]

National Populism "Light"?

Nurturing itself on social deprivations of transition, Mr. Mečiar's national populism owed its success to a clever blend of nationalism and populism. Political defeat of the movement was made possible by Slovaks starting to

mind the authoritarian excesses and resulting international isolation of the country. While the latter can be easily attributed to the politics of nationalism, overall, it remains debatable to what extent was national populism in Slovakia discredited in the eyes of its citizens.

After the parliamentary elections in 2006 a coalition came to power containing the two prominent actors of the era of national populism of the previous decade – the populist radical right SNS and the post-national-populist HZDS. This fact, along with the alleged nationalism of the pivotal coalition party SMER–Social Democracy, provoked the thoughts as to whether Slovakia was experiencing the revival of the national populism. The concern is certainly a relevant one but it should be addressed while taking into account the changed context into which the politics of the new coalition unveils itself.

First, both the HZDS and SNS learned the lesson that national populism incurs severe costs on domestic, but mainly on international level. They experienced the eight years in opposition as a direct consequence of defying those obvious facts in the 1990s.

The SNS, in addition having gone through a protracted era of infightings and organizational disunity, kept its radicalism largely under control in spite of habitual verbal attacks on enemies of the Slovak nation. Currently, the party seems to be intensively engaged in the "consumption" of the spoils of power, which puts additional limits on its nativist radicalism.[22] With a little bit of exaggeration, if it were not for regular fierce declarations and utterances of the party leader Ján Slota, directed almost exclusively against Hungary and SMK–MKP, many Slovaks might have got an impression the *radical* right nationalism is absent from the country's politics.[23] It is, however, possible that nativism of SNS is in a dormant stage, 'waiting for immigrants' to unleash itself in a form much more similar to the nativism of the populist radical right in the West.

Considering the HZDS, we hold that starting from approximately 2000, the party developed into a largely ideologically empty political vehicle serving to provide a political leverage and impunity to its leader. To be sure, the "parenthood" of the Slovak nation-state became a central element of its appeal but currently it is free from radicalism as well as any potential to attract an additional vote.

Second, when it comes to the nationalism of SMER, several issues have been discussed, such as Robert Fico's 'personal' nationalist proclivity, or the presence of the 'left nationalists' within the party.[24] We assume that SMER also got the lesson of HZDS and SNS. Rather than contemplating the nationalism of SMER – which we consider largely instrumental to her

bashing of establishment and law and order radicalism – we suggest paying attention to the nature of their neo-populism.

SMER originates as an anti-establishment and non-ideological populist project within the opportunities of the transition populism era. It was characterized by the noteworthy elements of the radical right views on themes such as law and order, at least when it comes to the rhetoric of the party leader Fico. Although the nationalist utterances were not absent from Mr. Fico's campaigns, we hold that the party owes its recent success to populism rather than nationalism. Along with embracing the rhetoric of radical criticism of the impact of the previous governments' reforms, more importantly, Fico astutely (re)introduced into the Slovak politics the diction of the care for the concerns of the 'commoners'.[25] Thus he managed to monopolise *all* kinds of disenchantment with the way Slovak politics have been recently operating.

From what has been said above, our scepticism regarding the possibility of reviving an old national populism of the 1990s is obvious. We take the view that the 'sedative' Fico offered to voters was of a different kind then the Mečiar's did; taking care of the common people's concerns rather than a 'bearable transition'. Fico appeals to people who can by no means feel fatally threatened by the material deprivations, or see their state in jeopardy – even though such people certainly exist, their number would not account for the election results of SMER. SMER's message resonates among the group who deem that politics as it has recently been done disregarded their interests and concerns. They are badly in need of mental satisfaction rather than asking for concrete policies to be implemented. While a part of such a group coincides with those amenable to the national-populist mobilisation, national populist politics certainly can not be considered a prescription for victory.

Having said so, however, we hasten to add that the possibility of a national populist revival should be a primary concern of this project. While we object nationalism being the key element of the SMER's ascension to power, we are open to debating the possibility of a radicalization of its politics in the nationalist terms. There are several hypotheses to be researched in as to whether it is feasible to expect a more virulent blend of the nationalism and populism to play a more prominent role in the politics of SMER and the whole coalition.

In order to do that, we find quite useful to inquire into the nature of nationalism the members of the current ruling coalition may exhibit. We also recommend seeing into the role of populism in articulating political arguments. The enquiry related to the affinities making the cooperation of

the current coalition possible should not fall beyond the scope of the research either.[26] We suggest that whether the politics of the current coalition becomes somewhat similar to the old national populism (a soft version of the national populism?), and to what extent, will largely depend on the developments within the SMER party itself.

Conclusion

In this text we attempted to clarify the applicability of the term national populism under post-communism. We suggested a caveat that its meaning and usage were different than in the case of the western populist radical right. Having let the reader know our opinion of what the national populist politics in Slovakia stood for, we further recommended a meticulous inquiry into the nature of nationalism and populism in Slovakia making use of a handful of concepts featured in the text.

Sceptic as it has been regarding the possibility of the national populist revival;[27] the argument admitted that there were concerns in this matter to be dealt with. These concerns have not only to be addressed but their possible implications for the practice of citizenship as well as the notion of the political nation has to be assessed.

In the latter regard, we anticipate following trends to take place in Slovakia:

(1) Furtherance of the current notion of citizenship based both on liberal rights and the tacit assumption "we are all Slovaks";

(2) Determined but largely non-aggressive resistance to endowing the notion of Slovak citizenship with more of something possibly called 'cultural rights' or even the rights pertaining to territorial and/or functional autonomy;

(3) Continuous ignorance of the problem of a true quality of citizenship our Roma countrymen 'enjoy'.

Whether any of those anticipations hold true will largely depend of the developments within the ruling parties – each of them endowed with a noteworthy pool of the populist genes and a record of the nationalist politics. Even though the radical left fell into oblivion and the appeal of the old national populism by and large vanished, nativism of the radical right is here to stay. It may possibly develop into a more malign form with the increasing number of immigrants from other cultures taking place in Slovakia.

Overall, while not dismissing the importance of the development of the 'other side' (namely the Magyar one)[28], we believe that the debate on citi-

zenship and consolidation of the political national will be driven by the (explicit or implicit) Slovak nationalism.

In this respect, we would also like to draw an attention to the possibility of a tacit nativist consensus penetrating Slovak political establishment. Recent amendment of the law on citizenship, which instituted more restrictive formal conditions for conferring Slovak citizenship to applicants, such as the requirement of the eight years of residence, witnessed, for example, a joint vote of the SMER, SNS, HZDS and KDH in favour of restrictions.

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NOTES

1   We will stick to 'radical right' or 'populist radical right' throughout this section.
2   According to Mudde: "[T]his is particularly important if the concept is to 'travel' to the eastern part of the European continent. In post-communist Europe mass immigration has so far remained a fairly marginal concern, yet xenophobia and nationalism have played an important role in various parts of the region. The term nativism, as defined above, is able to accommodate the xenophobic nationalist reactions to (so-called) indigenous minorities from parts of the majority populations (e.g. 'Estonian Estonians' versus 'Russian Estonians' or 'Slavic Slovaks' versus 'Hungarian Slovaks'); as well as those from minority members to either the majority population or other minorities (e.g. 'Hungarian Slovaks' against 'Slavic Slovaks' or against 'Gypsies')" (Mudde 2007, 19).
3   Telling examples of this approach are Margaret Canovan (1981, 1999) or Paul Taggart (2000).
4   It needs to be said, though, that along with a sophisticated treatment rooted in the political theory, populism is often also seen as a sheer communication style employed by politicians.
5   In general, with a bit of exaggeration, and begging for an empirical check, it could be argued that 'thin-centred ideology' approach potentially allows researchers to travel through time and space more comfortably without compromising the scholarly rigour of the research. Thus, by what initially seemed as the resignation on global ambitions, populist studies may have re-gained the capability to treat populism in various territorial, temporal, and cultural settings.
6   In the context of Slovakia we have see non-nationalist populist parties such as the centrist populist Party of Civic Understanding (SOP) and the neo-liberal populist Alliance of a New Citizen (ANO). For more details see Učeň 2007a.
7   Even though, in line with Nikolas (1999) we tend to believe that when it comes to study of nationalism, the best position is that of ethnicist operating within the modernist framework.
8   Slovak 'state-building' nationalism can serve as an example of the first type, policies of Hungary of the second, and nationalism of the Magyar minority in Slovakia of the third one.
9   This is an amended version of a classification presented in Učeň 2007a. It draws on a distinction between the post-communist *transition* (as a relatively short period of a *political* change leading to the demise of the Communist order and establishment of the liberal one) and post-communist *transformation* (referring to the protracted process of *complex changes* in societies concerned following the transition).
10   The placement of individual parties in respective categories is debatable. Note that, for example, Mudde (2007) considers Croatian HZD in the 1990s to be populist radical right. Also, Milošević's Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) remains for us for a time being an undecided border case regarding their continuity with the Yugoslav Communist party.
11   National populism can be also seen as a way of constructing the political nation which, in defining its (non) membership, makes use of, in addition to ethno-cultural criterion, also the arguments linked to the injustice and social costs of transition, as well as the resulting uprooting and displacement on the identity level.

12 In fact, the purest anti-establishment party from among the mentioned was NDSV. While, SOP and namely DP had certain leftist tint, RP, but namely JL declared themselves centre right. The message which resonated among electorates, and thus delivered then electoral returns, though, was the criticism of establishment.

13 More often than not, the life-span of those parties proved to be short; they either vanished or transformed through adopting a more traditional ideological profile. For the fortunes of the parties at issue see Učeň 2007a.

14 For a complete discussion of the transformation populism, we would have to take into account also the 'delayed' emergence of the PRR *Ataka* and the successful anti-establishment drive of Boyko Borissov and his GERB in Bulgaria.

15 We are somewhat uneasy with calling Mr. Mečiar's rule a regime but do not exclude it.

16 This attempt could be easily traced in the textual analysis of the newspapers *Slovenská Republika* and *Nový deň*, as well as weekly Extra.

17 Or still otherwise: "Among parties representing ethnic Slovaks, Mečiar's HZDS propelled the integration of multiple nationalisms into a single, increasingly well articulated message. From a position that Slovaks had faced multiple national threat, HZDS leaders gradually moved to a position that the new country's enemies were in fact one and the same, because opposition leaders – Slovaks without strong nationalist feelings – had conspired with the Hungarian minority and representatives of NATO, the EU, and multinational corporations to eliminate Slovakia's independence" (Deegan-Krause, 2004, 691).

18 That politicisation was not to attract the new voters. After all, from 1994 the voting choice based on nationalism has been stabilized – those who were not nationalists would not became them, and vice versa. The politicisation, however, was capable of changing supporters mind as to which kind of nationalist sentiment they 'approved' to be cultivated by the ruling group.

19 "[M]any nationalist movements use an emancipatory discourse in which the nation (equated with the 'true' people) is to be liberated from foreign domination (as, for instance, in the form of the 'transfer' of Western institutions) and domestic subjugation to political élites. In these discourses, an argument is often made for increased popular sovereignty through the granting of absolute priority to the nation, in other words, to the people as an undivided and organic unity, and the expression of its will" (Blokker 2005, 377).

20 We tend to concur with Deegan-Krause that the essence of HZDS' authoritarianism was an attempt to undermine mechanisms of horizontal accountability in order to eliminate their constraints on furthering the national populist project.

21 Other explanation for the relationship of authoritarianism and nationalism offers Snyder (2000, 332, cited in Hearn 2006, 134): "Democratization produces nationalism when powerful groups within the nation not only need to harness popular energies to the tasks of war and economic development, but they also want to avoid surrendering real political authority to the average citizen. For those élites, nationalism is a convenient doctrine that justifies a partial form of democracy, in which an élite rules in the name of the nation yet may not be fully accountable to its people. Under conditions of partial democratization elites can often use their control over the levers of government, the economy, and the mass media to promote nationalist ideas, and thus set the agenda for the debate. Nationalist conflicts arise as a by-product of élites' efforts to persuade the people to accept divisive nationalist ideas." While appreciating the insight, we take the view that explanation of nationalism as a straightforward tool for the authoritarians has a limited power.

22 Recent warm realtionships between Ján Slota and Kia, a representative of not only the foreign but even the 'foreign race' capital, is a telling (but not the only one) example of that.

23 Note that the 2006 election camapign of the SNS featured rather vague natioinalist slo-
    gans, the most prominent being "Slovak government for Slovaks!", "We will return
    Slovakia to the Slovak hands!", and "We are Slovaks! We vote for SNS".
24 We have addressed some of those issues in Učeň 2007b (see in particular references to
    the work of Marušiak and Orogváni) and Učeň 2004.
25 This highlights serious psychological shortcomings in the politics of the previous govern-
    ment which in its diction sounded a bit elitist: "we do right policies; you'd better to get
    ready for enjoying its fruits… some time in future". Fico understood that satisfaction given
    to people should be immediate and it does not need to take the form of policies.
26 Regarding the latter, we believe that 'illiberal staple', related to the commonly shared pop-
    ulist dislike for liberal-democratic constraints, facilitates the cooperation. Considering more
    pragmatic aspects, the parties concerned also shared a protracted opposition experience.
    Their cooperation (may) have been facilitated by the joint concern for accessing power in
    order to enliven their political projects, funnel the material resources to sustain their party
    organizations, and, last but not least, to satisfy ambitions of the 'starving' party activists.
27 National populism as forget by Vladimír Mečiar in the 1990ws was certainly a *par excel-
    lence* opposition strategy in society like Slovakia. There are, however, reasons to doubt
    that its 'replication' could be attractive to the incumbent ruling group given that in the
    past it proved to be a disastrous way of rule.
28 For example, we take the view that politics amenable to analysis in terms of national pop-
    ulism as defined in this text arose also on the Magyar side of the Slovak political scene.
    It took the form of the Coexistence Movement which in 1998 merged into SMK–MKP.
    Admitting our lack of competence to deal with the topics in detail, we believe that it
    should be addressed in some way by this project.

GRIGORIJ MESEŽNIKOV:
National Populism in Slovakia – Defining the Character of the State and Interpreting Select Historic Events

National Populism and the Context of its Existence in Slovakia

In recent years, political players in Slovakia have grown increasingly fond of such patterns of appealing to the electorate that are based on applying populism strategies with strong ethnic-nationalist undertones. This way of addressing voters became typical for the country's political life quite some time ago. Since the 1989 collapse of the communist regime and reinstatement of pluralistic democracy, it has proven to be sufficiently effective and at times brought ample power and political gains to its upholders. The recent revival of national populism is interesting especially because the conditions for its existence are quite different compared to the mid-1990s – they are characterized by generally successful social transformation that helped build foundations of a liberal-democratic regime and achieve the country's integration goals, i.e. its full-fledged membership in the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Alliance (NATO).

The term of "national populism" is generally used to describe political activity (in the multitude of its displays) that focuses on addressing voters via traditional populistic methods[i] while accentuating strong ethnic-nationalist ('national') chords. It applies to a broad spectrum of political players, i.e. not only to supporters of extremist, radical and nationalistic ideas but to all those politicians of various ideological affiliations (including declared ones) whose preferred *modus operandi* combines populist appeal and ethnic nationalism.

It is obvious that the prime mover behind recent activation of national populism forces in Slovakia was the power change that took place after the

2006 parliamentary elections when new government was formed by the coalition of SMER–Social Democracy (SMER-SD) – Slovak National Party (SNS) – People's Party-Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS), i.e. three political subjects that view various elements of national populism as part and parcel of their ideological and political arsenal. These parties' combined election result and their leaders' subsequent decision to form a new ruling coalition cannot be perceived outside the context of national populism as a tool of voter mobilization and a cultural and political bond that binds part of Slovakia's party elite. The working of the national-populism appeal during the period of 2006–2009 has affected the overall atmosphere within society and significantly shaped the environment for mutual interactions between various social groups.

When examining activities of political players that are considered protagonists of national populism in Slovakia, one ought to bear in mind general factors of socio-political as well as historical nature. It was long-term working of these factors that formed the socio-cultural environment in which national populists disseminated their messages and capitalized on people's response to them. Besides ethnicity-related issues they also included other socio-political factors such as constitutional system Slovakia was part of, types of political regimes in these constitutional systems, the character, course and implications of social changes that occurred during periods of government and societal transformation, the definition of statehood and general pattern of power execution preferred by dominant political forces, etc. In the course of the 20th century, Slovakia formed part of five different constitutional systems: Austro-Hungarian Empire, Czechoslovak Republic, wartime Slovak State, restored Czechoslovak Republic and independent Slovak Republic. These systems were home to different political regimes, including monarchist semi-authoritarianism, pluralistic democracy, fascist totalitarianism, restricted 'national' democracy, communist totalitarianism and alternate regimes of liberal and non-liberal democracy between 1990 and 2006. Frequent changes in the system of government and political regime within a relatively short historical period have caused a different degree of various population groups' self-identification with existing and/or obsolete social order, including their self-identification with particular government formations; at the same time, these population groups demonstrated their allegiance to opposing types of political culture (i.e. democratic vs. authoritarian), which immediately influenced their political behaviour as well as political players' preferred strategies of addressing them.

Following the collapse of communist regime in 1989 and subsequent restoration of democratic regime with all procedural attributes, including

electoral competition, political forces that are viewed as populist based on their internal character, program, values, ideological background and preferred methods of voter mobilization became an important part of the country's party system. Since 1992, these forces have regularly posted solid results in parliamentary elections and – in case of favourable power configuration – formed coalition governments that relied on majority in parliament. Such was the case in 1992 when the HZDS formed a majority crypto-coalition government with the SNS (that turned into overt coalition a year later); in 1994 when early elections brought to power the coalition of HZDS – ZRS – SNS; and finally in 2006 when the incumbent administration was formed by the coalition of SMER-SD – SNS – ĽS-HZDS.

The general approach to power execution may be viewed as the basic criterion to distinguish between different protagonists of populist politics in Slovakia; based on this typology, one may identify 'hard' (authoritarian) and 'soft' (prevailingly non-authoritarian) populism. In early stages of transformation, i.e. before the process of EU integration was launched, Slovakia's political landscape generated the first generation of populist politicians (i.e. 'hard' populists gathered at the time in the HZDS and SNS); the second generation of populists began to emerge during the period of reviving the country's integration ambitions (i.e. between 1998 and 2002) and gained its political foothold immediately before and after Slovakia's EU accession when 'soft' populists (SMER-SD) became a dominant political force.[2] The contemporary period may be characterized by mutual cooperation between both generations and types of populist actors; in 2006, their cooperation was upgraded to the government level.

Protagonists of National Populism

A typical representative of national populism in Slovakia is the Slovak National Party (SNS). The party was founded in spring 1990 by the means of publicly subscribing to the legacy of the historic SNS; several months later, in the first free parliamentary elections in the country's modern history, it received enough votes to qualify to the national parliament, the Slovak National Council. It has evolved into a relevant political subject and has been represented in parliament ever since 1990, except for the hiatus between 2002 and 2006 when it remained outside the assembly due to an internal rift that led to a defeat in the 2002 elections.

Between 1990 and 1992, the party was the weightiest political representative of Slovak separatism. Relatively soon after it emerged and entered parliament, it began to champion the idea of Slovakia's state sovereignty.

Between 1993 and 1994, between 1994 and 1998 and after the 2006 elections it was part of government, which enabled it to participate in shaping policies in all relevant areas of public life. It is a radical nationalistic force that uses far-right and anti-communist rhetoric. It is a sworn opponent of the concept of civically defined political nation and advocates the concept of ethnic nation. The SNS views the Slovak Republic as a national state of ethnic Slovaks; with respect to ethnic minorities, it promotes the concept of assimilation that manifests primarily – but is not limited to – in *a priori* questioning ethnic Hungarians' loyalty to the Slovak Republic. On the 'theoretical' level, this shows through questioning the fact that ethnic Hungarians living in Slovakia are of truly Hungarian origin; in practice, it shows through proposing measures that complicate practical exercise of ethnic Hungarians' rights in the field of political representation, use of language, education, culture, regional development and maintaining ties with Hungary, which ethnic Hungarians consider their motherland in terms of culture and language. In the mid-1990s, the SNS unsuccessfully campaigned to introduce the system of so-called alternative education for children belonging to ethnic minorities. Its practical implementation would have amounted to an irreparable decline in the standard of exercising minority rights with all sorts of political implications.

SNS representatives have become notorious for using confrontational rhetoric and aggressive tone; they regularly utter offensive statements with respect to members of ethnic minorities and their political representatives. The party appeals to people with proclivity to nationalist views and authoritarian concepts of society's political organization.

Another political subject that can be considered a protagonist of national populism in Slovakia is the People's Party-Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS). The party was founded in spring 1991 as a result of internal rift within Public against Violence (VPN), a revolutionary and reformist movement that was the architect of peacefully toppling the communist regime in 1989 and won in the first free parliamentary elections in June 1990. The initiators of the split led by then Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar advocated a model of transformation different from the 'federal' model that was implemented in Slovakia between 1990 and 1992 by VPN and its coalition partners. Eventually they founded the HZDS that immediately gained political support, especially among those voters who were disenchanted by the course of the transformation process. Another item on the movement's political agenda and an important factor behind its strong voter support was the issue of dissolving the Czechoslovak Federation. The HZDS profiled itself as the promoter of Slovaks' 'national aspirations' and

proposed solutions to Czechoslovakia's constitutional system that went beyond the framework of the existing federative model. After scoring a resounding success in the 1992 elections, the HZDS became the principal political force behind the 'velvet divorce' in Slovakia; ever since 1993, it has portrayed itself as "the architect of Slovak statehood".

Ever since its emergence, the HZDS presented itself as a "nationally oriented" and "pro-Slovak" political force. In the most flagrant form, its 'national' orientation was furthered by a group of party leaders whose views regarding issues such as interethnic relations, the country's history, the government's character, etc. were not essentially different from those shared by SNS leaders. Between 1992 and 1998, this group of HZDS officials enjoyed the broadest space to pursue their activities and influence the party's actions as well as its program and ideological profile. Between 1994 and 1998, the HZDS was the backbone of the ruling coalition whose authoritarian methods were incompatible with values of liberal democracy, which caused serious democratic deficits in the country's internal development and undermined its integration aspirations. By 1998, though, the nationalist wing began to lose its grip due to gradual electoral and general political debilitation of the HZDS. Eight years in the opposition brought about a dramatic decline in voter support and forced the party to regroup. Eventually, the 'nationally oriented' wing was elbowed out of the party; however, the departure of nationalist leaders and authentic upholders of the 'national' agenda does not mean that the HZDS cannot be considered a party of national populism anymore.

The third important representative of national populism in Slovakia is SMER–Social Democracy (SMER-SD) that declares its social-democratic orientation. The party was founded in 1999 by Robert Fico, former Vice-Chairman of the Party of Democratic Left (SDL) who refused to toe the party line and moved on to fulfil his own political and leadership ambitions.

SMER-SD has covered a remarkable journey since its founding, moving from the initial concept of a "non-ideological party of pragmatic solutions" to a third-way party that according to its leaders amalgamated values of conservatism, social democracy and liberalism (yet later those of "leftists, social democrats and national liberals") and finally to a party with proclaimed social-democratic profile. From the very outset, the nationalist element has been popular among SMER-SD leaders. It has manifested through their adoption of "pro-Slovak" (i.e. pro-national) positions on issues concerning interethnic and international relations, interpretation of various historic events and figures, general perception of society's development after the fall of communism and pursued alliance strategies. When seeking

a viable ideological anchor, party leaders did not hesitate to use nationalist arguments. For instance Boris Zala, former party vice-chairman and one of its principal ideologists wrote in 2002 that the third way concept (i.e. the party's new ideology) according to SMER-SD included a "renewed search for national meaning and historical anchoring of Slovakness".[3]

SMER-SD earned parliamentary representation in the 2002 parliamentary elections. Between 2002 and 2006, it behaved as an implacable opposition force that criticized all relevant socio-economic reform measures adopted by the centre-right administration. It promised to carry out fundamental changes once it would seize power. Its communication with voters, sweeping criticism of government's performance and proposed measures to tackle existing problems all showed clear traces of populism. Messages of nationalistic nature formed an integral part of the party's mobilization strategies. The party confirmed its 'pro-national' orientation by cooperating with nationalistic-oriented subjects before presidential and regional elections in 2004.

The decision of SMER-SD to form a new administration with the SNS and the ĽS-HZDS after the 2006 elections was catalyzed primarily by power ambitions. Leaders of SMER-SD tried to justify the decision by the motivation to create favourable conditions for implementation of socio-economic policies based on social-democratic values (e.g. building the welfare state).

According to SMER-SD leaders, the Robert Fico administration pursues social-democratic policies while its coalition partners endorse these policies and even adapt their own priorities to them. In fact, two minor ruling parties actively pursue their own ideas in several areas, which in the case of radically nationalist SNS leads to direct attempts to meddle with the established system of minority rights' implementation, for instance in the field of education and use of native languages. Government participation of the SNS allows its leaders as well as representatives of related opinion streams to take an active part in the public discourse and sway it toward strengthening the concept of ethnic nationalism. This leads to a general change in overall social atmosphere, including the area of interethnic relations.

There was one more relevant subject of the populist type on Slovakia's political scene, namely the Association of Slovak Workers (ZRS) that was part of the ruling coalition between 1994 and 1998. Describing this party as a typical protagonist of national populism would be little far-fetched, mostly because the element of ethnic nationalism was largely absent from its program profile, its voter mobilization strategies and its practical performance. Nevertheless, it was a populist political subject that attracted vot-

ers mostly by emphasizing social issues, opposing systemic changes within society after the fall of communism in general and liberal economic reforms in particular and sharing nostalgia for "socially just" society before November 1989. In terms of orientation the ZRS resembled a far-left organization of the neo-communist type, this despite the absence of references to the communist or Marx-Leninist ideology from its program documents and its leaders' public statements. Although the ZRS was not a typical national populism subject, its participation in government alongside the HZDS and SNS created favourable conditions for implementation of policies of national populism.

The actual stance of national populists on various types of mutual interactions (i.e. dialogue or conflict) between particular social groups in Slovakia is not only reflected in their positions on issues concerning ethnic minorities (although this is where ethnic nationalism is manifested the most vividly) but also on issues such as understanding the fabric of society, defining the character of the system of government, choosing the concept of nation, tackling the dichotomy of 'ethnic' vs. 'civil', general harmony between the political creed and liberal-democratic values and interpretation of national history, including perception of particular historical periods, events and figures.

Defining the Character of the State

Between 1994 and 1998, during the reign of 'hard' populists from the ruling coalition of HZDS – ZRS – SNS, leading protagonists of national populism strove to emphasize their exceptional role in the process of founding independent Slovakia, a special value of the national state, Slovakia's state independence as the top social priority, and superiority of interests of government and its institutions over those of individuals. At this point, emergence of the independent Slovak Republic was quite a recent history and the process of building state institutions had not yet been fully completed. The degree of Slovak citizens' self-identification with their recently-emerged country was relatively low; furthermore, for a significant part of the population the acceptance of former Czechoslovakia's dissolution was mixed with frustration over their own incapacity to put through a different solution to the constitutional system issue during the period of 1990–1992. These sentiments were multiplied by authoritarian domestic politics of the Vladimír Mečiar administration that inspired anxiety and provoked protests, especially among people professing pro-democratic values. Members of eth-

nic minorities, particularly ethnic Hungarians, were discouraged from endorsing the new country by nationalism that was manifested on the level of state minority policy in the field of education, culture and use of native languages.

The mentioned circumstances and phenomena created within society favourable conditions for emergence and growth of mass displays of disagreement, protests and support for alternative political concepts. Although representatives of then-ruling parties proclaimed their respect for democratic principles and standards, political practice often contradicted these declarations. Symptomatic in this context was their justification of power measures that flew in the face of democratic standards and traditions as well as arguments they used to dismiss criticism (coming both from within and abroad) the Mečiar administration faced for its authoritarian practices.

Ruling politicians tried to raise among citizens a permanent sense of threat to the fundaments of Slovak statehood; they often put this danger in the context with activities of domestic political opponents, particularly parliamentary opposition and independent media. Relatively shortly after seizing power in the early elections of 1994, the SNS and HZDS came up with an idea of adopting a special act that was supposed to protect state and its institutions as part of the penal law. In fact, it was motivated by the intention to punish citizens who participated in opposition political activities, championed different political concepts including a different understanding of power execution and spread abroad such information on the country's internal development the incumbent administration considered "false" or "untrue". In April 1996, Prime Minister and HZDS Chairman Vladimír Mečiar said in justification of the necessity to pass a "law on the protection of the republic" (an amendment to the Criminal Code) that Slovakia needed such legislation due to "permanent and intensifying assaults on government organs that are designed to bring about their moral and political disintegration and discredit them in the eyes of the public regardless of facts".[4] The proposed amendment to the Criminal Code even sought to protect the state against opinions ruling parties viewed as "unreasonable" and aimed "against statehood". Parliament Chairman Ivan Gašparovič (HZDS) declared that Slovakia is "truly a small and young state that needs to have certain defence systems in the beginning that would eliminate those not always reasonable opinions of some people who within young Slovakia seek to materialize certain measures that are aimed against statehood of the Slovak Republic".[5] MP Kamil Haťapka (SNS) seconded this view by saying that his party considered it inevitable to put through such legislative measures that should prevent "displays of bias and questioning of Slovak

statehood, unjustified attacks against emergence and existence of the state, its territorial integrity and democratic constitutional system".[6]

Representatives of national-populist parties saw threats to Slovak statehood even in attempts to provide critical information on Slovakia's internal situation abroad. For instance, MP Dušan Slobodník (HZDS) accused domestic political opposition and independent media that their criticism of government, particularly "criticism insidiously communicated abroad is an attempt to destroy Slovak statehood".[7] SNS Chairman Ján Slota expanded the list of people potentially targeted by the act on the protection of the republic to include representatives of Hungarian political parties in Slovakia and "other high representatives of Slovak politics" who "very often express themselves in a way that has nothing to do with the fact that they would have a positive relation to the state".[8]

During a party meeting in April 1996, one of HZDS prominent representatives Augustín Marián Húska served a thorough idea about the values on which the HZDS based its activities when building the new state following its emergence in 1993. In his speech, Húska enumerated "seven virtues" of the HZDS that had allegedly predetermined its success in building Slovakia anew. According to him, they included "brilliant improvisation", "complex providence and program creativity", "ability to capitalize on intergeneration synergy", "rootedness in national identity", "rootedness in spiritual experience", "ability to forge social solidarity" and "ability to forge Slovakia's capital-generation layer".[9] The said list of 'virtues' was completely free of any references to values that would indicate orientation on developing the state's democratic character.

According to Húska, the independent Slovak Republic emerged as an "unwanted child of superpowers" and the West's criticism of Slovakia's internal situation had to do with a thousand year-old struggle over the important space in the centre of Europe.[10] HZDS Chairman Mečiar repeatedly called for social unity ("unification") that according to him entailed "especially acknowledging the basic needs of the nation and state we live in and mutually respecting these interests everywhere".[11] In 1997, Mečiar said that "state interests prevail over interests of parties, groups and persons; they must be complied with and furthered everywhere in the world".[12]

The SNS emphasized that Slovakia's independent statehood should be guided by its own original understanding of democracy as opposed to concepts imported from abroad. On the occasion of the 7th anniversary of overthrowing the communist regime, SNS Vice-Chairperson Anna Malíková declared: "The meaning of November 89 is to preserve free, critical and – most of all – original way of thinking so that we are able to prevent oth-

ers from telling us what is and what is not correct or democratic … The principal challenge for the future is to defend an independent and sovereign Slovakia and build it in a way we imagined it to be".[13] According to the SNS, "the most tangible" and "historically most valuable" outcome of the regime change from 1989 was the split of former Czechoslovakia that followed and the subsequent emergence of the independent Slovak Republic, i.e. exercising the Slovak nation's right of self-determination.[14]

When interpreting interests of the state, HZDS representatives always liked to point out that their political subject was their authentic upholder, not only as the initiator of processes that eventually led to emergence of independent Slovakia but also as a political subject that enjoyed the highest voter support. According to this interpretation, activities by opposition forces or any opponents of the government should be perceived as "hostile to the state". SNS leaders embraced identical argumentation. Their party could not boast such a massive voter support as the HZDS could at the time; however, they strove to emphasize the fact that the SNS was the first political subject in Slovakia to further the concept of Slovakia's state independence after November 1989 and therefore it was the true upholder of "national values". Along the same lines, SNS representatives often dismissed criticism from their political and ideological opponents as "anti-national".

While the ZRS, the second largest ruling party in the period of 1994–1998, lacked any detailed concept of Slovakia's statehood, it always advertised its reluctance to embrace fundamental changes introduced after 1989, including the democratic regime. In fact, ZRS leaders viewed various social problems and negative social phenomena as a direct consequence of the regime change. "Our young Slovak Republic is just being born and that's why we struggle with many problems. We create laws and develop the economy, but democracy has brought us a lot of misfortune to us," ZRS Chairman Ján Ľupták said in 1997.[15] "All November 17 means is that we have paid too big a toll for freedom of speech and democracy in the welfare area … This nation had to learn the hard way and that's why we don't subscribe so much to [the ideas] they proclaimed on the streets … After all, November means nothing to me."[16] The anti-capitalist profile of the ZRS was manifested especially through efforts to halt the process of denationalizing economy, particularly privatization of so-called strategic enterprises. The party appealed mostly to people with etatist, egalitarian and anti-free-market views; however, the ZRS electorate was not sufficiently stable and its strongly submissive position in the coalition with the HZDS and SNS was one of principal reasons behind its defeat in the 1998 parliamentary elections.

The attitude to power execution all ruling parties shared between 1994 and 1998 largely stemmed from their preferred model of governance; this understanding became the main driving force behind serious democratic deficits that eventually dashed the country's integration ambitions, led to society's political polarization and strengthened confrontation between principal political forces. These deficits motivated democratically-oriented citizens to increase their participation in the 1998 parliamentary elections. High voter mobilization contributed to changing the political landscape and forming a ruling coalition that comprised non-populist, non-nationalist and pro-democratic parties. For almost eight years that followed (i.e. 1998–2006), national populism parties were banned from the executive.

The key factor that laid the ground for national populists' mutual cooperation after the 2006 elections was that in terms of preferred governance model and political regime, all three parties of the incumbent ruling coalition – SMER-SD, SNS and HZDS – may be described as etatist parties, although etatism in their activities shows to a different degree and is differently accentuated.

SMER-SD openly subscribes to etatism as the foundation of its political profile and advocates government's strong role in a number of areas; etatist paternalism of SMER-SD was fully exposed in a symptomatic statement by its chairman Robert Fico who said at the beginning of 2008 that government should be "the father of all citizens", just like the church is the "mother for believers".[17] The SNS considers an independent Slovak state to be the greatest social value and embodiment of long-term emancipation ambitions of the Slovak nation. The HZDS also emphasizes the importance of independent Slovak statehood; besides, it claims special credit for direct participation in the process of establishing it in 1993.

All ruling parties' positions on the character of the state are affected by ethnic and nationalist approach (i.e. obvious preference of the national principle over the civic one) as well as tendencies to mythologize history, the appropriation syndrome and negligence of issues related to the type of regime, quality of democracy, liberal-democratic foundation of Slovakia's constitutional system and importance of abiding by the principles of constitutional liberalism. Some measures the SNS proposed to ensure proper performance of government's functions directly contradicted basic principles of liberal democracy, for instance repeated proposals to pass a repressive bill on the protection of the republic or to outlaw the party that politically represents the country's ethnic Hungarians. Clear inclination to the concept of national state that is based on the nation's ethnic definition may be demonstrated by peculiar notions about the Slovaks' specific historic role

that are presented by some SNS leaders; for instance, head of the SNS parliamentary caucus Rafael Rafaj said that the consumerist Euro-Atlantic (i.e. Western) culture should be reminded that it has already fulfilled its role in the spiral of history and that it should now make room for Slavic culture to carry on the torch of collective consciousness. According to Rafaj, the chosen nation today is the Slovak nation that is the most moral and politically sinless.[18]

Ever since the 2006 parliamentary elections, two ruling parties (SMER-SD and SNS) have striven to strengthen national (or ethnic) elements of the Slovak statehood on the symbolic level. They do so under the pretext of inevitability to promote patriotism, Slovak identity, national solidarity, etc.

Already the prime minister, Robert Fico declared in July 2007 that "the Slovaks lack a national outburst" and that schools neglect education to patriotism. According to him, Slovakia is being engulfed by "the cancer of indifference, which is only one step away from national unconsciousness".[19] A display of such indifference was inadequate attention most Slovak media paid to "patriotic celebrations" of the Day of St. Constantine and Methodius. At the end of 2007, Fico announced that the cabinet and all ruling parties would in the coming year focus on "awakening people's national consciousness, encouraging their respect for state symbols and deepening general public's patriotism and awareness of Slovak history and historical figures". "[People's] relation to the country is unsatisfactory," Fico said. "Patriotism does not reach the quality one would expect in a developed country in the heart of Europe."[20]

In the past, Fico demonstrated his patriotic orientation through proposals to launch a public debate over possible ways to strengthen people's patriotism and improve their relation to the Slovak state, Slovak statehood and its symbols, for instance listening to the national anthem or raising the national flag at the beginning of each school week. In 2004 he proposed an amendment to the law on state symbols that sought to install a national flag in front of every school in Slovakia.

According to SMER-SD and the SNS, encouraging the Slovaks' patriotism should take place as the process of distinguishing themselves from the Hungarians (this aspect is emphasized by the SNS) as well as from non-nationally oriented and cosmopolitan members of the majority with lukewarm attitudes to patriotism (this aspect has recently become a favourite issue of SMER-SD). This philosophy may be illustrated by Fico's statement from July 2008 in which he emphasized the need to strengthen togetherness ("solidarity") of the Slovaks that must be built as a "sturdy barrier against activities of the peculiar sort of adventurers who undermine

Slovakia's spiritual integrity".[21] In 2007, Fico publicly complained that Slovak media have become a shelter for "spiritual homeless [and] media kibitzers who are unable to identify with their homeland's fate or find their state identity".[22] Typical for this interpretation are efforts to combine ethnic, social and constitutional elements. A good example of this combination was Fico's public scolding of *Sme*, a daily that takes a critical approach to his administration, as "anti-government, anti-national and anti-people".[23] Dividing the Slovaks into true, nationally-oriented ones and those who inadequately identify themselves with independent Slovakia is typical of all parties of the incumbent administration.

In 2000 Fico admitted he "was not happy about splitting Czechoslovakia that had it all going [as a country]" and *de facto* distinguished himself from the category of active protagonists of dissolving it (i.e. the 'true Slovaks')[24]; nine years later, though, SMER-SD leaders have succumbed to so-called appropriation syndrome that previously afflicted mostly SNS and HZDS representatives; symptoms of this syndrome include glorifying all those who initiated and conducted the process of dissolving former Czechoslovakia, criticizing all those who at the time advocated the common Czechoslovak state and disparaging all the problems that accompanied the process of founding independent Slovakia, particularly those caused by authoritarian practices between 1994 and 1998. In 2002, SMER-SD Vice-Chairman Dušan Čaplovič publicly expressed regret over the fact that on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of independent Slovakia's emergence, the Dzurinda administration proposed to bestow high state honours also to personalities that not only did not embrace the concept of independent Slovakia but they "actively opposed it and some of them demonstratively moved abroad afterwards".[25] This view was seconded by HZDS Chairman Vladimír Mečiar who publicly complained in 2002 that "a significant proportion of constitutional posts are held by those who did not want the Slovak Republic as an independent country".[26]

According to Fico, loyalty to national values is an irreplaceable factor determining a country's survival in the modern world. "The only chance to survive in this complicated and unjust environment with dignity and sovereignty is to stick to Slovak national and state interests and pull together, whether we are on the right, on the left or in the middle," Fico declared. "I hereby call on [embracing] such togetherness."[27] Fico also said it was "our duty [to build] Slovak pride" and encouraged the Slovaks to draw inspiration from "the Russians whose pride was restored by President Putin". To a follow-up question reminding him that Russia suffers from a democratic deficit, Fico responded by saying that he did not know what

national pride had to do with democracy.[28] The formulation indicates that in the process of building the state, the incumbent prime minister views the national (or ethnic) element to be much more important than the quality (or democratic substance) of the regime.

In November 2007, SMER-SD issued an official statement that placed the Velvet Revolution of 1989 in the context with the Slovaks' yearning for state independence,[29] this despite the fact that social turmoil in November 1989 was completely free of such undertones; in fact, apart from general opposition to the totalitarian regime, citizens showed mostly support for the common Czechoslovak state and 'return to Europe'.

For the SNS, the use of 'patriotic' motives forms an integral part of its confrontational desire to distinguish the Slovaks particularly from the Hungarians. This may be illustrated by the ongoing process of installing typical Slovak double crosses in various regions of Slovakia, including localities inhabited by mixed Slovak–Hungarian population. According to party leaders, the goal of the entire campaign is to show "the whole world that the Slovak nation is autochthonous on this territory, so that it is clear to everybody where Slovakia is and who is at home here."[30]

The element of confrontation is also obvious in party leaders' references to the Constantine-Methodist tradition as the foundation of the Slovaks' statehood and identity. The SNS emphasizes the Slovaks' exclusive 'patent' to this tradition and juxtaposes it to other cultural traditions, including those that form the foundation of integration groupings Slovakia is part of. According to SNS leaders, "the Constantine-Methodist tradition is the oldest and the most solid part of the Slovaks' identity. The Slovaks are ahead of other nations because the Constantine–Methodist legacy amalgamated in them both eastern and western values of European thinking. The existence of the Slovak Republic shows that the Constantine-Methodist tradition is stronger than Hungarian chauvinism, Prague-invented Czechoslovakism or communist dictatorship."[31]

In 2005, SNS Chairman Ján Slota declared that had the Constantine-Methodist tradition been upheld in Slovakia, its national economy would not have been massively sold out "to foreign hands". Slota called Slovak politicians "vassals who pledge their allegiance to further unspecified Euro-Atlantic values", adding it was necessary to apply on an everyday basis the message of the mission of St. Constantine and Methodius, which is to "defend the Slovak land permanently".[32]

The SNS is the most active of all Slovak parties in fuelling the sense of danger to Slovak statehood and proposing such measures to defend it whose repressive nature contradicts basic principles of liberal democracy.

One of its favourite legislative measures is so-called 'bill on the protection of the republic'. The SNS comes up with some form of the bill in every opportune moment, citing the need to neutralize consequences of Hungarian politicians' activities in Slovakia; the last time the SNS proposed such a bill was in 2008. In the same year, Slota emphasized the principle of ethnic solidarity as the foundation to build mutual relations between citizens and government by stating that Slovak media were obliged to speak of Slovakia being threatened by Hungarians: "Is this democracy to give a bad name to one's compatriots and one's nation and give a good name to those strangers who clearly wish to harm the interests of this nation and this country?"[33]

Interpretation of Select Historic Events

In their interpretation of national history, national populists tend to mythologize and ethnicize history, present the titular nation as older than it is, place its ethnogenesis as far back in history as possible, show clear inclination to positive evaluation of authoritarian historic figures and a tendency to favourable evaluation of historic periods in which the nation was ruled by authoritarian regimes. National populists reproach critics of the said mythologizing approach, including representatives of established academic circles, for insufficient national orientation and attempt to question their professional credibility.

Premier Fico described his administration's attitude to the issue of Slovakia's history as cultivating "sound historicism as part of government policy" with respect to those who underrate the "national" element in history. "Unfortunately, we live in a reality where so-called spin doctors consider everything Slovak good enough to disparage it," he said.[34]

In 2008, SMER-SD chairman attempted to introduce the term of "ancient Slovaks" to the public and professional historical discourse. According to him, "ancient Slovaks" led by King Svätopluk ruled over the Great Moravian Empire while "other states had nothing – maybe some animals wandering around but certainly no state entities".[35] Many academic historians view the theory of "ancient Slovaks" who inhabited the Great Moravian Empire as a mythological construct that does not correspond to findings of historical science.

Fico openly demonstrated his inclination to mythologizing Slovakia's history early in 2008 when he defended the historical figure of highwayman Juraj Janošík and called him the first socialist: "I want to ask the media not to belittle Slovak legends," Fico said. "It's been enough. We

have but [two options]: either respect the Jánošík tradition or replace the nation … Anti-Slovakism still dwells as a hidden bacillus in some Slovak historians. That is why these spiritually homeless people object to a free discussion over new terminology that speaks of ancient Slovaks or King Svätopluk."[36] According to Fico, "the media launched an inquisitorial witch-hunt against everything that is Slovak […]. Only spiritually homeless or nationally ignorant may [strive to] deprive the nation of the legend about Jánošík who struggled against social oppression."[37]

National populists' inclination to positive perception of "nationally-oriented" historical figures with an authoritarian profile may be illustrated by efforts to pass a special law on the merits of Andrej Hlinka, a Catholic priest and one of the Slovak nation's principal political leaders in the first half of the 20th century. The SNS proposed that Hlinka be officially referred to as "the father of the nation". One of the most active protagonists of the idea to pass the special law on Hlinka was SMER-SD Vice-Chairman and Minister of Culture Marek Maďarič who declared that Hlinka's "personality is unambiguous" and "his merits are extraordinary". The positive evaluation of Hlinka would be imposed in an authoritative fashion that, if enforced in practice, could even restrict freedom of scientific research and public discussion. Maďarič called voices arguing that Hlinka's historical profile deserves detailed discussion "perfidious", arguing that "Hlinka's personality deserves mostly respect".[38] In line with this attitude, the SNS directly proposed to punish critical evaluation of Hlinka as "defamation of Hlinka's name". The HZDS also supported 'enacting' Hlinka's merits; according to Chairman Mečiar, his party endorsed the SNS position more than that of the opposition KDH that submitted a more moderate bill on Hlinka.

A special place among historic events whose interpretation is particularly important in terms of impact on Slovakia's socio-political development is emergence and existence of the wartime Slovak State. The official state doctrine of the Slovak Republic is based on the anti-fascist tradition embodied in the Slovak National Uprising of 1944. The modern Slovak Republic is considered a successor to the Czechoslovak Federation but neither legal nor political successor to the wartime Slovak State proclaimed in March 1939; however, a revisionist perception of the period of 1939–1945 has become part of the country's public and political discourse regarding the issue of national history after 1989. An integral part of this perception is the thesis that the wartime state (also called "the first Slovak Republic") was *de facto* a predecessor of the modern Slovak Republic, efforts to separate the totalitarian regime established by the fascist Hlinka's Slovak

People's Party (HSLS) from the state itself, portray life in Slovakia during this period in a more positive light, disparage the regime's repressive, undemocratic and racist character, shift responsibility for perpetrated war crimes, including deportations of Jews, from domestic actors onto their external partners (i.e. Nazi Germany) and emphasize the positive role of its president Jozef Tiso.

The said inclination to favourable perception of the wartime Slovak State leads to (directly or indirectly) confrontational efforts to distinguish from certain opinion or identity groups, including people with anti-fascist and liberal-democratic views, supporters of the common Czechoslovak state, the Jews, the Roma, the Czechs, non-Catholics, etc. After 1989, principal upholders of revisionist views of the period of 1939–1945 included nationalistically-oriented cultural associations and individuals (including some historians), Matica slovenská, and a significant part of the Catholic Church leaders; on the level of the country's party system, it was primarily the SNS.

The SNS began to advertise its positive views on Slovak statehood from World War II immediately after its founding in 1990 and furthered them every time it was part of government (i.e. in 1993–1994, 1994–1998 and 2006–2009). In March 1998 it issued a declaration in honour of founding the Slovak State in 1939, calling it the beginning of the first sovereign statehood of the modern Slovak nation. According to the SNS, March 14, 1939, "clearly showed the Christian values to which the Slovak nation must be anchored".[39]

The SNS insisted on introducing *The History of Slovakia and the Slovaks*, a history textbook by revisionist historian Milan Ďurica, to primary schools' curriculum. SNS Vice-Chairperson Anna Malíková called the book whose author strove to excuse deportations of Jews during World War II a "very valuable and objective overview of Slovakia's history".[40] In April 1998, the SNS publicly called Tiso a "martyr who defended the nation and Christianity against Bolshevism and liberalism". Addressing the nature of Slovakia's political and constitutional regime between 1939 and 1945, the party declared: "The concept of harmonizing state of the estates that complied with social teachings of the Catholic Church with a balancing role of parliament surpassed European development in the sensitive social area during this period".[41]

In October 1998, SNS Chairman Slota openly called for Tiso's rehabilitation, stating: "Those who claim that the wartime Slovak State in 1939–1945 was fascist simply play their mean dirty tricks."[42] Then SNS spokesman Rafael Rafaj who became the head of the party's parliamentary

caucus in 2006 argued it was misleading to use not only the term of 'clerical fascism' but even the term of fascism as such with respect to the Slovak State's regime; according to him, the term was made up by the communist propaganda that used it to refer to "everything that stands against communism in any way".[43]

Perhaps the most overt attempt to excuse the so-called solution to the Jewish issue during World War II in Slovakia was presented by late MP Bartolomej Kunc (SNS), former Chairman of the SNS Professional Club for Christian Policy. In an interview for TV Nova in May 1996, Kunc resorted to 'explanatory' arguments of socio-economic nature by stating: "The Slovak Republic was not based on racist laws. Those economic aspects that you apparently have in mind, those were brought to force even before adopting the Jew Code that later paved the way for such things as deportations. It was an attempt to correct in some way an unfortunate state of affairs when too big a share of national wealth was controlled by too few people – only 3.6 percent of the population. This concentration of wealth in Jewish hands had its specifics. Those who did not live here and did not study the issue have no idea about this. The point is that the Slovak people were exploited and impoverished, which was a way to transfer ownership of national wealth into the hands of that small group of citizens".[44]

In 2000 Slota defended a decision by the Žilina municipal council to unveil a plaque in honour of Jozef Tiso, arguing that other countries also honoured their fascist leaders: "In Hungary's capital [they have a statue of] Horthy, who was a big time fascist, on a big horse," Slota said. "All around Italy you see countless busts of the fascist Mussolini, in Germany and Austria you see loads of various plaques celebrating or commemorating Hitler."[45]

Two years later, Slota demanded that "all circumstances and true information on the execution of Tiso be made available to the Slovak public". He declared that if political meddling with the trial and abuse of justice is established, Tiso should be rehabilitated. Slota called conviction and execution of Tiso a "vendetta" and a "murder commissioned by the Czechs and communists".[46]

Slota came up with a truly peculiar interpretation of the wartime Slovak State, calling it an important survival factor of the Slovaks. "[This state] saved the nation from liquidation by German and Hungarian anti-Slavic fascism," he said. In 2005, Rafaj declared that "time has come to [proclaim] and socially accept March 14, 1939, as the date of establishing historically first Slovak statehood", placing the wartime Slovak State onto the "contin-

uum of unchanged endeavour to exercise the nation's right of self-determination within its own state".[47]

SNS leaders' positive views of the "first Slovak statehood" were automatically reflected in their negative perception of the Slovak National Uprising (SNP). In 2002 Slota declared that the SNP laid the ground for communist totality and the country's Soviet satellitization, adding that the SNP "was abused for 40 years to promote red totality" and that it "has lost its moral credit".[48]

After 2006, official views presented by SNS representatives regarding the period of 1939–1945 saw a slight shift. While party chairman Slota virtually avoids making any public comments on the issue, positive views are most frequently presented by a former emigrant and now MP for SNS Jozef Rydlo. According to him, Slovakia's constitutional history did not begin on September 1, 1992, when the Slovak National Council passed the currently valid Slovak Constitution but on July 21, 1939, the day of adopting the constitution of the wartime Slovak State. "Without the first Slovak Republic there would be no second," Rydlo said, arguing that the Slovak State's political regime should be distinguished from the state itself. Like other SNS leaders, Rydlo condemns deportations of Jews from Slovakia as abominable practices; on the other hand, he opposes attempts to disparage the state as such, reasoning that the former Czechoslovakia was also ruled by a communist regime. "Nobody questions existence of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic just because it was undemocratic," he said.[49]

But the most significant shift in SNS leaders' interpretation of the World War II period in recent years may be noticed with respect to the SNP. In 2004 SNS Vice-Chairperson Anna Malíková-Belousovová called the SNP an act of "the Slovaks' opposition to fascism" but refused that the move was aimed against their own state. "The SNP shall enjoy an honourable place in Slovakia's history," she said.[50] In August 2006, Belousovová declared that the SNS took its hat off to hundreds and thousands of victims claimed by the struggle against "perverted fascist ideology and its upholders".[51] These statements illustrate SNS leaders' overall perception of Slovakia's history during World War II, which is full of confusing and ambiguous interpretations. While these statements cannot be qualified as intentional nourishing of pro-fascist sentiments, they were undoubtedly inspired by efforts to appeal to those nationalist-oriented voters who view positive perception of 'the first Slovak statehood' as a display of true 'patriotism'.

On a declaratory level, SMER-SD fully embraces the ideological legacy of the anti-fascist Slovak National Uprising. Its chairman Robert Fico repeatedly presented public statements in which he unambiguously con-

demned "the fascist regime" of the wartime Slovak State led by Tiso as well as war crimes perpetrated during that period. In order to strengthen his party's image of a principled anti-fascist force, Fico declared in 2007 that he would not have any attempts to revise the government's official position on the SNP, claiming that "the cabinet will clamp down on [anybody] questioning the Slovak National Uprising".[52]

However, several serious cracks recently appeared in this seemingly integrated attitude of SMER-SD. It was not only its government cooperation with the SNS whose leaders harbour ambiguous views of the wartime Slovak State. Far more importantly, it was party leaders' tolerance of the fact that one MP for SMER-SD co-authored an anthology of odes to Jozef Tiso and their repeated defence of professional credit of historians who openly supported his views on particular issues of the Slovaks' ancient history; some of them were revisionist historians who openly advertise their sympathies to the wartime Slovak State and its President Jozef Tiso.

Besides, the unambiguousness of officially declared anti-fascist positions of SMER-SD has been rendered increasingly relative by the constant support chairman Fico shows to leaders of Matica slovenská who are the most vocal members of the opinion stream that demands a revision of the standing official anti-fascist doctrine in interpretation of the World War II period, including political rehabilitation of Jozef Tiso.

Although the HZDS has officially subscribed to the SNP legacy since its founding, some representatives of the party's nationalist wing between 1991 and 2002 presented apologetic statements regarding the wartime Slovak State and critical views of the SNP, which put them on the same platform with upholders of revisionist concepts. For instance, a group of MPs for HZDS in 1997 visited the parental home of Jozef Tiso in Bytča. The visit was supposed to demonstrate the party's endeavour to evaluate the president of the wartime Slovak State in a more "balanced" manner in order to "shed more light [onto his personality] … eliminate various lies and bias … and assess all his negative but also positive acts with cool head".[53]

In summer 1997, then HZDS spokesman Vladimír Hagara defended the already mentioned history textbook *The History of Slovakia and the Slovaks* that featured actual adoration of the wartime Slovak State and tried to make light of war crimes its regime perpetrated with respect to Jews, which was the main reason why the book's distribution to primary schools was halted on a request by the European Commission. According to Hagara, Ďurica's publication was a "well researched piece of science work that deserves admiration and respect of all Slovaks".[54] At that time, though, HZDS

Chairman Vladimír Mečiar openly labelled the wartime Slovak State's regime as "fascist".[55]

In recent years, ĽS-HZDS tried to avoid the public debate on issues related to the wartime Slovak State and SNP; occasionally, it releases rather general and vague statements. "Historians owe us a lot regarding the issue of [wartime] Slovak State," Mečiar declared in 2007. He also made light of the fact that positive views about the wartime Slovak State appeared increasingly frequently in Slovakia by alleging that "the entire [Czech] cabinet visited the grave of [Czech Protectorate's Prime Minister Emil] Hácha and the entire Hungarian cabinet visited the grave of [Hungary's Regent Miklós] Horthy". According to Mečiar, the issue of "the first Slovak Republic" should not be turned into an acute political issue.[56]

SMER-SD leaders' preference of ethno-national element over the civic-democratic one clearly showed on the occasion of commemorating the 90th anniversary of founding the first Czechoslovak Republic (ČSR). Party leaders issued several public statements in which they emphasized that founding of the Czechoslovak state in 1918 amounted to materialization of the Slovaks' emancipation efforts and desires to liberate from "an almost thousand-year Hungarian hegemony" and terminate "an almost thousand-year forced coexistence between Slovakia and Hungary"[57] and that existence of the ČSR allowed for "further development of attributes such as Slovak nation and Slovak statehood". The fact that the ČSR was primarily a state with a democratic system of government was largely overlooked in public statements by SMER-SD; while they did positively evaluate "democratic environment" of the first ČSR, they simultaneously pointed out that "a failure to tackle social issues led the first ČSR into a serious economic crisis that befell Slovakia in particular".[58]

Symptomatic for SMER-SD is its evaluation of the country's communist past. Here, the party applies a 'balanced' approach that combines general acknowledgment of the fact that the pre-November regime was undemocratic with assertions that communism was socially more just and provided greater social security to citizens. When comparing the existing regime to the communist one, party leaders tend to emphasize negative phenomena of the country's post-November development.

In 2003 Fico declared that the communist regime was more socially-oriented and that people were better off back then. While acknowledging that the Velvet Revolution of November 1989 did bring about important political and civil rights, he claimed that these rights had become merely formal, which was the biggest disappointment. Fico believes that strong financial groups and corporations have seized control over Slovakia and that people's

standard of living is worse today than it was under the communist regime. Also, he is convinced that the Velvet Revolution was a classic political coup d'état that had been prepared long before from the outside – as opposed to from within Czechoslovakia – and that students and other citizens were brought to the streets only to make an impression of masses demanding changes.[59]

When evaluating certain symbolic events related to the communist regime (e.g. the anniversary of the communist putsch in February 1948), SMER-SD opts for 'emergency exits' such as a declaration in which the party claimed that it "looks into the future and leaves evaluation of historical events up to historians. Everything negative from the past should be condemned and everything positive should be made an example of".[60]

While the party emphasizes positive aspects of particular Slovak protagonists of the communist regime in specific historical periods (e.g. Gustáv Husák during the SNP, Vladimír Clementis after World War II when he was executed by the communist regime or Alexander Dubček as a leading figure of the Prague Spring), it tends to avoid addressing more controversial aspects of their respective political careers.

The HZDS verbally subscribes to the legacy of November 1989 as a historic event that removed totality and paved the way to restoring democracy in the country. The HZDS presents itself as a direct successor to political forces generated by the civic movement that led to toppling the oppressive communist regime. In 1998, the official website of then-prime minister Vladimír Mečiar featured information that he was "one of leading personalities of 1989, which was the landmark of bringing down the communist regime". Since the said information was not even remotely true, it was eventually removed from the website;[61] however, the case illustrates that the HZDS does not hesitate to resort to expedient interpretation of important historic events that portrays the subject in a better, more 'democratic' light with respect to November 1989.

On the other hand, the HZDS never took the initiative of entering public debates on various aspects of the country's development during the period of communism and never used anti-communist rhetoric. The closest any HZDS official ever came to criticizing the past regime was MP Ján Cuper (HZDS) who in 1996 called the communist regime a "failed experiment".[62] During the period of democratic deformations caused by the authoritarian rule by the populist coalition of HZDS – ZRS – SNS when democratic opposition pointed out that government's power practices contradicted basic democratic principles and values of the Velvet Revolution and organized protest rallies designed to revive the November legacy, the HZDS

accused its representatives of "trying to usurp November 17 and score polit-
ical points from it".[63] Such diction clearly indicates that the HZDS never
quite embraced the legacy and values of November 1989.

Future Prospects Regarding Activities of National Populists in Slovakia

Mobilization strategies used by national populists in Slovakia after 1989
have proven sufficiently effective not only in terms of drumming up voter
support and gaining a strong power position but also in the sense of influ-
encing the public discourse and overall atmosphere in society. Long-term
presence of national populism political forces on the country's political
landscape gave birth to a certain communication culture that is based on
confrontation and conflict. This culture creates strong division lines between
different population groups by emphasizing their collective identity as a
solid bond used to distinguish themselves from other identity groups. The
said method of political communication complicates the civic dialogue by
its very non-dialogic nature.

On the verbal level, the national-populist appeal shows especially
through confrontational attitudes with respect to members of ethnic minori-
ties and upholders of different opinions. On the one hand, chief protago-
nists of this appeal have toned down their radicalism after the 2006 elec-
tions; on the other hand, patterns of the national-populist appeal have begun
to penetrate the general public discourse on a much more massive scale
compared to the period of 1998–2006. After 2006, national populists
enjoyed a much stronger power position; they strove to use it to transform
their concepts of various aspects of society development into government
policies, including those in the field of education, culture and ethnic minori-
ties. In other words, upholders of radical nationalistic views gained a chance
to bring their ideological views from the political spectrum's margin into
its centre.

Naturally, effectiveness of national populists' mobilization strategies has not
only an ethnic-nationalist dimension but also a social one. Strengthening
populist parties' position in Slovakia in recent years should be viewed in
the context of socio-economic developments, an area where thorough liber-
al reforms were implemented after 1998 but especially between 2002 and
2006. Some population groups' aversion to these reforms' social impact
(actual or fictitious) combined with lingering anti-capitalist and anti-liberal

sentiments created a generally favourable social environment for populists and elevated to power the segment of the political elite that is appreciated by voters for its ability to lead confrontational struggles, use militant rhetoric, expose imaginary enemies and defend collective entities national populists like to identify themselves with (i.e. people, state or nation). The nationalist appeal falls quite naturally within this formula.

For quite some time, Slovakia's public discourse in general and political discourse in particular has featured elements that do not encourage the intercultural dialogue. Most importantly, it is deeply rooted vigilance with respect to the country's largest ethnic minority that is fuelled by the historical legacy as well as by contemporary social actors' efforts to capitalize on this vigilance on a number of levels (e.g. education, culture, party politics, international relations and foreign policy, etc.). Secondly, it is the lingering perception of the national state that is defined purely ethnically. Thirdly, it is ambivalence in evaluating certain key events of the Slovaks' national history. Last but not least, it is relatively high voter support for political forces that use the method of confrontation as the principal tool to achieve the set goals, including the type of confrontation that has a potential to mobilize large population groups.

Since the national-populist type of appealing to voters and preference of confrontation is deeply rooted in all three parties of the incumbent ruling coalition (particularly in the SNS and SMER-SD), it would be naďve to expect a real improvement in conditions for intercultural civic dialogue in Slovakia as long as these parties remain dominant ruling forces. Their evolution toward more moderate forms of appealing to voters is very unlikely in this situation; on the contrary, they may further step up their aggressive rhetoric under certain circumstances (e.g. lingering problems in Slovak–Hungarian relations, potential social and political turmoil caused by the world economic crisis or declining voter support). Still, only declining voter support for national populists may in the long term create favourable conditions for resuming mutual dialogue and cooperation between representatives of different social groups.

Notes

1   These methods include appeals to ordinary people via promises to protect their interests against those who do not care for them in an apparent effort to attract so-called protest voters; harsh criticism of the political establishment, incumbent administration and established 'mainstream' parties for their alleged corruption; unclear program orientation and proclaiming 'people's character' of one's own political creed; attempts to appeal to the broadest possible electorate combined with labelling certainly social groups as 'isolated'

from the common folk (e.g. the wealthy, capitalists, sophisticated intellectuals, etc.); egalitarian motives in addressing voters and generally anti-elitist rhetoric; advertising one's own 'know-how' to solve existing social maladies; promises of swift changes for the better; adapting proposed solutions to prevailing public opinion trends, etc.

2   For further information, please see Mesežnikov, Grigorij – Gyárfášová, Oľga – Bútora, Martin – Kollár, Miroslav: "Slovakia" in Mesežnikov, Grigorij – Gyárfášová, Oľga – Smilov, Daniel (eds.): *Populist Politics and Liberal Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe* (Bratislava: Institute for Public Affairs, 2008).

3   Zala, Boris: "Kam smeruje cesta SMER-u" ['Where Does SMER's Path Lead?'], *Sme* daily, September 26, 2002.

4   "Vladimír Mečiar tvrdí, že Slovensko potrebuje zákon na ochranu štátu" ['Vladimír Mečiar Claims Slovakia Needs State Protection Act'], *Sme* daily, April 1, 1996.

5   "Podľa I. Gašparoviča má Trestný zákon ochrániť malú a mladú Slovenskú republiku pred nerozumným konaním" ['Criminal Code Is Supposed to Protect Small and Young Slovak Republic from Imprudent Actions, says I. Gašparovič'], *Národná obroda* daily, October 22, 1996.

6   "Podľa K. Haťapku zo SNS treba predchádzať útokom médií proti štátnosti a územnej celistvosti SR" ['Media Attacks on Statehood and Territorial Integrity of the Slovak Republic Should Be Prevented, says K. Haťapka of SNS'], *Sme* daily, October 16, 1996.

7   "D. Slobodník podozrieva opozíciu a časť novinárov z pokusov o deštrukciu slovenskej štátnosti" ['D. Slobodník Suspects Opposition, Some Journalists of Attempts to Destroy Slovak Statehood'], *Národná obroda* daily, October 4, 1996.

8   "J. Slota: Chceme upozorniť na nebezpečenstvá" ['J. Slota: We Mean to Warn about Dangers'], *Národná obroda* daily, August 17, 1995.

9   Hrabko, Juraj – Kotian, Robert: "Ich záujmy musia byť záujmami štátu" ['Their Interests Must be Identical with the State's'], *Sme* daily, April 3, 1996.

10 Fajčíková, Kveta: "Podľa Húsku SR bola nechceným dieťaťom veľmocí, ktoré by nás radšej videli v košiari" ['The Slovak Republic Was an Unwanted Child of Superpowers that Would Rather See It Sheep-Folded, Says Húska'], *Sme* daily, December 16, 1996.

11 *Nemôžeme byť abstraktní* ['We Cannot Afford to Be Abstract'], an interview of Nora Slišková, Pavol Minárik and Ján Škoda with Vladimír Mečiar, *Pravda* daily, July 4, 1996.

12 "Keď strany prestanú znásilňovať štát, niet zábrany, aby všetci mohli byť znovu bratia – tvrdí V. Mečiar" ['Once Parties Stop Violating the State, There Is No Hindrance to All People Being Brothers Again, Says V. Mečiar'], *Sme* daily, June 27, 1997.

13 "SNS: Budujeme Slovensko, aké sme si ho predstavovali" ['SNS: We Build Slovakia as We Imagined It'], *Národná obroda* daily, November 16, 1996.

14 "Za najcennejší výsledok „novembra" považuje SNS zánik federácie" ['SNS Views Dissolution of Federation as the Most Valuable Result of 'November''], *Sme* daily, November 18, 1996.

15 "Podľa J. Ľuptáka demokracia priniesla mnoho nešťastia" ['Democracy Brought a Lot of Misfortune According to J. Ľupták'], *Národná obroda* daily, April 17, 1997.

16 "November 1989 bol pre niektorých politikov zážitkom, pre Jána Ľuptáka ničím" ['Some Politicians View November 1989 as Experience but to Ján Ľupták It Holds No Importance'], *Sme* daily, November 17, 1997.

17 Uličianska, Zuzana: "Fico: Cirkev matkou, štát otcom" ['Fico: Mother Church, Father State'], *Sme* daily, January 25, 2008.

18 Leško, Marián: "Rafael Rafaj: v službách Jána Slotu" ['Rafael Rafaj: In Service of Ján Slotu'], *Sme* daily, May 26, 2008.

19 "Sviatok: Fico na Devíne vyzýval na výchovu k vlastenectvu" ['Holiday: Fico in Devín Called on Education to Patriotism'], *SITA* news agency, July 5, 2007.

20 "Fico: Kritizuje Slovákov, že nie sú dosť vlastenecki, chce to zmeniť" ['Fico: Criticizes the Slovaks for Lack of Patriotism, Aims to Change It'], *SITA* news agency, December 18, 2007.

21 "Politici vyzývali na vlastenectvo" ['Politicians Appealed on Patriotism'], *Sme* daily, July 7, 2008.

22 "Fico: V médiách sú duchovní bezdomovci" ['Fico: Media Home to Spiritual Homeless'], www.sme.sk, August 29, 2007.

23 "Fico oprášil slovník 50. rokov" ['Fico Brushed Up 1950s Vocabulary'], *Sme* daily, September 19, 2008.

24 "Som pripravený byť predsedom vlády" ['I Am Prepared to Be Prime Minister'], an interview of Štefan Hríb with Robert Fico, *Domino forum* weekly, No. 50/2000.

25 ": Sú proti niektorým návrhom na štátne vyznamenania" [' Opposes Some State Honour Nominations'], *SITA* news agency, December 18, 2002.

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KÁLMÁN PETŐCZ:

Slovakia since 2004 – National Populism and the Hungarian Issue

Slovakia's Entry to EU and NATO: a Turning Point[1]

In the second half of 2004, the pace of political development as well as economic and structural reforms in Slovakia slowed down. After the country had accomplished two crucial foreign and domestic policy objectives – namely accession to the North Atlantic Alliance (NATO) and the European Union (EU) – most political and social players began to display certain signs of fatigue.

Simultaneously, emotions began to prevail in mutual Slovak–Hungarian relations, this time on account of Hungary's referendum on granting double citizenship to ethnic Hungarians living in neighbouring countries that had been initiated by the World Federation of Hungarians and supported by former Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and his Fidesz party along with other right-wing parties. On the other hand, the ruling socialists and their coalition partners, namely the Association of Free Democrats (SZDSZ) refused to endorse the referendum, which eventually led to its failure.[2] Ethnic Hungarians across the region accepted the plebiscite's outcome with disappointment, desertedness and betrayal, especially in Transylvania (Romania), Trans-Carpathian Ukraine and Vojvodina (Serbia).[3] Members of Slovakia's Hungarian minority felt a little less offended, mostly because Slovakia had already been a full-fledged member of the EU. Nevertheless, the Party of Hungarian Coalition (SMK–MKP) endorsed the idea of double citizenship for ethnic Hungarians in the region out of solidarity, provoking displeasure on the part of Slovak political parties.

Meanwhile, contradictions among Slovak ruling parties sparked by financial scandals involving Pavol Rusko, Minister of Economy and

Chairman of the ruling Alliance of a New Citizen (ANO), grew irreconcilable. Prime Minister Mikuláš Dzurinda eventually initiated Rusko's removal from his cabinet post. As a direct result, the ANO split up and the total number of independent deputies in the National Council of the Slovak Republic, the country's parliament, on whom the Dzurinda minority administration relied reached one fifth of all members of parliament. Leaders of all ruling parties, including SMK–MKP, openly began to speak of inevitability to call early parliamentary elections. At last, the Gordian knot was cut by the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) that on February 7, 2006, left the ruling coalition in protest against its coalition partners' refusal to endorse the Treaty between Slovakia and the Holy See on Conscientious Objection. The assembly almost immediately approved a proposal to hold early parliamentary elections, which acting Parliament Chairman Béla Bugár called for June 17, 2006.

Nothing now stood in the way of launching an election campaign that may be described as somewhat peculiar. Not only did hostility among formerly ruling parties increased but chairmen of two largest opposition parties, namely Robert Fico (SMER-SD) and Vladimír Mečiar (ĽS-HZDS), were at loggerheads with each other. As a result, all relevant parties blew their own horn but they simultaneously kept the back door open to their potential government participation in any possible combination. Fico's criticism was targeted particularly at the Slovak Democratic and Christian Union–Democratic Party (SDKÚ) and especially its chairman Mikuláš Dzurinda. The same was true vice versa. An obvious conclusion was that a government comprising these two parties was unthinkable; yet, analysts did not exclude that eventuality either.

The only alternative that was *a priori* ruled out by all political analysts, commentators and party leaders was government cooperation between the Slovak National Party (SNS) and SMK–MKP. The former party's campaign was built on virulent anti-Hungarian rhetoric; the SNS openly campaigned for a 'Slovak' government (i.e. free of ethnic Hungarians' representatives) while accusing the SDKÚ and the KDH of "collaboration". The SNS campaign also mobilized SMK–MKP voters, although they were not entirely satisfied with the party's performance in previous years; disenchantment was observed especially in some districts of the Nitra region and in poorer parts of the Gemer region and the Bodrog River valley. Despite that, SMK–MKP posted the best ever election result in relative terms (11.68% of the popular vote), although the absolute number of ballots cast for the party was the lowest; the reason for this seeming discrepancy was that voter participation among ethnic Hungarians was higher than among the rest of the population.

Nevertheless, the SNS won its duel with SMK–MKP by the thinnest of margins thanks to 11.73% of the popular vote.[4]

Parliamentary Elections in 2006: Deterioration of Slovak–Hungarian Relations

SMER–Social Democracy (SMER-SD) won the election by the landslide, receiving 29.14% of the popular vote. All those involved expected lengthy negotiations on forming a new ruling coalition but everything turned out differently. After two weeks of talks, SMER-SD Chairman Robert Fico announced that the new administration would also include the SNS led by Ján Slota and the LS-HZDS led by Vladimír Mečiar; in fact, it was the most logical choice not only with respect to previous developments but also because the three parties' constituencies are quite similar. The new government constellation immediately provoked anxiety among ethnic Hungarians, their political representatives and official political circles in Hungary. Obviously, their memories of the authoritarian tandem of Mečiar–Slota that was set in motion in 1994 by simple-minded Ján Ľupták and his Association of Slovak Workers were way too fresh. Fico's government reservation ticket for the SNS outraged not only the Hungarians and liberally-oriented Slovaks but also foreign partners of SMER-SD from the Party of European Socialists (PES), the socialist faction of the European Parliament (EP). The PES warned SMER-SD first and after the party refused to take its reservations seriously, it suspended the party's associated PES membership on July 5, 2006.[5]

Prime Minister Robert Fico and other constitutional officials very emphatically opposed the PES decision and dismissed harsh criticism by Hungarian government officials. Fico stated that the decision to launch the procedure potentially leading to cancellation of his party's associated PES membership reflected "the interests of supranational corporations and monopolies that fear losing their profits" as well as activities of Hungarian MEPs who were allegedly unhappy that SMK–MKP was no longer part of government (*ČTK* news agency, July 7, 2008).

Following the failure of the European Union's attempts to ostracize Austria's administration that featured national populist Jörg Haider in 2001, it was most unlikely that this kind of criticism would or could lead to reconstruction of the Slovak Government whose formal legitimacy was indisputable; nevertheless, these attempts to play down the international community's anxiety were ill conceived.

An example worth following in this respect was the position adopted by the SZDSZ, the minor ruling party in Hungary whose representatives were the only members of Hungarian parliament not to endorse the Law on Foreign Hungarians in 2001. Three years later, they opposed proposals to resolve the double citizenship issue in a plebiscite. They argued that while the solution would partly materialize one of principal ambitions of Hungary's foreign policy, it would also undermine an equally important ambition of maintaining good neighbourly relations – particularly with Slovakia, a candidate country that was knocking on the EU door – which might negatively affect ethnic Hungarians living there.

It was therefore symptomatic that SZDSZ leaders, including Chairman of Hungarian Parliament's Committee for EU Affairs Mátyás Eörsi, showed no mercy when commenting on the new political situation in Slovakia. Widely viewed as one of Hungarian politicians with the friendliest attitude to Slovakia, Eörsi even urged the EU to adopt similar measures with respect to Slovakia as it had introduced in the case of Austria in 2001.[6]

Initially, the Robert Fico administration manifested an honest interest to maintain good bilateral relations with Hungary, particularly through Foreign Affairs Minister Ján Kubiš whose first official visit upon inauguration was to Budapest. Fico attended a reception on the occasion of Hungarian public holiday organized by Hungary's ambassador to Slovakia. Deputy Prime Minister Dušan Čaplovič even sent a letter of congratulation to the ambassador in which he subscribed to the legacy of Hungary's patron St. Stephen. At the same time, though, government officials continued in their efforts to convince the public at home and abroad that principal responsibility for tensions in Slovak–Hungarian relations rested with SMK–MKP whose leaders were unable to get over their relegation into the opposition.

Slovakia's diplomacy apparently felt that the Hungarian side inadequately appreciated its endeavour to maintain good neighbourly relations expressed by some of the mentioned gestures. The *Report on Discharging Foreign Policy Tasks of the Slovak Republic in 2006* described this disappointment in the following way: "Although the new Slovak Government declared a desire to cooperate with Hungary from the beginning, which may be illustrated by the fact that the first official trip of Foreign Affairs Minister Ján Kubiš was to Budapest, Hungary began to mount on Slovakia inadequate diplomatic and political pressure that borders on meddling with internal affairs and chose the strategy of internationalizing mutual relations."[7]

Premier Fico never clearly and unambiguously dissociated himself from anti-Hungarian statements presented by Ján Slota or incidents with anti-

Hungarian motives. This further strengthened anxiety and distrust on the part of ethnic Hungarians as well as the sensitive public opinion abroad. A declaration condemning displays of extremism and intolerance passed in the Slovak parliament after lengthy haggling could not possibly substitute an unambiguous statement by the country's top executive official.[8]

One of such anti-Hungarian incidents was the attack on Hedviga Malinová, an ethnic Hungarian student of the Nitra-based University of Constantine the Philosopher who was battered in living daylight on August 25, 2006, just because she spoke Hungarian on the street. At first, law enforcement organs took an uncompromising attitude to the incident that was harshly condemned by some ruling parties' representatives. Premier Fico not only failed to condemn the incident in a way that would be expected of a prime minister but three weeks later he appeared on a press conference along with Interior Minister Robert Kaliňák at which they jointly accused Malinová of lying and insinuated that the entire incident might have been motivated by the endeavour of "certain circles" to harm the Slovak Republic.

By appearing on the press conference, Fico clearly politicized the entire affair because investigation of the case was not over at that point; in fact, it has not been properly concluded even by the time of putting the present publication together in fall 2009. Furthermore, it turned out that much of the so-called evidence presented by Minister Kaliňák at the press conference was simply not based on truth.

The SMK–MKP also contributed to politicizing the case to a certain degree. For instance, Member of Parliament Gábor Gál (SMK–MKP) took over as Malinová's legal counsel immediately after the notorious press conference. Also, SMK–MKP Chairman Béla Bugár called on ethnic Hungarian citizens to report all verbal and physical attacks on them to the nearest local SMK–MKP branch.

While this kind of politicization does not even begin to compare to cabinet officials' meddling with independent investigation, the Slovak public embraced the view taken by most media that it was SMK–MKP that had politicized the incident and that Malinová was a 'liar' and a 'provocateur'. The incident's aftermath also negatively affected the bilateral meeting of both countries' prime ministers Ferenc Gyurcsány and Robert Fico that was scheduled to take place during the Visegrad Four summit on October 10, 2006. Shortly before the meeting, Gyurcsány cancelled it, which was viewed as unfortunate and incorrect by most media and political analysts on both sides.

During winter months that followed, emotions in Slovak–Hungarian relations calmed down a little, only to gather new strength in February and

March 2007 when the United Nations' Security Council was expected to take a vote on the future statute of Kosovo. At that point, Slovakia was a non-permanent member of this important organ and some SNS and SMER-SD representatives saw a chance to score political points by repeatedly discussing Slovakia's official position on the Kosovo issue. Previously, this position was guided by an unspoken consensus that complied with the majority position of the EU, i.e. that Kosovo independence could not be avoided anymore and that it was crucial to achieve it through a managed process that would not cause further destabilization within the region. But after SNS and SMER-SD had opened the Pandora's Box, all Slovak parties began to compete over who is the best ally of the Serbian nation and the best protector of Slovakia's territorial integrity. They argued that if Kosovo was granted independence, Hungarian revisionist forces might view it as a precedent justifying their alleged endeavour to annex Slovakia's southern territories to Hungary.[9]

Change in SMK–MKP Leadership: New Ammunition for National Populists

Simultaneously, SMK–MKP prepared its regular party congress in the atmosphere of struggle for power. Slovak leading dailies (e.g. *Sme*, *Pravda* and *Hospodárske noviny*) published a series of extensive interviews with three SMK–MKP frontmen, namely Chairman Béla Bugár, Executive Vice-Chairman Miklós Duray and Vice-Chairman Pál Csáky. From the interviews, the Slovak public learned that even SMK–MKP was after quite some time consumed with internal disputes. It is important to note that many regular SMK–MKP members began to voice dissatisfaction that the party had not been able to formulate a clear strategy of its future performance in opposition since the 2006 elections.

Bugár did not hide his desire to pacify power ambitions of Duray who is known to represent a more radical wing within the party; at the same time, Bugár gave ambiguous answers to questions regarding his own future ambitions, which indicated that after spending 17 years in Slovakia's top politics he was beginning to burn out. Duray responded to Bugár's statements by accusing him of being managed by a former agent of the communist secret police in early years of his political career and alleging that Bugár preferred economic interests of lobby groups to those of the party. But everything turned out differently in the end. Csáky, who had long refused to accept candidature to the post of SMK–MKP chairman, eventually took advantage of

the situation and defeated Bugár by a thin margin in the March 31 party ballot, most probably with the help from Duray's wing.

The public, the media and the political scene immediately reacted to the change in SMK–MKP leadership by alleging its potential radicalization; some KDH leaders even proposed to "place [SMK–MKP] under a quarantine for some time". The media began to portray Bugár almost as a martyr, without giving a serious thought to the fact that his ousting might have been caused by natural and even logical processes. They ad nauseam repeated phrases that did not fully correspond to the truth, for instance that Duray had become the second most powerful man in SMK–MKP; in fact, Duray held the post of the party's number two, i.e. executive vice-chairman, during Bugár's tenure while he was 'demoted' to a regular vice-chairman at the March congress. True, Duray continued in his habit of commenting on relevant Slovak issues for Hungarian media and at various cultural and political events organized in Hungary, further irritating the Slovak public; however, he was doing nothing more than he used to do when Bugár was at the helm.

The problem was that Pál Csáky was not prepared to take over power within SMK–MKP. He did not come up with any clear, thought-out strategy to tackle the problems based on which he had criticized Bugár. Instead of patiently and steadfastly working on winning over the public opinion in Slovakia as well as in Hungary, Csáky often reacted peevishly or evasively to journalists' questions, setting most Slovak media against himself.[10] Without proper previous preparation, he accentuated issues in the public discourse that irritated not only the SNS but the entire political scene in Slovakia.

Here, we should point out that highlighting the issue of autonomy or criticizing the lingering implications of Beneš decrees (or, more precisely, those of the decrees that enacted the principle of the Hungarians' collective guilt for the events of 1938–1944) cannot be called a provocation, let alone an act of extremism, by itself. After all, both these issues formed an integral part of programs of all parties representing ethnic Hungarians between 1990 and 1998; after they merged to create SMK–MKP in 1998, these issues were incorporated into the new party's program. As far as the autonomy issue goes, one should note that whenever political representatives of ethnic Hungarians spoke of some forms of autonomy (i.e. minority self-governance), they always referred to already existing western European models.

Nevertheless, accentuating these issues in Slovakia's political atmosphere of 2007 had two effects: first, the entire diapason of Slovak parties

united in order to protect 'Slovakia's national and state interests'; second, the community of ethnic Hungarians including its intellectual elite became uncertain. A special contributor to the public debate on this issue was Culture Minister Marek Maďarič who repeatedly declared that no Hungarians were forcibly resettled or deported from Slovakia after World War II based on their nationality alone, which clearly flies in the face of historical truth.[11] In September 2007, acting on an initiative taken by the SNS, parliament passed a resolution that proclaimed Beneš decrees "unchangeable". For the sake of objectiveness, we should point out that in the same resolution the assembly rejected the principle of collective guilt on which the Beneš decrees in question are based and thus unwittingly made a somewhat schizophrenic gesture.[12]

The measure provoked another round of escalating tensions in Slovak–Hungarian relations. Most importantly, it put a halt to the process launched by adopting a 14-item program titled *Common Past, Common Future in the Mirror of Common Projects* that had been signed by premiers Robert Fico and Ferenc Gyurcsány in June 2007.[13] It was the first official meeting between Slovak and Hungarian prime ministers in years and domestic as well as international observers had great expectations of the meeting and the adopted program.

In reaction to Slovak parliament's resolution on unchangeable nature of Beneš decrees, the Hungarian side cancelled several bilateral meetings already scheduled to take place in Slovakia and henceforth resorted to the tactics of turning down all proposals by Slovakia's representatives for official meetings on the highest level.

Hungarian President László Sólyom unofficially visited Slovakia in October 2007 to take part in public discussions with citizens at which he criticized certain phenomena on Slovakia's political scene. Sólyom's visit coincided with another unofficial visit by Chairwoman of the Hungarian Parliament Katalin Szili who attended a rally to commemorate post-war deportations and forced resettlement of Hungarians from Slovakia. Slovak government officials reacted very peevishly to both visits. Premier Fico chose unusually harsh vocabulary when condemning Sólyom's visit: "Hungarian government officials should be kept behind the limits where they belong," he said.[14] The atmosphere began to remind one of Cold War.

Again, the situation partly calmed down toward the end of the year when the public's attention focused on a scandal involving non-transparent and potentially clientelist decisions by officials of the Slovak Land Fund that provoked not only a coalition crisis between SMER-SD and the ĽS-HZDS but also a new round of bickering between ruling and opposition

parties over which administration covered up for more thievery. This little hiatus gave SMK–MKP an opportunity to get out of the spotlight and focus on its own regrouping.

Even the resolution on Beneš decrees did not satisfy the SNS and slacken its offensive. On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the so-called Černová massacre, the SNS proposed to adopt a declaration on the Černová tragedy and pass a specific bill on the merits of Andrej Hlinka seeking to proclaim him 'the father of the Slovak nation'. The gist of the incident that took place in the village of Černová near Ružomberok was that a cordon of gendarmes fired into a crowd of Slovak believers who demanded consecration of the local church by Andrej Hlinka, a priest who was suspended by the Catholic Church at the time. Interpretation of the incident and significance of Andrej Hlinka rank among issues that continue to be vividly discussed by Slovak historians. Of course, that did little to prevent the SNS and some other politicians from exploiting both issues in their anti-Hungarian campaign. The arrogant and offensive tone used by SNS Chairman Ján Slota during his speech at the rally in Černová on October 27, 2007, hardly surprised anyone anymore. More surprising was that Slovakia's top constitutional officials did nothing to dissociate themselves from Slota's statements. Even more surprisingly, an address presented on the same occasion by the chairman of the Conference of Slovak Bishops, a Catholic organization that should embody universal values of Christian love and understanding, was also relatively confrontational.[15]

Year 2008: Strengthening Slovak National Identity Leads to déjà vu of 1993–1998

Elements of national populism increasingly often began to appear also in public statements and concrete measures of Prime Minister Robert Fico. As if his administration aimed to 'compensate' Slovak citizens for greater openness and freedom on border crossings following Slovakia's accession to the Schengen Area by intensifying government supervision over them. Fico used the occasion of celebrating the 15th anniversary of emergence of independent Slovakia to call on strengthening the Slovaks' national identity, present his own peculiar interpretations of Slovakia's history (for instance, by calling Great Moravia an empire of "ancient Slovaks") and make several expressive gestures with respect to Matica slovenská.

By early 2008, virtually all issues for which Council of Europe, OSCE and EU emissaries had reprimanded Slovakia between 1994 and 1998 grad-

ually returned to Slovakia's public discourse. The Ministry of Education led by an SNS nominee drafted a new strategy of minority education whose objective could be summed up in a single sentence: make (all) ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia (finally) speak Slovak. The SNS once again proposed to adopt a law on the protection of the republic, using as a pretext an 'exotic' and solitary initiative by Komárno-based entrepreneur János Bósza to create so-called Southern Highland autonomy. Later, the SNS came up with an idea to introduce ethnic quotas to municipal elections in those municipalities where Slovaks make up a minority and stricter conditions to the citizens' right to assemble. Slota repeatedly labeled citizens of Hungarian origin "Hungarianized Slovaks" and proposed to 'stake out' Slovakia's southern border by monumental double-crosses.

For the sake of objectivity, we are compelled to say that Culture Minister Marek Maďarič and Deputy Prime Minister for Human Rights Dušan Čaplovič made at this period several accommodating gestures toward the Hungarian minority. For instance, the financing model of the Slovak Radio's minority broadcasting was settled temporarily; the volume of funds allocated to support minority cultures was raised moderately; the future functioning of Ifjú Szívek, the sole professional folklore ensemble of ethnic Hungarians, was solved provisionally.

Generally speaking, though, the entire period since June 2006 elections may be described as quite confrontational in terms of Slovak–Hungarian relations, at least on the level of top politics. While it seemed that this confrontation tone was set by the SNS or, according to some politicians and journalists, the tandem of SNS – SMK–MKP, it was paradoxically Premier Robert Fico and his SMER-SD fellows who firmly held the conductor's stick. For instance, in a statement released on June 17, 2007, on the occasion of the 15th anniversary of adopting *Declaration on Sovereignty of the Slovak Republic*, Fico said he "desired beyond all measure to make the Slovak Republic a true and peaceful home for the Slovak nation as well as for loyal minorities". Using the term of "loyal minorities" inevitably insinuates Slovakia also has 'disloyal minorities'; in any case, such a statement sets the majority and minorities against each other, although not as overtly as virulent statements by Ján Slota. A number of public statements and concrete legislative initiatives by SMER-SD representatives (e.g. the bill on associations or the new Press Act draft) clearly indicate that they view governance merely as execution of power, democracy simply as the rule of majority; furthermore, they identify their government with the state, which they aim to build by strengthening the national principle. In this situation, the maneuvering space of ethnic minorities is quite limited.

At the beginning of 2008, Education Minister Ján Mikolaj (SNS) initiated a new round of Slovak–Hungarian quarrels. The new Schooling Act drafted by his ministry is free of explicit references to schools that use Hungarian and Ukrainian/Ruthenian as the language of instruction that had been included in the law of 1984. Although the new law is much more extensive and detailed than its predecessor, it does not feature a specific section on minority education whose regulation is thus almost completely left up to various by-laws. This is a very non-standard practice since Schooling Act should be the principal legislative standard implementing the constitutional right of ethnic minorities to education in their native languages anchored in Article 34, Paragraph 2a of the Slovak Constitution.

Passing the final version of Schooling Act in May 2008 was related to one of the greatest mysteries of the country's political development after the 2006 elections. On April 10, 2008, parliament ratified the Lisbon Treaty, a revised constitutional treaty of the European Union that was an inevitable prerequisite to its proper functioning in the enlarged format comprising 27 member states. The document's ratification required a qualified (so-called constitutional) majority of 90 votes, which the incumbent ruling coalition did not dispose of; eventually, the document was ratified thanks to the votes of SMK–MKP deputies who supported it. That by itself would not be any surprise at all as SMK–MKP has always been a pro-European party; the problem was that SMK–MKP breached an internal agreement from January 2008 according to which opposition parties would not support ratification of the Lisbon Treaty unless government withdraws or essentially amends the new Press Act's draft, which according to all opposition parties, journalists' professional organizations and OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Miklós Haraszti unacceptably encroached on the freedom of speech and independence of journalistic and editorial work.[16]

In Slovakia's legislative practice, most laws are adopted by the means of simple majority, which seriously limits the opposition's maneuvering space in parliament. Therefore, ratification of international treaties is one of rare opportunities when the opposition stands a real chance to participate in the legislative process and influence its course or outcome. The remaining two opposition parties (i.e. SDKÚ and KDH) viewed SMK–MKP's support to the Treaty's ratification as a betrayal of the opposition agreement and openly voiced their suspicions of some murky deals.

The SMK–MKP reportedly benefited from the 'trade-off' in the form of inserting into the new Schooling Act a provision stipulating that in schools using one of minority languages as the language of instruction the number of Slovak language lessons cannot exceed the number of native language lessons.

Some opposition politicians dubbed it a "trade in the vein of more powers to Brussels for fewer Slovak lessons at [Hungarian] schools."[17] Allegations also appeared that in exchange for supporting the Treaty's ratification, SMK–MKP Chairman Pál Csáky demanded additional state budget subsidies for Madách, a publishing house that prints materials for ethnic Hungarians; however, these speculations have never been corroborated or disproved.[18]

In a letter addressed to publishers of pedagogical literature Mikolaj ordered that new editions of textbooks for schools that use Hungarian as the language of instruction must feature all geographic and topographic names solely in Slovak. Previously, the names were featured in Hungarian while their Slovak equivalents were included in parentheses or in a dictionary at the end of the textbook. As soon as the public learned about the content of Mikolaj's order, members of parliament for SMK–MKP harshly criticized the initiative, supported by associations of Hungarian pedagogues and parents. Facing fierce opposition, Mikolaj stepped back and conceded that Hungarian names could be featured in a dictionary at the end of the textbook or in parentheses after the first reference in Slovak.

A similar position was adopted by the Cabinet Council for National Minorities and Ethnic Groups chaired by Vice-Premier Dušan Čaplovič. It is symptomatic that the Council did not discuss the matter before June 30 when the controversial textbooks had long been with the printers; also, the Council discussed it under '*Miscellaneous*' according to minutes of the meeting; most importantly, though, the Council's recommendation completely ignored requirements and recommendations presented by Hungarian pedagogues and parents. At the turn of August and September, first text-books printed in compliance with the education minister's order were dispatched to Hungarian schools. It turned out that the texts were really written in a hybrid language as all names – even those that form part of Hungarian language's codified lexis – were featured in Slovak.

Eventually, parliament in October 2008 passed another amendment to Schooling Act that allowed for bilingual geographical and topographical names in textbooks for minority schools. President Gašparovič vetoed the law, arguing it was unenforceable; his view was seconded by Mikolaj. Parliament broke the presidential veto by re-passing the law in February 2009; almost entire parliamentary caucus of SMER-SD voted in favour of the law. That, however, did not put an end to the matter as Mikolaj continues to hold that the law is unenforceable; the SNS and the HZDS are still considering an option of turning to the Constitutional Court.

In August 2008, the Open Society Foundation and the Research Centre for Ethnicity and Culture published findings of their joint survey examin-

ing young people's sensitivity to multiculturalism. The survey's primary target group was pupils attending 8th and 9th grades of primary schools. According to the findings, young people perceive members of so-called traditional ethnic minorities (i.e. ethnic Hungarians and the Roma) more negatively than members of other minority groups; ethnic Hungarians ranked at the very bottom as three in eight respondents (37%) perceived them negatively. A significant share of respondents believed that ethnic Hungarians should not speak Hungarian in public at all. Highest constitutional officials including Vice-Premier Čaplovič called the survey manipulated. Education Minister Mikolaj said the view about edging Hungarian language to the sphere of private communication was "logical to some degree". By saying so, he not only outraged ethnic Hungarians and many Slovaks as well but questioned his own competence to manage education system's content and curricular reform that is supposed to emphasize multicultural education[19] (please, see also Debrecéniová–Petőcz, 3/2008.)

At this place we point to an example of negative influencing the minds of young people in their undestanding of multiculturalism by electronic media. In autumn 2008 one of the Slovak TV channels broadcast the series Slovakia´s Got Talent. One of the competitors wished to sing a song in Hungarian. However, the jury´s advise to her was that it was Slovakia´s Got Talent, not Hungary´s and she should not sing Hungarian. The fact that most competitors sang hits in an utterly foreign language (English), while many of them apparently did not even understand, what they were singing about, was not considered by the jury as unnatural or strange.

Hungarian diplomacy did not take too long to support SMK–MKP leaders and ethnic Hungarian pedagogues in their campaign against new textbooks. On October 2, 2008, Foreign Affairs Minister Kinga Göncz summoned Slovakia's ambassador to reproach the Slovak Government for four issues: publishing new textbooks; disadvantaging Hungarian minority schools none of which had been selected in previous grant rounds to receive financial aid from EU structural funds to develop school infrastructure; continuously hateful anti-Hungarian rhetoric used by some politicians of the incumbent ruling coalition; questioning loyalty of SMK–MKP politicians for attending a meeting of the Forum of Hungarian Deputies of the Carpathian Basin held in Budapest at the end of August.[20]

The reaction of Slovak government officials spearheaded by Premier Fico was swift and sharp. Fico called Göncz's legitimate request to provide explanation to mentioned issues an "ultimatum and coarse interference in internal affairs of the Slovak Republic". According to Fico, protection and implementation of minority rights in Slovakia is "highly above-standard and

could be made an example for entire Europe". The quintessence of argumentation embraced by Premier Fico (and virtually the entire ruling coalition) was summed up in the following statement issued by SMER-SD Spokesperson Katarína Kližanová-Rýsová: "The reason for expressive statements by Mr. Slota, which Premier and Chairman of SMER–Social Democracy Robert Fico does not view appropriate in political dialogue, is aggressive and dangerous behaviour by SMK–MKP chairman who has no scruples when slandering Slovakia abroad, lying on its account and souring Slovak–Hungarian relations by attempts to abolish Beneš decrees."[21]

After the Coalition Council meeting held on October 21, 2008, all three leaders of ruling parties showed unusual unity in blaming the Hungarian side in general and SMK–MKP leaders in particular for the situation at hand. President Ivan Gašparovič wasted no time to support the triumvirate. First, he welcomed official SNS endorsement of his run for re-election, declaring that recent tensions in Slovak–Hungarian relations reflected overall nationalization of Hungary's political scene and that Ján Slota merely reacted to this phenomenon. Gašparovič refused to budge a bit when asked to dissociate himself from Slota's statements.[22] Later, following his meeting with Education Minister Mikolaj, he fully supported his initiative to rewrite textbooks for Hungarian minority schools in a hybrid Slovak–Hungarian language. Opposition parties and the opposition's joint presidential candidate Iveta Radičová failed to dissociate themselves unambiguously from ruling parties' interpretation of the *status quo* and even continued to edge out SMK–MKP from mutual cooperation of opposition parties. In doing so, they further fanned the flames of Slovak–Hungarian tensions.

The confrontation grew into crisis after a violent incident during a football match between DAC Dunajská Streda and Slovan Bratislava on November 1, 2008. The game was attended by large numbers of 'hard core' fans from both camps; the DAC camp was 'reinforced' by fans of Ferencváros Budapest whose ranks apparently included supporters of the Hungarian Guard and the Movement of 64 Counties, radical organizations from Hungary. Although it was Slovan hooligans who caused greater disturbances, which may be documented by video footage of all TV crews present at the game, the special police units supervising the game suddenly at one point violently attacked the sector of DAC fans.

In the ensuing one spectator suffered serious and several spectators suffered minor injuries. The only reason for the brutal police intervention that could be verified from available sources was that home fans along with fans of Ferencváros Budapest chanted slogans regularly used at football games, waved flags depicting the Hungarian Kingdom and some of them may have

provoked members of special police units. On the other hand, the police apparently did not object to the slogan of "Bi a bi, a bi Maďara do hlavy" ['Hit and hit, and hit Hungarians in the head'] that was chanted by hundreds of Slovan fans not only in Dunajská Streda but also at the previous game between the two teams in Bratislava.

A thorough investigation into legitimacy of the brutal police intervention was required by SMK–MKP leaders but also Hungarian government officials since Hungarian citizens were among the injured. Like many other incidents, the incident has not been properly investigated by the time of putting this publication together in fall 2009. Slovak law enforcement organs failed to produce to the public satisfactory evidence that repressive action applied had been necessary. The sole tangible outcome of the incident was passing an amendment to the law on organization of sports events that apart from other provisions restricts bringing foreign flags to sports events organized on Slovakia's territory.

Year 2009: Reaching the Historical Bottom or Hoping for Improvement?

Year 2009 nothing but prolonged development trends recorded in previous years. Many respected commentators and analysts repeatedly observed that mutual Slovak–Hungarian relations hit the "historical bottom" a number of consecutive times.

First time it was during presidential elections at the end of March and the beginning of April 2009. After the first round of elections, SNS leaders Ján Slota and Anna Belousovová expressed "concerns and regret" over the fact that opposition candidate Iveta Radičová improved her election result "mostly thanks to votes from fellow citizens of Hungarian origin". "It is unacceptable that the rest of Slovakia be dictated by rich Bratislava … and those districts dominated … by the Hungarian minority," said Belousovová before the second round of elections. "It would be sick if an ethnic minority elected the head of state for the majority," seconded Slota (Kolíková–Petőcz, 2009/1). Except Foreign Minister Miroslav Lajčák, no constitutional official objected to such xenophobic statements. Leaflets warning that Iveta Radičová had promised autonomy to ethnic Hungarians were distributed in many constituencies around Slovakia; some media published an advertisement conveying the same message. Later it turned out that the advertisement had been commissioned by the SNS.

Second time it was at the beginning of June when parliament convened at a special session to adopt a special resolution reacting to statements made by Hungarian opposition leader Viktor Orbán. Orbán called on all voters of Hungarian origin to take part in elections to the European Parliament in order to secure the largest possible representation of Hungarians inhabiting the Carpathian Basin. Orbán uttered this statement during a working meeting with SMK–MKP Chairman Pál Csáky in Ostrihom that formed part of joint election campaign of his FIDESZ and Csáky's SMK–MKP.

Finally it was in the second half of summer 2009 when several events clustered together. On June 30, parliament passed an amendment to the Law No. 270/1995 on State Language. Although the law's final version featured several positive changes compared to the original draft submitted by the Ministry of Culture in late 2008, it still provoked a tidal wave of indignation among ethnic Hungarians as well as Hungarian government officials.

Many constitutional officials in Slovakia called their protests a "brutal mendacious campaign against the Slovak Republic". True, many politicians in Hungary as well as within the community of ethnic Hungarians often commented on the legislation in a biased fashion and presented several misleading statements, either deliberately or out of ignorance. Nevertheless, the law's diction is unclear and prone to misinterpretation in many respects, which was pointed out by none other than Knut Vollebaek, OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities who was specifically requested by the Slovak Government to give his opinion on the law.[23]

After Vollebaek published his opinion, Slovak and Hungarian officials as well as the media bickered for many weeks over what in fact he said. The Slovak Government tried to assure the public that the law was in full compliance with international standards and that the High Commissioner "did not request to change a single comma". Hungarian officials, for their part, pointed out Vollebaek's numerous reservations as well as his recommendations that Slovakia should amend the law on the use of minority languages and draft a complex law on the rights and status of national minorities.

Perhaps the most sensitive spot of the most recent amendment is the provision on its enforcement and sanctions. Vollebaek said that even though fines were not unacceptable in principle, he viewed their introduction as unfortunate and advised applicable bodies to use maximum caution when imposing them. Many citizens expressed outrage over the fact that transgressions against the State Language Act could be punished by fines up to € 5,000, which they viewed exorbitant.

The protests against the amendment peaked at a rally organized by SMK–MKP on a football stadium in Dunajská Streda that attracted a crowd

of 10,000. The rally was also supported by ethnic Hungarians' social organizations and civic associations. It was a peaceful demonstration that alternated keynote speeches and cultural program. All Slovak parliamentary parties harshly criticized the rally as inappropriate and prevocational. The Slovak public apparently failed to understand that the demonstration was not aimed against the amendment as such but rather against the philosophy of the law as such and the overall minority policy of the Robert Fico administration. The rally was also attended by approximately 200 Hungarian nationals who later unfurled several flags of the Hungarian Guard and the Movement of 64 Counties. The media attention focused primarily on these few people representing radical or extremist views, largely distorting the rally's impression in the eyes of the public; the media and politicians subsequently reproached organizers for failing to ban Hungarian Guard's members from the stadium.

But quarrels surrounding the State Language Act merely painted backdrop for an incident that followed and amounted to another 'historical low' in Slovak–Hungarian relations. To commemorate the Day of Saint Stephen, the first Hungarian king, municipal authorities in Komárno organized a cultural event that would include unveiling his statue. They also invited Hungarian President László Sólyom to attend the festivities. Sólyom viewed the visit as private and notified Slovak authorities about his plan to attend some two months in advance.

Several days before the visit scheduled for August 21, all three highest Slovak constitutional officials separately and jointly called on Sólyom not to travel to Slovakia because they viewed it inappropriate. While they did not clearly formulate their main objection, they presented three various reservations: first, no Slovak constitutional official had been invited to attend the event; second, President Sólyom should not attend a public event on the neighbouring state's territory under the pretext of a private visit; finally, the event's timing was insensitive because August 21 is the anniversary of invading Czechoslovakia by armies of five Warsaw Pact countries including Hungary.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a note that banned Sólyom from entering Slovakia's territory on grounds of security risks his visit might entail; in doing so, Slovakia actually ignored the Schengen Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons. Ignoring the ban, Sólyom decided to arrive at Komárom on the Hungarian side of the Danube River and walk to Komárno through a bridge. However, in the middle of the bridge, he eventually stopped, made a short statement and walked back to the Hungarian side.

The measure, which is truly unprecedented in the history of the EU, created a furor in Hungary. The Hungarian Government first strove to respond on the political and diplomatic level, expecting that the EU Presidency or the European Commission would take a position on the incident. At the same time, it expected that its Slovak counterpart would formally apologize for 'banning' President Sólyom. None of their expectations was materialized; on the contrary, Slovak constitutional officials emphatically reproached Hungary for the existence of the Forum of Hungarian Deputies of the Carpathian Basin and demanded it to cancel this consultation organ's institutional ties to Hungarian parliament. SNS and HZDS representatives even accused of high treason SMK–MKP deputies who regularly attend its plenary meetings at the end of summer; the SNS repeatedly proposed to ban SMK–MKP.

President Sólyom's aborted visit coincided with releasing a medical expert's opinion in the case of Hedviga Malinová. The expert's opinion was commissioned by the Office of Attorney General and elaborated by Professor Peter Labaš, Dean of Comenius University's Medical Faculty. The report's principal conclusion was that Malinová was not battered on the day of alleged assault, which would seem to corroborate the investigators' version that Malinová had made up the entire incident. After initial shock it caused, the report turned to feature serious shortcomings. A number of experts who were listed as the report's co-authors *de facto* dissociated themselves from it. Certain pieces of evidence the report presented as unambiguous (e.g. the CT scan of the victim's body) turned out to be insubstantial.[24]

In the course of September, the endeavour to mitigate mutual tensions finally prevailed on both banks of the Danube. The turnaround was probably catalyzed by reprimands from the EU (i.e. the EU Presidency or influential European leaders) and maybe also OSCE High Commissioner Vollebaek's mission regarding Slovakia's State Language Act. On September 10, Hungarian Premier Gordon Bajnai and his Slovak counterpart Robert Fico unofficially met on a working meeting in the Hungarian town of Szécsény. At the meeting, they adopted a declaration that ironed out the deepest wrinkles, at least on the outside.[25] They agreed upon an 11-item program of future cooperation. Some of them confirmed the tasks agreed upon by Prime Ministers Gyurcsány and Fico in June 2007 while others were new. Fico and Bajnai also agreed that the Slovak Government would elaborate principles of implementing State Language Act that would take into account Vollebaek's comments and recommendations.

Probably encouraged by the process of détente launched at the Bajnai-Fico meeting and continuing consultations on the diplomatic level, Slovak

Minister of Foreign Affairs Miroslav Lajčák at the end of October told a bunch of foreign journalists that "Slovak–Hungarian relations have normalized".[26] On the same day, though, Vice-Premier Dušan Čaplovič chastised Viktor Orbán, Chairman of Fidesz and most probably the next Hungarian prime minister, for his statements presented at SMK–MKP party congress. In his speech, Orbán publicly contemplated concepts such as planning common future of Hungarians inhabiting the Carpathian Basin or the right of national minorities – "national communities" according to Orbán – to autonomy while repeatedly using the term Felvidék, a historical name used in Hungary to refer to Slovakia (historical Upper Hungary) that is detested by the Slovaks.[27] Čaplovič called Orbán's speech a "political aggression against Slovakia, against Slovak values and against European values", adding that no politician in Slovakia over the past 20 years lied as much as SMK–MKP Chairman Csáky.[28]

Premier Fico wasted little time to second his deputy's criticism. Regarding the issue of Beneš decrees that has been recently revived by Czech President Václav Klaus' reluctance to complete the ratification process of the EU Lisbon Treaty in the Czech Republic, Fico said on his videoblog that "Beneš decrees allowed post-war Czechoslovakia to deal with enemies and fascist collaborators",[29] adding that Beneš decrees that deprived hundreds of thousands of persons of their civil and political rights formed part of de-Nazification measures and as such they constituted an "act of justice". In reaction to Fico's argumentation, the *Új Szó* daily wrote: "According to prime minister's logic, all Hungarians ranging from barely gabbling toddlers to decrepit old men on their death bed are fascist traitors and enemies of the Slovak nation."[30]

At this point, the author would like to quote István Bibó, an important Hungarian thinker of the 20th century who said: "No injustice committed by someone may justify injustices committed by others and especially the crimes of fascism can under no circumstances provide the reference and justification for methods of democracies."[31] Along the same lines, discriminatory measures enforced by democratic governments in time of peace cannot be justified by undemocratic regimes' actions in time of war. Even 20 years after the fall of communism, the way of debating this issue invites doubts whether political actors really understand the true content of terms such as democracy, law and morality.[32]

Government representatives hold that although the Slovak Republic already completed ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, it may retrospectively request an exception from the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights together with the Czech Republic because "legal protection provided to the Slovak

Republic and its citizens cannot be lower than in the case of the Czech Republic".[33] The fundamental question remains whether over 500,000 ethnic Hungarians deserve legal protection as well or should they bear the stigma of collective guilt forever?

A specific place in Slovak–Hungarian relations has the issue of so-called extremism. This issue is frequently used (and abused) in both countries' political discourse as the means of dealing symbolic blows to the 'adversary'.

The issue of extremism plays its role on two different levels. On the first level, Slovakia and Hungary criticize each other for representation of political extremists in parliament or even in government. Most Hungarian politicians and analysts viewed inviting the Slovak National Party to participate in government in July 2006 as a step toward nationalizing Slovakia's political landscape because the SNS had built the reputation of a radical, nationalist and even extremist party. Soon enough, SNS Chairman Ján Slota justified their fears in one of his first media interviews after the Fico administration's inauguration when he indirectly expressed regret over the fact that the Slovaks did not get rid of ethnic Hungarians after World War II the same way the Czechs got rid of ethnic Germans.[34]

The SNS is viewed as a non-standard political force also on the level of European politics. As we have already mentioned, the Party of European Socialists temporarily suspended associated membership of SMER-SD on grounds of inviting the SNS to government. So far, the most negative classification of the SNS was presented by SMK–MKP Vice-Chairman Miklós Duray who labelled the SNS a fascist party in an interview for Hungarian Inforádió. The SNS sued Duray and the court of first instance sentenced him to compensate the party for non-pecuniary injury worth one million crowns (33,194 Euro).[35] Duray appealed the decision before a regional court, which nullified the fine but ordered Duray to apologize to the SNS. Duray sent to the SNS an apology written in Hungarian, reasoning that his original statement had also been uttered in Hungarian. As of November 2009, the case has not been resolved.

On the other hand, SNS Chairman Ján Slota has also faced several lawsuits on grounds of defamation of race, nation and conviction for his anti-Hungarian and anti-Romany statements. Interestingly, none of these legal actions ever made it to court as all of them were halted in early stages of legal proceedings. Symptomatic in this respect was official justification of the decision by the Office of District Attorney in Prešov to turn down a motion for Slota's criminal prosecution filed by civic activist Ondrej Dostál for Slota's public statements. In October 2007, on the occasion of unveiling a double cross in the village of Pavlovce in East Slovakia, Slota gave

a virulent speech, insulting Hungary's foreign affairs minister and calling the Hungarians thieves and murderers. The Office of District Attorney held that "it is not certain whether Slota referred to Hungarians" and that "a certain degree of exaggeration and provocation" was compatible with the freedom of speech principle.[36]

More important than the rhetoric are practical measures and initiatives proposed by the SNS in recent years. From this viewpoint, we are compelled to point out that the party came up with several initiatives that are incompatible with modern understanding of liberal democracy, for instance proposals to make the Criminal Statute stricter by including in it provisions aimed at protection of the republic, efforts to outlaw a duly registered and elected political party or efforts to decide on fundamental human rights (e.g. the right to use native language) in a referendum.

Many Slovak Government officials like to qualify SMK–MKP or even the Fidesz in Hungary led by Viktor Orbán as nationalist and extremist parties. In fact, both of these parties are well established in European party structures as they are members of the European People's Party. Let us take a closer look at what makes some politicians and commentators in Slovakia call these parties' rhetoric or politics extremist.

On the rhetorical level, their leaders' statements on autonomy, inadequate standard of minority rights in Slovakia or a joint strategy of all Hungarians inhabiting the Carpathian Basin are often viewed extremist. On the level of activities, it is criticism of the situation in Slovakia presented abroad, participation of SMK–MKP leaders in political negotiations with Hungarian politicians in Budapest, etc. To an impartial observer these statements may sometimes appear tactless, insufficiently empathic, unprepared or lacking previous negotiation but not extremist. Qualifying them as extremist would amount to unacceptable restriction of the freedom of speech and the freedom of political conviction – which would not be in line with the Prešov district attorney's benevolent view of these freedoms manifested in assessing the case of Ján Slota.

The other level of the political discourse on extremism concerns truly extremist movements thriving on both sides of the border. Slovenská pospolitosť [Slovak Community] on the one hand and the Hungarian Guard along with its political wing (Movement for Better Hungary–Jobbik) on the other are organizations that overtly promote the program of removing the existing constitutional system in their respective countries; besides, the forms of advertising their views (e.g. uniforms, paramilitary organization, aggressive rhetoric, physical clashes with opponents) inspire fear and anxiety on the part of individual citizens and entire population groups.

When criticizing Hungary for the existence of the Hungarian Guard, Slovak government officials operated for quite some time with the fact that Slovenská pospolitosť was dissolved and outlawed as a political party in 2007; little did they care that it continued to exist without any problems as a civic association. Before the bilateral meeting of Gyurcsány – Fico in fall 2008, the Ministry of Interior made an expedient decision to dissolve the civic association as well; however, the Slovak Supreme Court repealed Minister Kaliňák's decision on July 1, 2009, on grounds that it failed to comply with legal requirements of dissolving a civic association.[37]

The ruling put the Hungarian side into an advantage for some time. The next day, the Budapest Court quite coincidentally issued a final decision on abolishing the Hungarian Guard.[38] The court argued by the organized nature of the subject's activities aimed at suppressing freedoms and rights of others as well as racist undertones of its leaders' rhetoric that inspired fear of ordinary citizens and posed a real threat to their security.

In the meantime, Slovak law enforcement organs clamped down on importers of extremism from Hungary several times. On November 8, 2008, the police apprehended about 40 members of *Nemzeti Őrsereg* (National Guard), an organization close to the Hungarian Guard, who arrived in the town of Kráľovský Chlmec dressed in their paramilitary uniforms in order to place wreaths to the monument of World War I and World War II victims on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the Vienna Arbitration. Premier Fico reacted immediately, calling a special press conference at which he harshly condemned the act; perhaps in an attempt to underline graveness of the situation, he appeared in casual outfit accompanied by interior and foreign affairs ministers.[39]

On March 24, 2009, the Security Council of the Slovak Republic convened on a special meeting after the Movement of 64 Counties announced it would recruit volunteers around Slovakia. Eventually it turned out that a statistically irrelevant number of Slovak citizens showed interest in these enlistments. Several commentators chastised Fico for not resorting to any such measures when the country's security was actually threatened, for instance during the gas crisis.

On April 1, 2009, a Hungarian citizen attending a commemorative gathering in the village of Borša on the occasion of birthday anniversary of Ferenc Rákóczi II unfurled the National Guard's flag for a couple of minutes and folded it again after rally organizers ordered him to. Despite that, he was apprehended and subsequently convicted in expedited judicial proceeding by the Trebišov District Court for a suspended sentence of ten-month imprisonment for promoting symbols of movements aimed at sup-

pressing the rights of others. According to the court, the organization's flag featured a symbol of the Hungaristic movement that existed in the 1940s and sought to restore the Hungarian Empire on the principle of pure Hungarian race. Leaders of the National Guard protested against the decision and threatened to appeal it before the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. They argued that the movement's symbols were not outlawed in Hungary and that they had nothing in common with the Hungaristic movement of fascist leader Ferenc Szálasi.[40]

Premier Fico again warned about dangers of importing extremism from Hungary on the occasion of commemorating the Holocaust on September 9, 2009, in Bratislava.

In the field of mutual Slovak–Hungarian relations, 2009 also brought a groundbreaking development in terms of internal organization of social life and political representation of ethnic Hungarians.

In January 2009, the Southern Slovak Information Network of Non-Governmental Organizations (Dél-Szlovákiai Civil Információs Hálózat) that also includes the Forum Institute for Minority Research in Šamorín initiated the first meeting of the Roundtable of Hungarians in Slovakia, which was established as a loose association of Hungarian minority organizations and institutions that focus on supporting and developing Hungarian culture and education in Slovakia. It comprises approximately 50 social organizations, civic associations, societies and cultural institutions as well as individuals who hold important posts in public life. The main ambition of the Roundtable is to provide space to expert dialogue on issues of community life and development of ethnic Hungarians and enter in interaction and dialogue with civil society in Slovakia as well as government organs and public institutions. The Roundtable operates as an informal platform on a non-partisan basis; it does not have a hierarchical structure and its public activities require individual members' consensus. Between plenary meetings, its activities are coordinated and organized by a committee that comprises most influential nationwide organizations and institutions (i.e. Csemadok, Péter Pázmány Foundation, Forum Minority Research Institute, Forum Information Centre, associations of pedagogues, parents, writers, scouts, and university students). Two spokespersons usually speak on behalf of the committee.

On July 15, the Roundtable of Hungarians in Slovakia addressed an open letter to President Ivan Gašparovič, asking him not to sign the amendment to State Language Act but refer it to parliament for further deliberation.[41] After Gašparovič ignored the call and ratified the amendment, the Roundtable launched a broad scope of activities. On the one hand, it supported the protest

rally in Dunajská Streda in order to express its disapproval of the way of passing the amendment and certain elements of its basic philosophy. On the other hand, it manifested a constructive approach to the process of formulating principles implementation and correct interpretation of legal regulations pertaining to language regime on ethnically mixed territories in compliance with recommendations by OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities Knut Vollebaek. The Roundtable participates in consultations that form part of the process of formulating these principles.

In the course of 2009, the Roundtable of Hungarians in Slovakia gradually established itself also on the international scene. In September 2009, its representative attended the annual OSCE conference on human dimension in Warsaw, Poland. The applicable organs of the Council of Europe and the OSCE view the organization as their consulting partner.

Another crucial development that took place within the ethnic Hungarian community but was much more attractive for the media and the public was disintegration of SMK–MKP in summer 2009. The inevitable break-up was adumbrated on April 22 when a group of three deputies led by former party chairman Béla Bugár left SMK–MKP parliamentary caucus.[42] Even before the Bugár group, the caucus and subsequently the party was left by MP Zsolt Simon who had been in a permanent conflict with new party chairman Pál Csáky as well as the party's ethical commission.

On June 7, 2009, one day after elections to the European Parliament, the group of four deputies that was meanwhile joined by Komárno Mayor Tibor Bastrnák announced founding of a new party called Most–Híd [Bridge]. According to Bugár, the main reason for founding the new party was that the style of the new SMK–MKP leadership led by Pál Csáky was becoming increasingly unacceptable for many party members who build politics on values such as cooperation, decency, openness and trust. Bugár charged that SMK–MKP was gradually beginning to disrespect basic principles of democratic decision-making and show tendency toward authoritarianism, radicalism and ignoring other opinions. SMK–MKP leaders struck back, alleging that the main motive behind founding Most–Híd was economic and lobby interests and/or unfulfilled personal ambitions of its founding members.

Most–Híd defined itself as the "party of cooperation" that was founded by ethnic Hungarians but was nevertheless open also to Slovaks. At its constituent congress, the party elected one prominent Slovak to its top leadership: Rudolf Chmel, literary scientist who in the past held posts of culture minister and Czechoslovakia's ambassador to Hungary. SMK–MKP representatives, for their part, dubbed Most–Híd as the "party of assimilation"

and accused its leaders of "betrayal of national interests". Twenty years after the Velvet Revolution, political representatives of ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia paradoxically seem to have returned to the very beginning, in the sense that they are not evaluated based on their ideological orientation, political profile and professional and human qualities but on whether they are 'good' or 'bad' Hungarians, whether they are 'national extremists' or 'opportunist collaborators'.

The electorate of ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia is apparently not large enough to support two competing parties. The quorum for entering parliament for a single party is 5%. It is highly improbable that both parties will be able to reach it unless they form a coalition. Most–Híd hopes to attract a sufficient number of additional votes from Slovak voters. For the time being, public opinion polls indicate it might just manage; the party's voting preferences in September 2009, i.e. four months since its founding, fluctuated between three and five percent while preferences of the competitive SMK–MKP hovered between five and seven percent.

A survey carried out by the Forum Institute for Minority Research in August 2009 revealed that the sample of ethnic Hungarian voters comprised sympathizers of SMK–MKP and Most–Híd in the ratio of approximately 2:1.[43] At the same time, surveys carried out by Slovak polling agencies show that voting preferences of both parties combined is not significantly higher than ethnic Hungarians' overall share of Slovakia's population. All these statistical data suggest it is quite difficult at this point to establish the mutual ratio of voting preferences of SMK–MKP and Most–Híd. Of course, their performance and results in the upcoming elections will depend on many factors. Very important will be the course and results of election campaign in Hungary where elections are scheduled to take place in April 2010 as well as in Slovakia that will follow suit just two months later.

The first acid test of both parties' electoral potential was the elections to organs of regional self-governance in November 2009. Before elections, SMK–MKP and Most–Híd did not form a joint election coalition in any of the five regions inhabited by ethnic Hungarians. The result was quite disappointing for Most–Híd: they lost the competition with their Hungarian minority political rival by a ratio of 2 regional councillor seats for Most–Híd to 40 seats of SMK–MKP. The ratio of the aggregate number of votes cast for the two parties was approximately 2:1 in favour of SMK–MKP.

'Slovak' parties formed a whole range of election coalitions regardless of the situation in the national parliament; not a single one of them included the Slovak National Party. What all this might entail for next year's parliamentary elections is extremely difficult to predict in November 2009.

Conclusion

Few would dare to dispute that the Slovak Republic has gone through remarkable development in twenty years since November 1989. Yet, the political and intellectual elite of the Slovak majority and the Hungarian minority continue to disagree over the interpretation of certain key issues in the field of minority policy and character of the state. The gist of the dispute is different understanding of the essence and importance of applying the civic principle to building government and administering public affairs. Mutual tensions between both groups significantly increased in summer 2006, after inauguration of the Robert Fico administration that also includes the Slovak National Party led by Ján Slota and the People's Party–Movement for a Democratic Slovakia led by Vladimír Mečiar.

Political representatives of the Slovak majority tend to interpret the civic principle as a continuous process of adapting the minority to the majority, as some kind of integration that ultimately leads to complete assimilation of the minority. At the same time though, the majority's political elite are susceptible to adopting measures that provide legal guarantees of non-discrimination based on ethnic affiliation and preservation of the *status quo* in the field of minority rights on the theoretical level. Most of its members see adoption of such measures as the essence of implementing the principle of civic equality. In a state that defines itself as national, though, application of the non-discrimination principle by itself cannot solve the problem of extensive reproduction (i.e. long-term preservation) of existence and identity of national minority communities that differ from the majority nation or the problem of national minorities' effective participation in decision-making on matters that existentially concern them.

That is why political representatives and intellectual elite of Slovakia's national minorities (particularly ethnic Hungarians) view the civic principle differently, i.e. not as equality through uniformity but, quite the contrary, as equality in diversity. Minority members should be viewed equal not only when they behave equally as majority members but also when they freely fulfil themselves as minority members in areas existentially related to their national identity, i.e. in the field of cultivating and using their native language, in the field of education and culture and even in the fields of regional development, economy and social affairs, to a degree to which decision-making in these areas directly affects development of the minority's language, education and culture. A minority community should enjoy the right

to decide on these matters more or less autonomously, provided that this decision-making stays within the limits provided by law.

There is also an alternative way of formulating this thesis: in areas existentially related to its ethnic identity (i.e. on matters of that community's internal, 'autonomous' life) a minority community should have the right of co-deciding. Or yet differently: decision-making on matters pertaining to preserving and developing a minority community's ethnic identity should apply a ban on majorization. Practical implementation of the said postulates in different countries is governed through different models, ranging from minority self-governance disposing of various degrees of participative or autonomous powers to the right of veto exercised by representatives or representative organs of a minority community on key issues of its ethnic existence on local, regional or national level.

In the Slovak Constitution and in the *Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities* of the Council of Europe, both of which are documents of undoubtedly binding nature, these rights are guaranteed by two provisions. One of them reads that members of ethnic minorities shall have the right "to express, preserve and develop their identity" (Preamble of the *Framework Convention*; Article 34 of the Slovak Constitution features words "right to complex development"). The other anchors the right of ethnic minorities "to effective participation in administration of affairs that concern them" (Article 15 of the *Framework Convention*; Article 34 Paragraph 2c) of the Slovak Constitution).

Resolving the status of ethnic minorities in the Slovak Republic should start with a matter-of-fact, expert discussion on the content and effective implementation of these two fundamental rights. But launching a fruitful dialogue is impossible without developing and strengthening mutual trust, which is the basic guarantee that the dialogue will not avoid sensitive issues. The responsibility of democratically-thinking intellectuals on both sides of the dialogue rests in their ability and/or determination to prevent sweeping sensitive issues under the carpet but, on the contrary, take them out of the hands of nationalists and populists who merely abuse them to attain their mercenary goals.

A sustainable solution may only be produced by long-term systematic endeavour, both in terms of strengthening mutual trust between political elites and bringing about a fundamental turning point in the field of implementing education system's content reform, including penetration of tolerance and mutual respect into political culture and public life. Slovak schools must increase their emphasis on intercultural education. Slovak children must be taught that Hungarians, Roma, Jews and other ethnic communities

also live in Slovakia and that they do not constitute a threat but rather enrichment. They must be encouraged to embrace the values of multiculturalism, human rights and elementary respect for dissimilarity.

Naturally, the same goes for schools with minority languages of instruction. Children at these schools must also be led to treating members of the majority positively. In order to achieve that, pedagogues at these schools must apply appropriate methods and encourage positive motivation. Adequate political culture of those who influence the public opinion is vital to this endeavour. The role of the media in matter-of-fact, responsible informing on issues of coexistence between different ethnic communities is irreplaceable, just like the role of intellectuals and civil society actors who are morally obliged to raise their voice in the name of human rights, tolerance and national understanding. Only then the hope of changing the situation in the foreseeable future will not remain a mere illusion.

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Notes

1   Parts 1 and 2 of the present study are edited versions of texts already published by the author (Petőcz, 2007 and Petőcz, 2008).

2   While most voters who came to polling stations on December 4, 2004, did approve the idea, the overall share of affirmative votes reached only 18.90% of all eligible voters, rendering the referendum unsuccessful; according to the Hungarian law, at least 25% of all eligible voters must vote in affirmative for a plebiscite to be successful.

3   These sentiments were faithfully described in a story headlined *Magyarországellenes hangulat a határontúliaknál* [Behind-Border Hungarians Feel Anti-Hungarian Sentiments] run by the Internet portal www.mindentudás.hu on December 6, 2004, two days after the vote. For further information, please see http://www.mindentudas.hu/nagyvilag/20041206magyarorszagellenes.html.

4   For complete results of the 2006 parliamentary elections, please see http://portal.statistics.sk/nrsr_2006/

5   In spring 2008, however, the PES decided to restore the party's associated membership although the reasons that had made European socialists adopt the original decision did not change; on the contrary, nationalization of Slovakia's political landscape continued even further.

6   Eörsi Mátyás: "Haider után Slota" ['Slota Follows Haider'], *Népszabadság*, July 12, 2006.

7   *Správa o plnení úloh zahraničnej politiky SR v roku 2006* [Report on Discharging Foreign Policy Tasks of the Slovak Republic in 2006], (Bratislava: Ministerstvo zahraničných vecí SR, 2007); available at: http://www.foreign.gov.sk/pk/mat/159-sprava.htm, p. 40.

8   *Spoločné vyhlásenie Národnej rady Slovenskej republiky k pamätnému dňu obetí holocaustu a rasového násilia a proti prejavom extrémizmu a neznášanlivosti* [Joint Declaration of the National Council of the Slovak Republic on the Day to Commemorate Victims of the Holocaust and Racial Violence and against Displays of Extremism and Intolerance], (Bratislava: Národná rada Slovenskej republiky, September 6, 2006). The full declaration is available at: www.nrsr.sk/Dynamic/Download.aspx?DocID=235911.

9   The fact that the assembly eventually passed a relatively harsh special resolution on the issue may quite paradoxically be attributed to SDKÚ Chairman Mikuláš Dzurinda who was 'more Catholic than the Pope' regarding the entire matter. Forming the *ad hoc* coalition of SNS – SDKÚ – KDH that incorporated in the resolution even harsher formulations than SMER-SD could hope for may certainly be regarded as a very peculiar moment of the country's political development in this period.

10 Classic examples of Csáky's clumsy communication with the media were two extensive interviews for serious weekly magazines (.*týždeň* and Új Szó) immediately after his election. In both interviews, Csáky avoided answering questions directly, reacted irritably and engaged in controversies with journalists.

11 This statement was first aired in *Saturday Dialogues*, a program broadcast by the Slovak Radio on October 6, 2007.

12 The full text of the declaration is available at: www.nrsr.sk

13 The projects envisaged by the program included, for instance, drafting common history textbooks or developing regional infrastructure in border areas, including construction of bridges over the Ipeľ River, a speedway connecting Košice and Miskolc, etc. For further information, please see *Výročná správa Ministerstva zahraničných vecí Slovenskej republiky. Zahraničná politika v roku 2007* [Annual Report of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic: Foreign Policy in 2007], (Bratislava: Ministerstvo zahraničných vecí Slovenskej republiky, 2008, pp. 22–23).

14 "Fico: Maďarský prezident zneužil návštevu" ['Fico: Hungarian President Abused Visit'], *SITA* news agency, October 3, 2007.

15 A sermon given by KBS chairman during a holy mass in Černová; available at: http://www.tkkbs.sk/view.php?cisloclanku=20071029017

16 Tomáš Nejedlý: "Haraszti: Zákon ohrozuje slobodu. Musí sa zmeniť" ['Haraszti: Law Threatens Freedom, Must Change'], *Hospodárske noviny*, February 18, 2008.

17 Miroslav Kern: "SMK–MKP zradila partnerov, Fico vyhral" ['SMK–MKP Betrayed Partners, Fico Won'], *Sme*, April 11, 2008.

18 It turned out eventually that the almost hysterical atmosphere regarding swift ratification of the Lisbon Treaty was nothing but a marketing stunt by Premier Fico. Even SMK–MKP would have been better off had the ratification process been postponed at least until June when Ireland rejected the Lisbon Treaty in a referendum. The failure created a completely new situation in Europe that could have provided favourable conditions for a thorough public debate on the Treaty's content and implications – which did not take place in Slovakia at all – as well as for negotiations on other issues such as Press Act or State Language Act. As of early November 2009, the ratification process has not been completed; the last member state that has not ratified the Lisbon Treaty is the Czech Republic.

19 Full findings of the survey are available at: www.cvek.sk

20 "Foreign Minister Summons Slovak Ambassador and Requests Explanation for Unacceptable Slovak Remarks and Actions", a press release by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of the Hungarian Republic, October 2, 2008; available at: <<http://www.kulugyminiszterium.hu/kum/en/bal/actualities/spokesman_statements/GK_Slovak_081002.htm>>

21 "Fico: Slota nadáva, lebo ho SMK–MKP provokuje" ['Fico: Slota Curses because SMK–MKP Provokes Him'], *ČTK, SITA*, September 27, 2007; available at: <<http://www.sme.sk/c/3508015/fico-slota-nadava-lebo-ho-SMK–MKP-provokuje.html>>

22 An interview with President Ivan Gašparovič broadcast by Slovak Television on November 19, 2008.

23 In his official position, Vollebaek observed that the amendment had been passed before consultations with his office were formally over. The full Slovak and English version of the document released on July 22, 2009, was published on the official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It is available at: http://www.mzv.sk/App/WCM/main.nsf?Open

24 The present publication features a separate chapter on the case of Hedviga Malinová.

25 For instance, they expressed regrets over the circumstances of President Sólyom's thwarted visit to Komárno while refusing to specify either side's responsibility for the incident and its implications.

26 "Lajčák: „rendeződött" a magyar-szlovák viszony az utóbbi hetekben" ['Lajčák: Slovak–Hungarian Relations Normalized in Recent Weeks'], *MTI*, October 25, 2009.

27 Vražda, Daniel: "Orbán sa postavil za Csákyho" ['Orbán Backed Csáky'], *Sme*, October 19, 2009.

28 "Čaplovič: Csáky je klamár, Orbánovo vystúpenie bola politická agresia" ['Čaplovič: Csáky Is a Liar, Orbán's Appearance Was Political Aggression'], *TASR*, October 24, 2009.

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31 Bibó, István: "Mierová zmluva a maďarská demokracia" ['The Peace Treaty and Hungarian Democracy'] in Bibó, István: *Bieda východoeurópskych malých štátov. Vybrané štúdie* [Misery of Small States of Eastern Europe: Select Studies], (Bratislava: Kalligram, 1996, p. 239).

32 Petőcz, Kálmán: "Právo a morálka" ['Law and Morality'], *Sme*, September 12, 2007.

33 "Maďarsko: na výnimku pri Benešovi zabudnite" ['Hungary: Forget Exceptions Regarding Beneš Decrees'], *TASR*, October 26, 2009. All EU member states including Hungary have ruled out retroactive effect of the Charter of Fundamental Rights that forms an integral part of the revised EU Constitutional Treaty also known as the Lisbon Treaty. In other words, the effect of Beneš decrees cannot be retroactively revoked based on the Charter of Fundamental Rights. Most analysts seem to agree that Václav Klaus perceives Beneš decrees merely as an opportunity to demonstrate his negative position on strengthening supranational mechanisms and institutions in the process of European integration.

34 The incriminated interview with Ján Slota was published by the *Lidové noviny* daily on July 22, 2006.

35 "Duray má zaplatiť SNS milión korún" ['Duray Must Pay Million Crowns to SNS'], *TASR*, January 30, 2008.

36 "Prokuratúra odmietla trestné oznámenie na Slotu" ['Motion for Slota's Criminal Prosecution Turned Down'], *SITA*, November 29, 2008.

37 "Pospolitosť ožila. Načas" ['Pospolitosť Revived Temporarily'], *Sme*, July 2, 2009.

38 Peter Morvay: "Budapešť zakázala gardy" ['Budapest Outlawed Guards'], *Sme*, July 3, 2009.

39 Ján Krempaský: "Premiér cíti ohrozenie" ['Premier Feels Threat'], *Sme*, November 10, 2008.

40 "Strasbourgban fellebez a Nemzeti Őrsereg" ['National Guard Will Appeal to Strasbourg'], *MTI*, April 3, 2009.

41 Please see http://www.niton.sk/documents/8-186-6376-list_prezidentovi.doc.

42 "Bugár opúšťa poslanecký klub SMK–MKP. Takisto Nagy a Gál" ['Bugár Leaves SMK–MKP Caucus Along with Nagy and Gál'], available at: http://aktualne.centrum.sk/domov/politika/clanek.phtml?id=1180307

43 Findings of the survey *Political Orientation and Value System of Hungarians in Slovakia* were summed up in Mrva, Marianna–Szilvássy, Tímea: "A szlovákiai magyarok politikai orientációja és értékrendje" ['Slovak Hungarians' Political Orientation and Value System'], *Új Szó*, October 10, 2009.

KÁLMÁN PETŐCZ:
National Populism and Electoral Behaviour

The course and results of the most recent presidential elections in Slovakia that took place on March 21 and April 4, 2009, created an impression as if the country was torn asunder in terms of electoral behaviour, into a broader northern stripe and a narrower southern stripe that also included the capital of Bratislava and the East Slovak metropolis of Košice. The coloured map depicting the division of constituencies claimed by the incumbent President Ivan Gašparovič and his challenger Iveta Radičová, a civic candidate endorsed by opposition parties, became one of the most frequently presented media messages related to the elections.

Map 1
Results of the second round of presidential elections in Slovakia in 2009 – candidates receiving the greatest number of valid ballots in particular electoral districts

Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic; www.statistics.sk

It is important to note that the featured map divides Slovakia into 50 electoral districts or constituencies (*obvod* in Slovak) while most media showed maps dividing the country into 79 districts of general administration (*okres* in Slovak).[1] On these maps, the southern strip marking the territory where Iveta Radičová had defeated Ivan Gašparovič was continuous, stretching along Slovakia's entire border with Hungary from Bratislava to Čierna nad Tisou.

In his run for re-election, incumbent President Ivan Gašparovič was supported by two ruling parties – SMER–Social Democracy (SMER-SD) led by Prime Minister Robert Fico and the Slovak National Party (SNS) led by Ján Slota. The third ruling party, namely the People's Party–Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (ĽS-HZDS) led by former premier Vladimír Mečiar refused to endorse Mr. Gašparovič and even overtly dissociated itself from his candidature. Nevertheless, it is very likely that a significant proportion of HZDS supporters voted for the incumbent president as well, particularly in the second round when the atmosphere within society had aggravated due to nationalist rhetoric of the SNS and reticence of the president and the prime minister. The SNS focused on 'warning' Slovak voters against a potential threat of proclaiming Hungarian autonomy in southern Slovakia if Iveta Radičová won the elections. Several days before the second round of elections, unknown perpetrators circulated leaflets in a number of municipalities around south-western Slovakia claiming that Radičová had "promised autonomy to the Hungarians". A similar advertisement was later commissioned by an agency that worked for President Gašparovič. Eventually it turned out that the original advertisement had been commissioned by the SNS. On a special press conference, Ján Slota declared that it would be "sick if the Hungarian minority elected the head of state for the majority." Neither President Gašparovič nor Premier Fico did anything to dissociate themselves from these assertions.[2]

A general view within the liberally oriented intellectual elite is that "frightening with Hungarians and their autonomy resonates especially among voters from the north of the country who rarely come in contact with citizens of Hungarian origin."[3] This view is seemingly corroborated by exact statistical data from all previously held elections as well as by various sociological surveys analyzing electoral behaviour in Slovakia.[4] If we examined the results of all previous parliamentary elections, we would find out that parties with a strong national-populist appeal (i.e. SNS, ĽS-HZDS and SMER-SD) had always lost in southern districts including Bratislava and Košice; these districts have been dominated by ethnic Hungarian parties and centre-right parties with a strong pro-European and civic appeal.

Do these statistical data actually justify a conclusion that electoral behaviour of Slovaks (i.e. voters of Slovak nationality) inhabiting northern
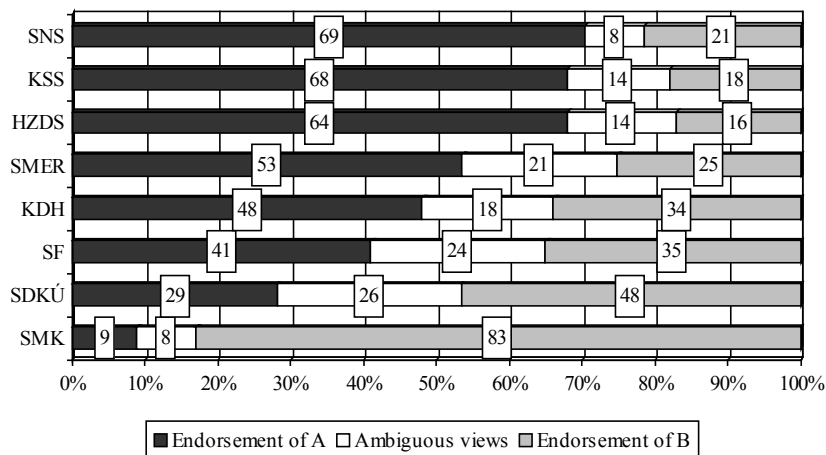
and southern districts is fundamentally different? If such a significant difference truly exists, does it indicate that their views of ethnic Hungarians and their attitude to tackling the issue of Slovak–Hungarian coexistence are significantly different as well?

This issue is quite relevant from the viewpoint of seeking effective tool of combating national populism in Slovakia. For instance, one of openly declared ambitions of the recently passed amendment to State Language Act was the effort to protect the rights of Slovaks living in southern Slovakia.[5] Violations of their language rights may allegedly be documented by numerous complaints received by the Ministry of Culture and other central government organs. The assertion that Slovaks are 'discriminated against' or even 'assimilated' by ethnic Hungarians inhabiting southern Slovakia is a common argument featured in public discourse in so-called nationally-oriented media and used not only by SNS representatives but also by HZDS and some SMER-SD leaders. Do these assertions and a campaign based on them truly reflect the views of at least a critical mass of Slovak voters in southern Slovakia? Or is this rhetoric largely designed for ignorant voters from northern districts who 'never saw a living Hungarian'? We may actually find a partial answer to this question if we take a closer look at electoral behaviour patterns of Slovaks inhabiting southern Slovakia.

Sociological surveys suggest that supporters of individual Slovak political parties show relatively significant differences in their perception of the status and rights of national minorities, especially ethnic Hungarians. Before the 2006 parliamentary elections, the Institute for Public Affairs examined the value profile of individual political parties' sympathizers, including their acceptance of the principle of full equality of all Slovak citizens regardless of nationality. The respondents were presented with two statements and asked to choose the one they preferred (please see Graph 1). As concluded by Bútorová and Gyárfášová (2006), the survey findings revealed that potential voters of SNS, KSS and HZDS took the most reserved and even disapproving position to the issue of national minorities' full equality. On the other hand, the most liberal were SDKÚ voters followed by supporters of the Freedom Forum (SF). In the middle were SMER-SD and KDH voters; yet, the position of SMER-SD voters on the issue was clearly closer to the camp of SNS – HZDS – KSS while KDH sympathizers were closer to the camp of SDKÚ – SF. Generally speaking, though, the electorate of each Slovak political party features a relatively high proportion of those who endorse the statement: "The Slovak Republic is a state of members of the Slovak nation and therefore the Slovaks ought to enjoy a decisive say in it".

101

Graph 1
Accepting the idea of full equality of persons belonging to national minorities by supporters of relevant political parties in Slovakia

Statement A: "The Slovak Republic is a state of members of the Slovak nation and therefore the Slovaks ought to enjoy a decisive say in it."
Statement B: "The Slovak Republic is a state of all citizens who inhabit it and therefore it must guarantee equal rights to all, regardless of nationality."
Source: Institute for Public Affairs, 2006; Bútorová – Gyárfášová (2006, p. 123).

Graph 1 plainly shows that in terms of perceiving the status and rights of national minorities, which is in the country's political discourse inherently related to the issue of protecting its national and state interests, the current division of political forces in Slovakia is in fact quite logical. The opinion that the Slovak Republic is exclusively a state of the Slovaks was shared by two in three SNS, HZDS (and KSS) voters. This view was somewhat less popular among supporters of SMER-SD (53%); on the other hand, the share of respondents with unambiguous views of the issue was relatively high in this category. Besides, only one in four (25%) SMER-SD sympathizers unambiguously endorsed the assertion that the Slovak Republic is a state of all citizens who inhabit it, which was only 4% more than among SNS supporters. SDKÚ sympathizers clearly stand out of the overall picture as nearly half of them believe that the Slovak Republic is a state of all citizens who inhabit it.
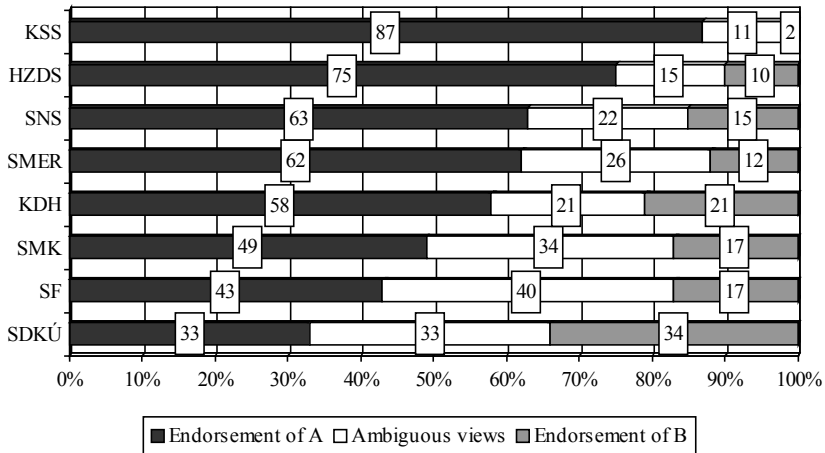
The division line illustrated by Graph 1 is significant not only in terms of national but also regional and municipal politics as it provides for important conclusions to tackle the issue of coexistence between Slovaks and eth-

nic Hungarians in southern Slovakia on a practical level. If we admit that Slovaks inhabiting ethnically mixed territories of southern Slovakia show better understanding of the minority rights issue and greater tolerance with respect to various models of ethnic coexistence (as it is often emphasized by politicians, media commentators and some academics), it should affect their electoral behaviour in a statistically significant manner.

It is interesting to compare the views of individual parties' voters regarding the issue of Slovak statehood to their views regarding the degree of government's involvement in social security issues. In the mentioned survey carried out in spring 2006, researchers from the Institute for Public Affairs summed up the latter in the following graph.

Graph 2
Government's responsibility for citizens' socio-economic situation

Statement A: "Government should take care of its citizens' jobs and decent standard of living."
Statement B: "Everyone should be responsible for their jobs and standard of living."
Source: Institute for Public Affairs, 2006; Bútorová – Gyárfášová (2006, p. 122).

A comparison of Graphs 1 and 2 reveals that the categories of voters who subscribe to the welfare state and to the national state overlap significantly. Dividing Slovakia's political landscape based on individual parties' position on the role of government (and the market) in socio-economic policies largely corresponds to dividing it based on their preference of the national or civic principle when building and administering the state. In both cases, we may find the same parties on each side of the political spectrum. That

is why the decision to form the incumbent administration after the 2006 elections was the most logical choice in terms of reflecting involved parties' voters' value orientations. The election slogan advertised by Ivan Gašparovič before the 2009 presidential elections ("I think nationally and feel socially") astutely reflected true views and value orientations of a significant share of voters of the SMER-SD – ĽS-HZDS – SNS – KSS bloc. In order to capture and express this bloc's value orientation, we dubbed it a bloc of nationally and socially oriented parties or a national-populist bloc. In line with analyses of these parties' policies and strategies presented in other chapters of this publication, we intend to use these two terms interchangeably or as synonyms.

The principal focus of this study is electoral behaviour of citizens who live in southern Slovakia, particularly those of Slovak origin. When examining the connection between national populism and Slovak–Hungarian relations, our basic hypothesis was that the key to both issues lay in southern Slovakia. Its essence is to define a mutually acceptable model of both communities' coexistence in situations when ethnic Hungarians form a minority (be it on the national, regional or local level) as well as in situations when they form a numerical majority (be it on the micro-regional or local level).

Substantially lower support for the national-populist bloc among Slovak voters from the south compared to those from the north seems to corroborate the hypothesis on peaceful coexistence of Slovaks and ethnic Hungarians in southern Slovakia that is only disturbed by politicians' insensitive interventions from above; however, if electoral behaviour of Slovaks from the south and from the north failed to show marked differences, it would imply a necessity to revise many elements of minority policy pursued by the government as well as by relevant political parties (both majority and minority ones). The point is that in such a case, critical masses of two electorate segments that are diametrically different in terms of professed values would inevitably clash in southern Slovakia; needless to say, none of these two segments would ever be completely satisfied with their status.

Defining the Terms of Southern Slovakia, Ethnically Mixed Territory and Territory Inhabited by Ethnic Hungarians

In Slovak as well as Hungarian political and social science, let alone media vernacular or colloquial language, the terms of 'southern Slovakia', 'ethnically mixed territory' and 'territory inhabited by ethnic Hungarians' are used almost as synonyms. The Hungarian specialized literature has coined

the term of *magyarlakta járások*, or districts inhabited by Hungarians, that normally include the following 16 districts (listed from west to east): Senec, Dunajská Streda, Galanta, Šaľa, Komárno, Nové Zámky, Nitra, Levice, Veľký Krtíš, Lučenec, Rimavská Sobota, Revúca, Rožňava, Košice area, Trebišov and Michalovce (please see Gyurgyík, 2008).[6] The Slovak specialized literature usually refers to these 16 districts as ethnically mixed territory; likewise, various agencies that carry out public opinion polls or sociological surveys consider this territory as the frame of reference for the purpose of selecting samples of ethnic Hungarian respondents.[7] However, the total number as well as the overall share of ethnic Hungarians in these districts differ significantly (please see Table 1).

Table 1

Total number and overall share of ethnic Hungarians in particular districts (constituencies) of southern Slovakia according to 1991 and 2001 population censuses

	District/constituency	1991			2001		
		Population total	Of that: ethnic Hungarians	Share (%)	Population total	Of that: ethnic Hungarians	Share (%)
1.	Bratislava city (constituency)	442,197	20,312	4.6	428,672	16,451	3.8
2.	Senec	49,871	12,214	24.5	51,825	10,553	20.4
3.	Dunajská Streda	109,345	95,310	87.2	112,384	93,660	83.3
4.	Galanta	92,645	38,295	41.3	94,533	36,518	38.6
5.	Šaľa	54,159	21,754	40.2	54,000	19,283	35.7
6.	Komárno	109,279	78,859	72.2	108,556	74,976	69.1
7.	Nové Zámky	153,466	63,747	41.5	149,594	57,271	38.3
	Nové Zámky constituency	*–*	*–*	*–*	*116,428*	*31,106*	*26.7*
	Štúrovo constituency	*–*	*–*	*–*	*33,106*	*26,165*	*79.0*
8.	Nitra	160,725	13,113	8.2	163,540	10,956	6.7
9.	Levice	120,703	38,169	31.6	120,021	33,524	27.9
10.	Veľký Krtíš	46,813	14,384	30.7	46,741	12,823	27.4
11.	Lučenec	72,946	22,513	30.9	72,837	20,072	27.6
12.	Rimavská Sobota	82,112	36,404	44.3	83,124	34,323	41.3
13.	Revúca	40,143	10,256	25.5	40,918	8,994	22.0
14.	Rožňava	60,681	21,434	35.3	61,887	18,954	30.6
15.	Košice area	99,292	16,240	16.4	106,999	14,140	13.2
16.	Košice-city (constituency)	235,160	10,760	4.6	236,093	8,940	3.8
17.	Trebišov	100,520	33,191	33.0	103,779	30,425	29.3
18.	Michalovce	105,281	13,754	13.1	109,121	12,819	11.7
	Total	2,135,338	560,709	26.3	2,144,624	514,682	24.0
	Total without Bratislava and Košice	1,457,981	529,637	36.3	1,479,859	489,291	33.1

Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic; Forum Institute for Minority Research; author's own calculations.

If we compare a map of Slovakia's ethnic make-up by municipalities and by districts, it is plain to see that the territory inhabited by ethnic Hunga -

rians does not fully correspond to the territory of mentioned 16 districts. Except the districts of Dunajská Streda and Komárno that are numerically dominated by ethnic Hungarians (their overall share reached 83.3% and 69.1%, respectively, in the 2001 population census), all other districts comprise a relatively homogeneous ethnic Hungarian majority in the south and an almost homogeneous Slovak majority in the north.[8] The only exception may be found in the Nitra district where the town of Nitra is in the southeast surrounded by a crescent of villages stretching from Veľký Kýr to Jelenec pod Zoborom that are dominated by ethnic Hungarians. Nevertheless, the southern parts of the said districts form a relatively continuous strip of land where people of Hungarian origin (i.e. inhabitants with Hungarian identity) constitute a majority.[9]

Therefore, the ethnic border (i.e. the northern border of ethnic Hungarians' homogeneous territorial settlement) is quite easy to demarcate, the only problematic area being the one between Nové Zámky and Nitra where ethnic Slovak and ethnic Hungarian enclaves alternate.

As Table 1 shows, the overall share of ethnic Hungarians in the 16 examined districts totalled only 33.1% in 2001, declining by over 3% compared to 1991. If we included the cities of Bratislava and Košice, the overall share of ethnic Hungarians on the examined territory would decline further to 24%. However, if we demarcated the (actual) ethnically mixed territory by the northern border of ethnic Hungarians' homogeneous territorial settlement, then the share of ethnic Hungarians on this territory would remain above 50% and would in fact approach 60%. It is not this study's ambition to draw any political or ideological conclusions from this fact.[10] All we care about is methodological correctness of research.

The currently applied methodology of data collection – be it for statistical or research purposes – has been adapted to the country's existing administrative and territorial organization; however, the real life as well as social and economic relations may not adapt immediately to artificially created administrative units that are subject to frequent changes. Therefore, researchers specializing in sociology, political science or social psychology would quite logically expect particular qualities, features and characteristics established on a territory demarcated by the actual ethnic border to differ at least partially from results established on the 'ethnically mixed territory' that has been artificially defined by the borders of newly created administrative units. For instance, it is fair to assume that the town of Tisovec located in the northern part of the Rimavská Sobota district will not show the same characteristics of 'ethnically mixed territory' as the town of Jesenské located in the southern part of the same district. Similarly, the

town of Michalovce is likely to have a different ethnic make-up than the town of Veľké Kapušany.
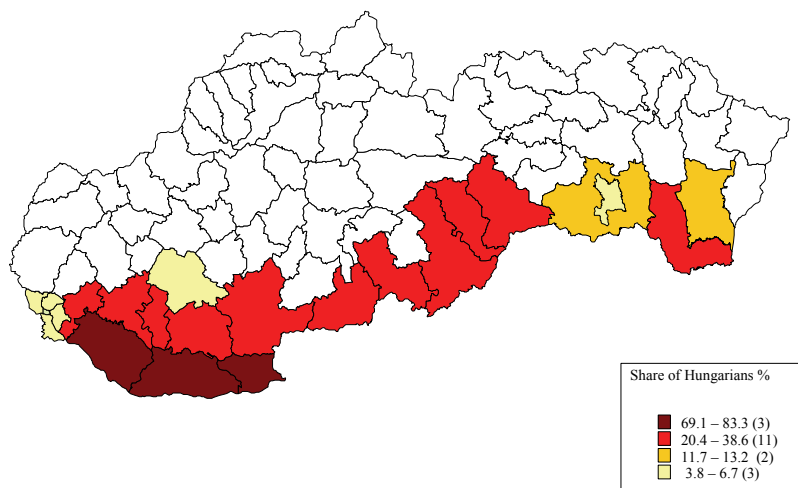
Sometimes, the ambiguity of demarcating the ethnically mixed (Slovak–Hungarian) territory leads to interchanging and confusing of both concepts. A very valuable and pioneering publication titled *Mýty a kontramýty* [Myths and Counter-Myths] that examined the roots of tensions between Slovaks and Hungarians on ethnically mixed territories used the term of 'southern Slovakia' as a synonym for the territory dominated by ethnic Hungarians.[11] But when explaining the applied methodology several pages later, the same publication described the ethnically mixed territory of southern Slovakia as 11 border districts plus the Galanta district, i.e. districts as enacted before 1996 in which ethnic Hungarians made up more than 10% of the population.[12] The same definition of ethnically mixed territory of southern Slovakia was used by another interesting study titled *Problém soužití Slováků a Maďarů na Slovensku v polovině 90. let* [The Problem of Slovak–Hungarian Coexistence in Slovakia in the Mid-1990s] (Frič 1999, p. 219). Sociologist Vladimír Krivý also describes the ethnically mixed territory as all districts where ethnic Hungarians make up over 10% of the population (Krivý, 2007). A joint project carried out by the National Educational Centre and the Forum Institute for Minority Research that examined the culture of coexistence on the ethnically mixed territory of southern Slovakia used a slightly different methodology, focusing only on those districts where representation of ethnic Hungarians exceeded 25% (please see Lampl, 2008, p. 81).[13]

Map 2 shows the share of ethnic Hungarians on the population of the southern districts of Slovakia based on the 2001 population census. I complete the data shown on this map by the following figures: in 2001, Slovakia had 551 municipalities inhabited by at least 100 ethnic Hungarians; in 410 of those municipalities (i.e. 74%), ethnic Hungarians constituted a majority. The number of ethnic Hungarians in these municipalities totalled 396,214, which means that 77% of all ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia inhabited municipalities in which they formed a majority.[14]

So, for the purposes of our study, the ethnically mixed territory is a region relatively clearly demarcated by the line of Bratislava – Senec – Galanta – Nové Zámky – Levice – Veľký Krtíš – Lučenec – Rožňava – Košice on the north and Slovakia's state border on the south, plus the alluvial plain formed by Bodrog and Uh rivers. This territory, which Hungarian-language expert literature usually refers to as *magyarlakta terület*, or territory inhabited by Hungarians, shelters approximately 90% of all ethnic Hungarians living in Slovakia.

Map 2

Ethnic composition of south-Slovakian districts (share of Hungarians in 2001)

Notes:
1) In the case of Bratislava and Košice the aggregate figure for the whole municipality is shown (i.e. districts of Bratislava I to V, Košice I to IV).
2) The district of Nové Zámky is divided on the map into electoral constituencies Nové Zámky and Štúrovo.
Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic.

Northern and southern parts of the said districts do not differ only in terms of ethnic make-up but usually also in terms of geomorphologic division, transportation infrastructure and socio-economic characteristics. From the viewpoint of state administration, the last time when southern Slovakia's administrative and territorial organization corresponded to its ethnic make-up was between 1990 and 1996; then the existing 38 districts were further divided into 121 territorial units that served as the 1st level of state admin-istration.[15] One should note that these territorial units did not have any exec-utive powers as districts remained basic administrative units (regions were temporarily abolished).[16] In 23 out of the 121 territorial units, the share of ethnic Hungarians exceeded 20% and in 16 of them ethnic Hungarians con-stituted a majority. According to the 1991 population census, the territori-al units of Senec, Dunajská Streda, Šamorín, Sládkovičovo, Galanta, Šaľa, Veľký Meder, Komárno, Kolárovo, Hurbanovo, Nové Zámky, Štúrovo, Želiezovce, Šahy, Veľký Krtíš, Fiľakovo, Rimavská Sobota, Tornaľa,

Plešivec, Rožňava, Moldava nad Bodvou, Kráľovský Chlmec and Veľké Kapušany were inhabited by almost 60% of ethnic Hungarians.[17] Even if we included territorial units of Lučenec, Levice, Šurany and Vráble where the share of ethnic Hungarians fluctuated between 9.5% and 13%, the overall share of ethnic Hungarians in all 27 units exceeded 50%.

Of course, these territorial units' existence had its foothold in history. The lowest-level administrative units (also called districts or administrative districts) that more or less matched the territorial units from the period of 1990–1996 existed on modern Slovakia's territory from the mid-1850s until 1960.

Electoral Behaviour of Slovaks Living on Ethnically Mixed Territories

When examining electoral behaviour of people inhabiting southern Slovakia, it is sometimes useful to divide them into voters of ethnic Slovak origin and voters of ethnic Hungarian origin. Since the ballot is secret, finding out exact figures is impossible. The aggregate data for individual constituencies, municipalities, areas or districts provide only a rough guide. Based on overall election results as well as on surveys examining parties' voting preferences, we assume that most citizens of Hungarian origin (or with ethnic Hungarian identity) voted for the Party of Hungarian Coalition (SMK–MKP) or its legal predecessors in previous elections.[18] Unfortunately, election statistics do not reveal how many ethnic Hungarians voted for Slovak parties and how many Slovaks voted for SMK–MKP or its predecessors. Also, these figures do not always reveal voting patterns of the Roma who also make up a significant share of the population living on the territory inhabited by ethnic Hungarians while only part of them officially declare Romany ethnicity.

If we intend to find out whether electoral behaviour of Slovaks living on ethnically mixed territories significantly differs from that of Slovaks inhabiting ethnically homogeneous Slovak territories, working with aggregated statistical data for particular districts may be misleading. For instance, a quick glimpse on the map of President Ivan Gašparovič's election results in the 2009 presidential elections might suggest that neither Gašparovič nor political parties that intensely supported his candidature, namely SMER-SD and the SNS enjoy strong voter support on the ethnically mixed territory.

Table 2

Election results of candidates in the second round of the 2009 presidential elections in southern Slovakia

	District/constituency	Number of valid ballots	Ivan Gašparovič		Iveta Radičová	
			Number of votes	Share (%)	Number of votes	Share (%)
1.	Bratislava city (constituency)	212,332	75,378	35.50	136,954	64.49
2.	Senec	29,177	9,884	33.87	19,293	66.12
3.	Dunajská Streda	61,441	3,084	5.01	58,357	94.98
4.	Galanta	41,988	14,666	34.92	27,322	65.07
5.	Šaľa	21,426	6,611	30.85	14,815	69.14
6.	Komárno	47,639	6,165	12.94	41,474	87.05
7.	Nové Zámky	65,046	24,230	37.25	40,816	62.74
	Nové Zámky constituency	*49,270*	*22,941*	*46.56*	*26,329*	*53.43*
	Štúrovo constituency	*15,776*	*1,289*	*8.17*	*14,487*	*91.82*
8.	Nitra	70,073	42,835	61.12	27,238	38.87
9.	Levice	49,942	21,163	42.37	28,779	57.62
10.	Veľký Krtíš	18,506	8,941	48.31	9,565	51.68
11.	Lučenec	27,220	13,043	47.91	14,177	52.08
12.	Rimavská Sobota	31,423	13,292	42.30	18,131	57.69
13.	Revúca	13,950	7,928	56.83	6,022	43.16
14.	Rožňava	23,700	9,691	40.89	14,009	59.10
15.	Košice area	40,722	19,943	48.97	20,779	51.02
16.	Košice-city (constituency)	90,058	35,687	39.62	54,371	60.37
17.	Trebišov	35,362	17,261	48.81	18,101	51.18
18.	Michalovce	36,030	22,499	62.44	13,531	37.55
	Total	916 035	352 301	35.51	649 734	70.93
	Total without Bratislava and Košice	623 645	241 236	38.68	458 409	50.04

Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic.

Table 2 shows that especially in southern part of West Slovakia the voter support for Ivan Gašparovič and, consequently, parties of the Slovak national-populist bloc was relatively low. Gašparovič scored a significant success only in Michalovce and Nitra districts that are not border districts and the share of ethnic Hungarians in them is relatively low. Except these two districts, Gašparovič received a majority support only in the Revúca district. In no other districts did he receive over 40% of the popular vote; in Dunajská Streda and Komárno districts, his voter support was below 15%, which seems almost irrelevant. In fact, the situation is a bit more complicated as we are about to demonstrate.

Comparison of Presidential Elections in 2009 and Parliamentary Elections in 2006 in Southern Slovakia on the Level of Districts

The presidential elections in 2009 ended up in an atmosphere that most probably made a vast majority of ethnic Hungarians in southern Slovakia vote according to the same pattern. Long before the elections, SMK–MKP unambiguously endorsed the candidature of Iveta Radičová; some public statements and appearances by Ivan Gašparovič and his supporters further assured ethnic Hungarians that Mr. Gašparovič was indeed not their candidate. As a result, the votes of ethnic Hungarians tipped the balance in all districts of southern Slovakia to the favour of Iveta Radičová, this despite the fact that they constitute a majority in only two of these districts (and three constituencies). By all available estimates, ethnic Hungarians voted for Mrs. Radičová in a ratio that exceeded 90% and even approached 100%. Consequently, we were able to establish with relative precision the voting pattern of Slovak voters living on the ethnically mixed territory.

We used a methodology of leaving the votes of ethnic Hungarian voters out of consideration. The total number of votes received by both candidates was adjusted by the coefficient of Slovaks' representation in each given district based on the data on ethnic make-up of particular districts and municipalities as established by the 2001 population census. The remaining votes were considered the votes cast by Slovak voters. The results are summed up in Table 3.

If election results of Ivan Gašparovič were compared to data from other districts and expressed in a cartogram, then the map of Slovakia would look something like this (please see Map 3).

Table 3
Election results of Ivan Gašparovič in the second round of the 2009 presidential elections in southern Slovakia

District	Share of the popular vote total (%)		Share of the popular vote among Slovaks only (%)		Share of ethnic Hungarians (2001 census)
	Iveta Radičová	Ivan Gašparovič	*Iveta Radičová*	*Ivan Gašparovič*	
Senec	66.12	33.87	*57.7*	*42.3*	20.4
Dunajská Streda	94.98	5.01	*68.7*	*31.3*	83.3
Galanta	65.07	34.92	*42.7*	*57.3*	38.6
Šaľa	69.14	30.85	*43.9*	*56.1*	35.7
Komárno	87.05	12.94	*36.9*	*43.1*	69.1
Nové Zámky (constituency)	53.43	46.56	*34.4*	*65.6*	26.7
Nitra	38.87	61.12	*34.3*	*65.7*	6.7
Štúrovo (constituency)	91.82	8.17	*66.1*	*43.9*	78.9
Levice	57.62	42.37	*35.8*	*64.2*	27.9
Veľký Krtíš	51.68	48.31	*25.7*	*74.3*	27.4
Lučenec	52.08	47.91	*30.6*	*69.4*	27.4
Rimavská Sobota	57.69	42.30	*37.8*	*62.2*	41.3
Revúca	43.16	56.83	*22.1*	*77.9*	22.0
Rožňava	59.10	40.89	*34.1*	*65.9*	30.6
Košice area	51.02	48.97	*38.0*	*62.0*	13.2
Trebišov	51.18	48.81	*30.3*	*69.7*	29.3
Michalovce	37,55	62.44	*26.5*	*73.5*	11.7
Slovakia total	44.47	55.53	*38.5*	*61.5*	9.7

Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic; author's own calculations.

Map 3
Election results of Ivan Gašparovič in the second round of the 2009 presidential elections by district[19], ethnic Slovak voters only
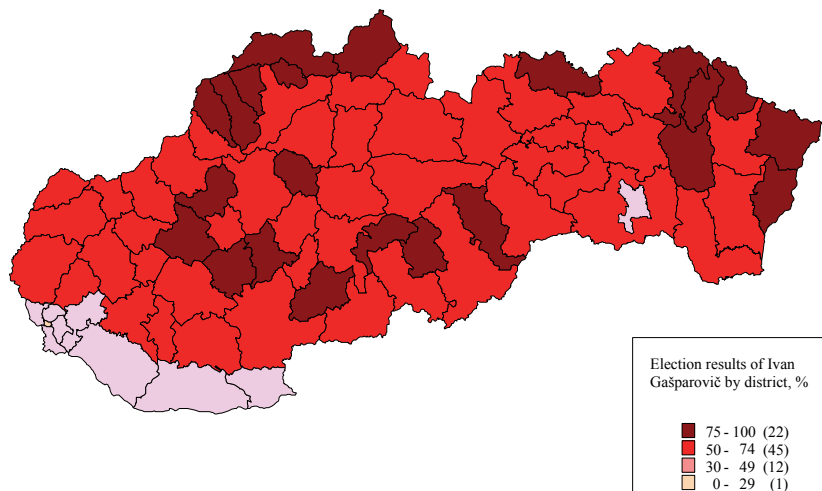
Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic; author's own calculations.

Table 3 as well as Map 3 clearly shows that electoral behaviour patterns of voters in southern Slovakia are much more structured than Map 1 presented at the beginning of this study seemed to suggest. From looking at Map 1, one would probably conclude that Slovakia was divided into two stripes (a broader and a narrower) characterized by diametrically different electoral behaviour; however, Map 3 shows that the said conclusion does not apply to Slovak (or, more precisely, non-Hungarian) voters in southern Slovakia. Had it been up to ethnic Slovak voters only, the incumbent President Ivan Gašparovič would have won not only in all northern districts but also in all southern districts except Senec, Dunajská Streda and Komárno districts and the Štúrovo constituency. Iveta Radičová would have convincingly claimed a single district, namely Bratislava I (Old Town) where she received almost three in four ballots cast by Slovak voters (72.32%). She would have also comfortably claimed the Košice I district (Old Town) on the back of 65.16% of the 'Slovak' popular vote as well as the remaining seven districts in Bratislava and Košice where Gašparovič recorded the worst results. All in all, Slovak (i.e. non-Hungarian) voters would have elected the opposition candidate in only 13 out of 79 districts (including the Štúrovo *obvod* and the altogether 9 districts of Bratislava and Košice).

If we take a closer look at electoral behaviour of Slovaks (i.e. non-Hungarians) from southern districts, we see that Iveta Radičová would have won by a convincing margin (i.e. two-third majority) only in the Dunajská Streda district where Ivan Gašparovič received 31% of all ballots cast by Slovak voters. Still, this number significantly changes the initial impression made by aggregated data featured in Table 2 according to which the incumbent president received only 5.1% of the popular vote in the said district. In the remaining three southern districts where Iveta Radičová won a majority of the 'Slovak' popular vote, the outcome was much closer. The incumbent president managed to attract about three in seven votes (42% to 44%) cast by non-Hungarian voters from Senec and Komárno districts as well as the Štúrovo constituency.[20]

Table 3 also justifies a conclusion that voter support for President Gašparovič (and most probably for parties that supported him) is inversely proportional to ethnic Hungarians' share of the given district's total population, i.e. the higher the share of ethnic Hungarians, the lower the voter support for the incumbent ruling coalition. Could this justify a conclusion that Slovak and ethnic Hungarian inhabitants of truly mixed municipalities and regions show more understanding to each other and are less likely to vote for political parties that like to use the so-called ethnic card in their campaigning? The point is that a comparison of Map 2 (Ethnic make-up of Slovakia's population) and

Map 3 (Election results of Ivan Gašparovič) might also suggest that election results of the incumbent president and parties that support him are in ethnically mixed districts 'improved' by their northern parts inhabited by more or less homogeneous Slovak population. In order to provide a correct answer to this question, we have to shift the focus of our analysis from the level of districts to the level of micro-regions and municipalities.

Before we do that, however, let us remain on the level of districts and compare regional patterns of electoral behaviour of voters who voted for Ivan Gašparovič in the 2009 presidential elections to those of voters who voted for parties of the incumbent ruling coalition in the 2006 parliamentary elections. Table 4 shows election results of individual parties of the incumbent ruling coalition posted in southern districts as well as their combined election results. The table compares aggregated election results for the set of all eligible voters to specific election results calculated for the set of non-Hungarian voters in each district.

Table 4
Election results of parties of the incumbent ruling coalition in the 2006 elections in southern Slovakia by district; overall results compared to voting preferences of non-Hungarian (i.e. Slovak) voters[21]

	SMER–SD		ĽS–HZDS		SNS		SMER+HZDS+SNS	
District	Total	*Slovaks*	Total	*Slovaks*	Total	*Slovaks*	Total	*Slovaks*
Senec	18.23	*24.0*	6.15	*8.1*	8.83	*11.6*	33.21	*43.7*
Dunajská Streda	3.24	*23.7*	1.64	*12.0*	0.70	*5.1*	5.58	*40.8*
Galanta	18.95	*34.8*	5.86	*10.8*	6.56	*12.1*	31.37	*57.7*
Šaľa	18.20	*33.0*	5.11	*9.3*	6.59	*11.9*	29.90	*54.2*
Komárno	7.49	*31.4*	2.24	*9.4*	2.70	*11.3*	12.43	*52.1*
Nové Zámky (constituency)	24.99	*37.9*	7.39	*11.2*	10.49	*15.9*	42.87	*65.0*
Nitra	33.61	*36.6*	10.44	*11.4*	11.52	*12.5*	55.57	*60.5*
Štúrovo (constituency)	4.16	*28.3*	1.57	*10.6*	1.43	*9.7*	7.16	*48.6*
Levice	22.87	*34.1*	8.01	*11.9*	7.35	*11.0*	38.23	*57.0*
Veľký Krtíš	25.80	*39.3*	6.88	*10.5*	8.06	*12.3*	40.74	*62.1*
Lučenec	26.18	*38.0*	6.58	*9.5*	8.53	*12.4*	41.29	*59.9*
Rimavská Sobota	23.17	*39.2*	3.59	*6.1*	8.17	*13.8*	34.93	*59.1*
Revúca	31.65	*43.0*	7.83	*10.6*	9.48	*12.9*	48.96	*66.5*
Rožňava	25.49	*41.0*	5.55	*8.9*	7.52	*12.1*	38.56	*62.0*
Košice area	26.73	*33.7*	6.32	*8.0*	7.63	*9.6*	40.68	*51.3*
Trebišov	26.44	*37.3*	5.99	*8.5*	6.44	*9.1*	38.87	*54.9*
Michalovce	35.53	*41.6*	8.08	*9.5*	9.39	*11.0*	53.00	*62.1*
Slovakia total	29.14	-	8.79	-	11.73	-	49.66	-
Slovaks only total	-	*33.0*	-	*10.00*	-	*13.4*	-	*56.3*

Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic; author's own calculations.

Table 4 reveals several interesting findings. Most importantly, election results of the Slovak National Party (SNS) among Slovak voters from

southern Slovakia were not significantly worse than its overall election result on the national level (11.73%); in the Nové Zámky constituency, the party's performance was substantially better than on the national level. The only district where the SNS did not perform well among Slovak voters was Dunajská Streda. This may be partly attributed to the fact that the overall share of Slovaks in this district is really low and some of them probably have a Hungarian identity anyway; however, we assume that an even more relevant factor is geographical closeness of Bratislava, which significantly affects electoral behaviour of inhabitants of the upper part of Žitný ostrov, the alluvial plain island formed by the Danube River. Some of them are tied to the capital by labour or social obligations; others have resettled from Bratislava to this region over the past couple of decades.

A detailed analysis of incumbent ruling parties' election performance among non-Hungarian voters from southern Slovakia reveals that the coalition of SMER-SD – SNS – ĽS-HZDS won in all districts except Senec and Dunajská Streda and the Štúrovo constituency! In south-western Slovakia, ruling parties posted the best overall election results in the Nové Zámky constituency and the Nitra district. To the east of the town of Šahy, they scored the most points in Novohrad and Gemer regions (i.e. Veľký Krtíš, Lučenec, Rimavská Sobota, Revúca and Rožňava districts). A mutual comparison of individual ruling parties' election results partly indicates prevailing motivation of voters from these districts. In their election rhetoric, all three parties strongly accentuated national(ist) and social(ist) elements of national populism. We believe that these elements' mutual ratio not only varied from one party to another but also tended to change from west to east in terms of affecting electoral behaviour of Slovaks from southern Slovakia. While the rhetoric emphasizing protection of Slovakia's national and state interests apparently seemed to work better in the west (hence better election results of the SNS), the more eastward we go the greater was the emphasis on 'social feelings' and criticism of economic policies pursued by centre-right parties of the previous administration (hence better election results of SMER-SD).

SMER-SD recorded the best election results – approximately 40% – among Slovak inhabitants of districts plagued by high unemployment and low rate of economic development. In the west, the party posted comparable results in already mentioned constituencies of Nitra and Nové Zámky; here, however, they could be largely attributed to the strong nationalist rhetoric that lured former nationally-oriented ĽS-HZDS voters into the camp of SMER-SD. Generally speaking, election performance of SMER-SD in southern Slovakia was above the average. Again, the only exceptions were Senec and Dunajská Streda districts (the mentioned 'Bratislava factor') and

the Štúrovo constituency where SMER-SD received less than 30% of the popular vote among non-Hungarian voters.

Similar conclusions go for election results posted by the ĽS-HZDS led by Vladimír Mečiar. His movement's success rate among Slovak voters in particular districts of southern Slovakia did not essentially differ from its election results on the national level (8.79%). A conclusion may be drawn that the ĽS-HZDS was relatively more successful in the west than in the east. In the more backward regions of Novohrad, Gemer and East Slovakia, a substantial share of former ĽS-HZDS voters cast their ballots for SMER-SD, swayed most probably by its leaders' strong social rhetoric. Interesting in this respect was the Rimavská Sobota district where former ĽS-HZDS voters defected in significant numbers to SMER-SD as well as SNS camps. A potential factor here may have been a strong Romany community in this region.

Table 5 compares election results of Ivan Gašparovič in the 2009 presidential elections to those posted by the bloc of SMER – SNS – HZDS in the 2006 parliamentary elections in ethnically mixed districts of southern Slovakia.

Table 5
Election results of Ivan Gašparovič in the 2009 presidential elections compared to election results of the SMER – SNS – HZDS bloc in the 2006 parliamentary elections in southern Slovakia (%)

District	Presidential elections 2009		Parliamentary elections 2006	
	Total	*Slovak voters*	Total	*Slovak voters*
Senec	33.87	*42.3*	33.21	*41.7-43.7*
Dunajská Streda	5.01	*31.3*	5.58	*33.4-40.8*
Galanta	34.92	*57.3*	31.37	*51.1-57.7*
Šaľa	30.85	*56.1*	29.90	*46.5-54.2*
Komárno	12.94	*43.1*	12.43	*40.2-52.1*
Nové Zámky (constituency)	46.56	*65.6*	42.87	*59.3-65.0*
Nitra	61.12	*65.7*	55.57	*59.6-60.5*
Štúrovo (constituency)	8.17	*43.9*	7.16	*33.9-48.5*
Levice	42.37	*64.2*	38.23	*53.0-57.0*
Veľký Krtíš	48.31	*74.3*	40.74	*56.1-62.1*
Lučenec	47.91	*69.4*	41.29	*56.9-59.9*
Rimavská Sobota	42.3	*62.2*	34.93	*59.5-59.1*
Revúca	56.83	*77.9*	48.96	*62.8-66.5*
Rožňava	40.89	*66.0*	38.56	*55.6-62.0*
Košice area	48.97	*62.0*	40.68	*46.8-51.3*
Trebišov	48.81	*69.7*	38.87	*55.0-54.9*
Michalovce	62.44	*73.5*	53.00	*60.0-62.1*
Slovakia total	55.53	*61.5*	49.66	*55.0-56.3*

Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic; author's own calculations.

Table 5 illustrates obvious differences between western and eastern constituencies. In the west, one may detect a significant discrepancy between both sets of figures that may probably be attributed to several factors. One of the most important is that election results of SMK–MKP in some districts of West Slovakia significantly (i.e. by three to nine percent) exceeded ethnic Hungarians' overall share on the given constituency's population. A plausible explanation is that voter participation among ethnic Hungarians was slightly higher than among Slovaks. This factor was the most perceptible in Dunajská Streda and Štúrovo constituencies where voter participation was the highest of all Slovak constituencies not only in the 2006 parliamentary elections but also in the 2009 presidential elections.[22] Another important factor might have been that SMK–MKP was supported by two groups of Slovak voters: first, citizens who officially declare Slovak nationality but internally perceive themselves as Hungarians, either because Hungarian is their mother tongue or because they have a Hungarian ethnic identity;[23] second, so-called 'pure' Slovak voters who preferred SMK–MKP based on their civic values that disregarded ethnic criteria.[24]

In eastern constituencies, the discrepancy between both sets of figures is not as obvious. Also, the differences between election results posted by SMK–MKP and the official share of ethnic Hungarian voters are less conspicuous than in the west. In Rimavská Sobota and Trebišov districts, election results of SMK–MKP were in fact lower than ethnic Hungarians' share on these districts' respective populations. One of plausible explanations is that a significant share of numerous local Roma who otherwise declare Hungarian ethnic nationality in population censuses voted for Slovak parties.

Even though we are unable to define exact voting preferences of Slovak voters in the 2006 elections (hence the intervals), we may draw relatively unambiguous conclusions regarding stability or changeability of their voting preferences between 2006 and 2009. The difference between nationwide election results posted by President Gašparovič in 2009 (55.53%) and the SMER – SNS – HZDS bloc in 2006 (49.66%) is approximately 6%, which almost exactly matches the combined election results of seven small parties that failed to qualify to parliament in 2006 but are closer to the ruling coalition than the opposition in terms of ideological and political background.[25] This justifies a conclusion that the overall voter support for the national-populist bloc (i.e. the bloc of national-socialist forces) remained unchanged in three years.[26] Table 5 even suggests that overall voting preferences of ruling parties grew slightly stronger in the stripe of border districts to the east of the town of Šahy. This is true particularly of Michalovce and Trebišov districts but also of Košice-area, Revúca, Rimavská Sobota and Veľký Krtíš districts.

All these districts are plagued by serious socio-economic problems, high unemployment and generally lower standard of life.

The following two maps illustrate election results of SMER-SD in the 2006 parliamentary elections. The first taken from the official website of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic illustrates the party's aggregated results by constituency. The second illustrates the party's election results broken down to the set of Slovak voters only (i.e. voters who did not vote for SMK–MKP).

Map 4
Election results of SMER-SD in the 2006 parliamentary elections – aggregated data by electoral constituency
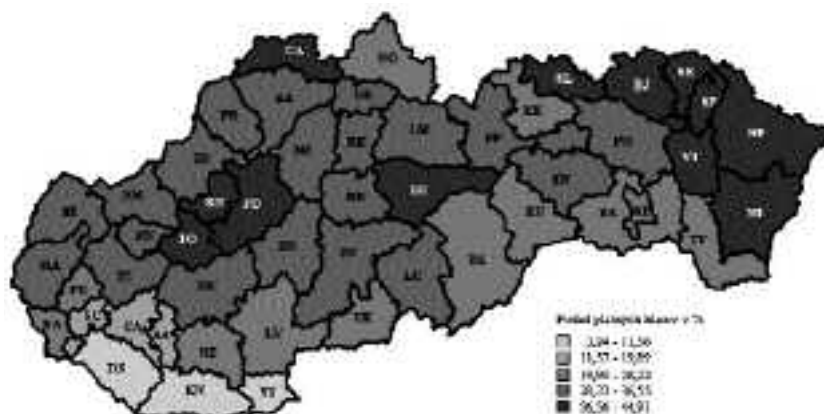
Share of the popular vote (%)
Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic; www.statistics.sk

Map 5
Election results of SMER-SD in the 2006 parliamentary elections – data for
SMK–MKP non-voters only

Share of the popular vote (%)
Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic; author's own calculations.

Both maps clearly illustrate the discrepancy between both sets of figures on
election results of SMER-SD in southern districts obtained by different
approaches. Again, we find out that electoral behaviour of Slovak voters
from southern Slovakia does not differ essentially from Slovak voters
inhabiting other regions of Slovakia. The only exceptions from this rule are
the two largest cities in Slovakia and their immediate surroundings inhab-
ited by more liberally-oriented voters as well as some northern districts in
Orava and Spiš regions where traditional Christian and conservative patterns
of electoral behaviour continue to prevail.

Comparison of Presidential Elections in 2009 and 1999 on the Level of Districts

In the following section, we intend to compare the results of presidential
elections in 1999 and 2009, mostly because both elections show several
similarities. Most importantly, the second round of the 1999 presidential
elections was a duel between two candidates one of whom – namely Vladi -
mír Mečiar – was strongly supported by nationalist forces (i.e. HZDS and
SNS voters) while the other – namely Rudolf Schuster – was supported by
parties of the civic bloc (i.e. SDKÚ and SOP voters) and leftist parties (i.e.

SDĽ voters). Another similarity was that one ruling party – namely the KDH – refused to endorse Schuster unambiguously while another – namely SMK–MKP – openly supported him. Due to Vladimír Mečiar's extremely negative image among ethnic Hungarians, it is quite safe to assume that a vast majority of them voted for Schuster. Very much like in the case of the 2009 presidential elections, this allowed us to establish, with a relatively high degree of precision, the structure of votes cast by Slovak (i.e. non-Hungarian) voters on the ethnically mixed territory.

Table 6
Comparison of presidential elections in 1999 and 2009 – election results of candidates running for the national-socialist bloc (%)

District (constituency)	2009 elections (Ivan Gašparovič)		1999 elections (Vladimír Mečiar)	
	Total	Slovak voters only	Total	Slovak voters only
Senec	33.87	*42.3*	29.97	*37.5*
Dunajská Streda	5.01	*31.3*	3.10	*19.4*
Galanta	34.92	*57.3*	29.46	*37.5*
Šaľa	30.85	*56.1*	24.22	*44.0*
Komárno	12.94	*43.1*	8.23	*27.4*
Nové Zámky (constituency)	46.56	*65.6*	29.48	*52.6*
Nitra	61.12	*65.7*	51.59	*55.5*
Štúrovo (constituency)	8.17	*43.9*	5.24	*31.3*
Levice	42.37	*64.2*	29.45	*44.6*
Veľký Krtíš	48.31	*74.3*	30.92	*47.6*
Lučenec	47.91	*69.4*	30.71	*42.1*
Rimavská Sobota	42.3	*62.2*	24.16	*35.5*
Revúca	56.83	*77.9*	29.54	*42.8*
Rožňava	40.89	*66.0*	24.14	*38.9*
Košice area	48.97	*62.0*	21.06	*26.7*
Trebišov	48.81	*69.7*	23.96	*34.2*
Michalovce	62.44	*73.5*	37.48	*44.1*
Slovakia total	55.53	*61.5*	42.81	*47.4*

Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic; author's own calculations.

Table 6 relatively convincingly justifies several interesting conclusions. A candidate of the national-populist bloc in 1999, Vladimír Mečiar not only failed to win on the national level but even among Slovak voters; in fact, Nitra and Nové Zámky were the only two constituencies in southern Slovakia where Mr. Mečiar dominated among Slovak voters. A mere glimpse on the table reveals that the gap between election results of

Vladimír Mečiar in 1999 and Ivan Gašparovič in 2009 in particular districts of southern Slovakia tends to grow from west to east. In Revúca, Košice-area and Trebišov districts, the difference exceeded 35%. In western districts, the difference never exceeded 20% and usually fluctuated around 15%. As one would think, the smallest gaps were recorded in Nitra and Nové Zámky constituencies.

Like in the case of parliamentary elections in 2006, these figures indicate that national populism as a voter mobilization strategy works particularly in south-western Slovakia while populism accentuating social issues stands a better chance to be effective in south-eastern districts. The explanation seems obvious: the socio-economic situation of citizens inhabiting western Slovak districts has always been and continues to be significantly better than that of citizens inhabiting eastern Slovak districts. Since Rudolf Schuster opted for social populism in his 1999 campaign, we venture to draw a conclusion that Vladimír Mečiar was supported primarily by hard-core voters from the national-populist camp.

Table 6 also reveals similar patterns of Slovak voters' electoral behaviour in presidential elections of 1999 and 2009. Both Vladimír Mečiar in 1999 and Ivan Gašparovič in 2009 recorded the worst election results in three constituencies that are relatively homogeneously populated by ethnic Hungarians (i.e. Dunajská Streda, Komárno and Štúrovo) where their share of the popular vote among Slovak voters barely exceeded 30% and 40%, respectively. On the other hand, in districts located along the actual Slovak–Hungarian ethnic border, both Vladimír Mečiar and Ivan Gašparovič recorded much better results among Slovak voters.

When running against Rudolf Schuster in 1999, Vladimír Mečiar recorded his worst results among Slovak voters in the following south-eastern districts: Košice-area, Rimavská Sobota, Rožňava and Trebišov. In the case of Košice-area, this could be largely attributed to the fact that Schuster had long been active there on the local level and held various important posts including that of Košice mayor. As far as the remaining three districts go, it was little surprise that they had the highest share of ethnic Hungarians to the east of Šahy. On the first glimpse, this pattern seems to corroborate the hypothesis that on truly ethnically mixed territory, Slovaks and ethnic Hungarians coexist more peacefully and tend to elect candidates or parties whose overall policy is generally more accommodating with respect to the Hungarian minority and its members.

On the other hand, though, voter support for candidates of national-socialist (i.e. national-populist) bloc in south-eastern Slovakia showed an immense increase in 2009 compared to 1999. One of plausible explanations

may be that a substantial share of voters who supported Schuster in 1999 mostly because of his socially-oriented rhetoric supported Ivan Gašparovič for the same reasons a decade later. Also, it is very likely that many of these flux votes belonged to local Roma who officially declare Hungarian nationality. The following two maps show the territorial structure of the performance by Vladimír Mečiar and Ivan Gašparovič in presidential elections of 1999 and 2009.

Map 6
Election results of Vladimír Mečiar in the second round of the 1999 presidential elections by district
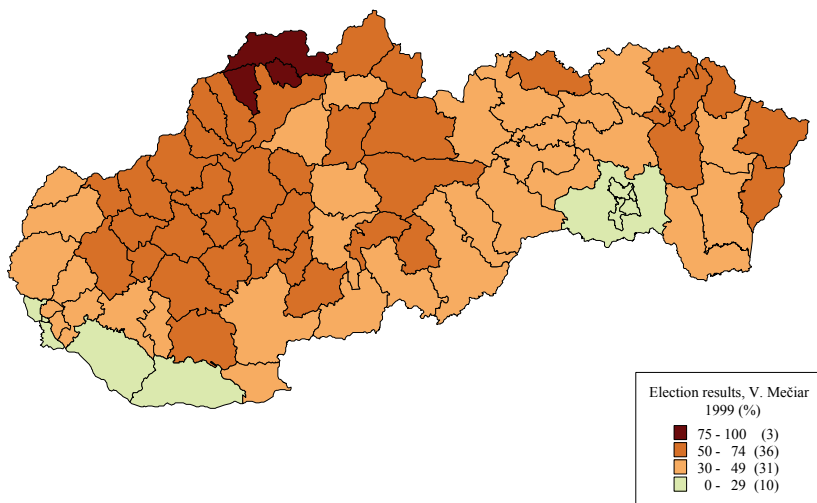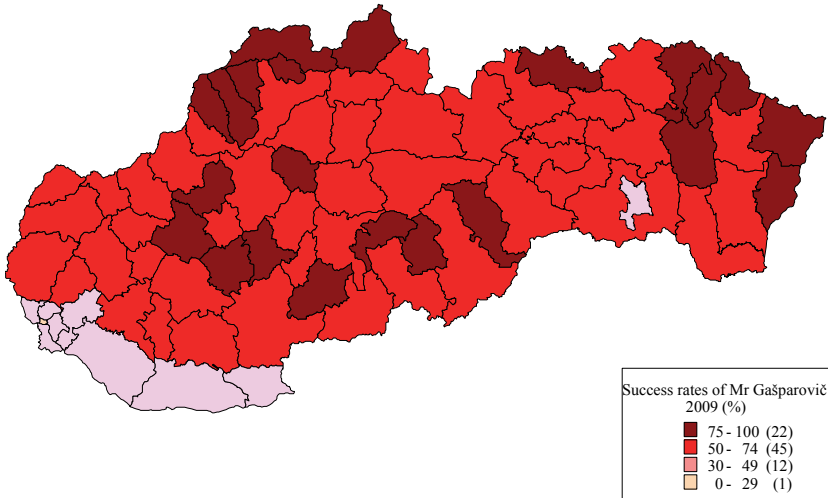
Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic; author's own calculations. Graphics: Tamás Hardi.

Map 7

Election results of Ivan Gašparovič in the second round of the 2009 presidential elections by district

Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic; author's own calculations. Graphics: Tamás Hardi.

On the next map, we intend to show the regional distribution of the impact of national and social populism. Inhabitants of districts coloured in dark claret tend to react to messages of national populism while inhabitants of districts coloured bright are likely to respond to social-populist messages. In the remaining districts the impact of national and social populism is more balanced while the balance is tipped to one side or another. The cartogram does not say anything about the intensity of populist messages' impact on electoral behaviour of local inhabitants; it rather indicates which kind of populist arguments stands a better chance to work. So, the dark colouration of Bratislava and its surroundings does not mean that local voters would be particularly responsive to national-populist arguments in absolute terms; it means that if populist parties achieve any success here at all, they achieve it rather through national-populist than social-populist rhetoric.

Map 8

Areas of national and social populism's influence in Slovakia by district[27], correlation between gains of Mr. Mečiar in 1999 and Mr. Gašparovič in 2009

	1.04 - 1.20
	1.22 - 1.39
	1.40 - 1.60
	1.61 - 2.50
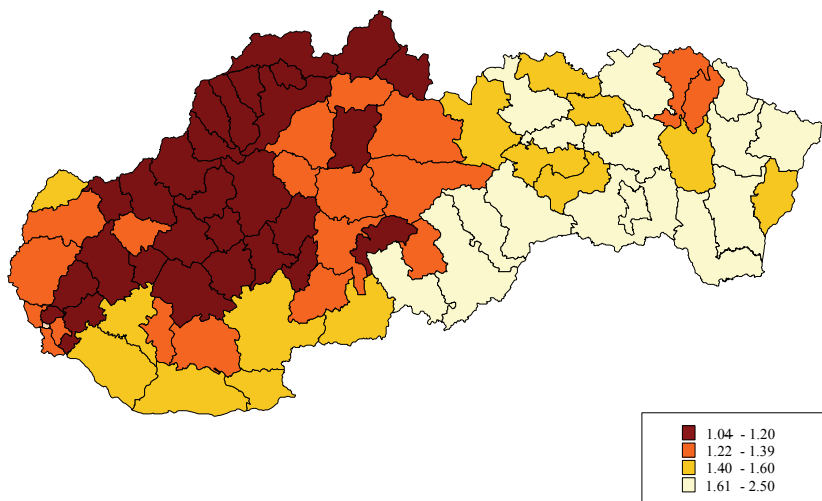
Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic; author's own calculations
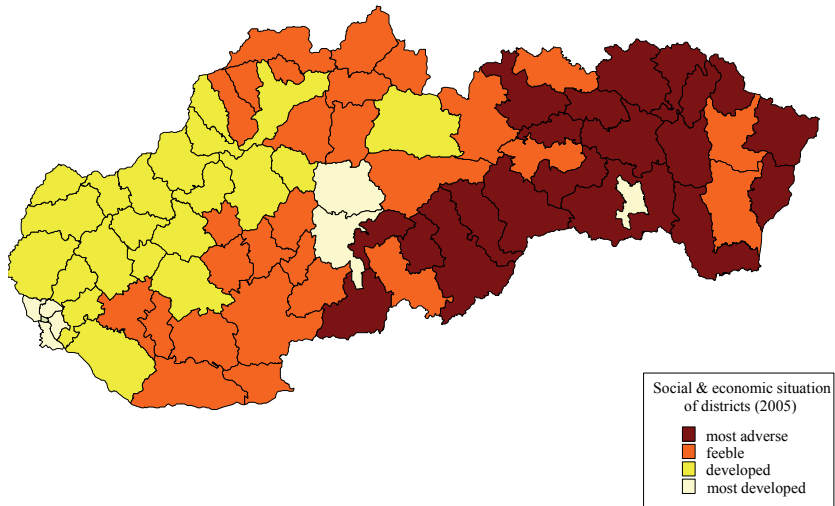
The data were obtained by a mutual comparison of election results posted by Vladimír Mečiar in the 1999 presidential elections and by Ivan Gašparovič ten years later. The coefficients that were used to produce the cartogram express the ratio between both candidates' election results in the second round of presidential elections. In his campaign, Mr. Mečiar chose the image of a national populist (i.e. founder of independent Slovakia, protector of its national and state interests, campaigner against Hungarian irredentism and interests of foreign powers, advocate of state property's privatization into 'Slovak' hands, etc.). Mr. Gašparovič, for his part, was relatively successful in portraying himself as an uncompromising defender of Slovakia's national and state interests who was simultaneously a common man with strong social feelings. Obviously, this image worked out in his campaign against Iveta Radičová better than Vladimír Mečiar's image in his duel with Rudolf Schuster, for at least two reasons: first, Mr. Schuster based his own campaign on social populism; second, Mrs. Radičová represented a party that was directly responsible for 'insensitive' socio-economic reforms. A comparison of districts with the highest responsiveness to national-populist messages (located especially in north-western Slovakia) to maps depicting regional pat-

terns of electoral behaviour (please see, for instance, Krivý, 1996 or Krivý, 2006) indicates conspicuous similarities. The territory inhabited by people who are the most responsive to national populism (please see Map 8) almost perfectly overlaps with the territory of highest voter support for Mr. Mečiar's HZDS in its heyday between 1992 and 1994.

Also, the map justifies a conclusion that in terms of the relative influence of national and social populism, Slovakia's territory is divided along a south-west-northeast axis. Interestingly enough, the same axis divides the country also in terms of complex indicators of socio-economic development. In 2005, the Sociological Institute of the Slovak Academy of Science (SAV) examined socio-economic and human resource potential of particular districts (Gajdoš, 2005).[28] Map 9 illustrates the study's findings regarding the territorial structure of particular types of districts (for the sake of transparency, original eight types analyzed by the SAV study were merged into four types). It is plain to see that the territorial structure of Slovakia's districts according to socio-economic development largely correlates with their territorial structure according to influence of national or social populism.

Map 9
Slovakia's districts according to types of socio-economic and human resource potential

Social & economic situation of districts (2005)

■ most adverse
■ feeble
■ developed
□ most developed

Source: Slovak Academy of Science; map by author.

125

Finally, a comparison of Map 8 (Areas of national and social populism's influence in Slovakia) to Map 5 (Election results of SMER-SD in the 2006 parliamentary elections) reveals that SMER-SD has strong footholds in regions where Slovak voters respond to national populism as well as in regions where they are more sensitive to social populism.

So, Robert Fico at the pinnacle of his popularity managed to copycat the feat of Vladimír Mečiar from his heyday in the first half of the 1990s. He is equally successful in economically and socially backward regions of East Slovakia and in more developed western regions (except Bratislava and its immediate surroundings), skilfully blending the messages of protecting the socially disadvantaged with the messages of defending Slovakia's national and state interests.

Comparison of Presidential Elections in 2009 and Parliamentary Elections in 2006 in Southern Slovakia on the Level of Municipalities

Our analysis of election results 2006 a 2009 with a special focus on electoral behaviour of Slovak voters (or non-Hungarian voters or SMK–MKP non-voters) on the level of districts could be summed up as follows:

– Election results of parties with strong nationalist or national-populist appeal (i.e. ĽS-HZDS, SNS or SMER-SD) and/or candidates supported by these parties in southern districts are not essentially different from their election results in northern districts;

– In ethnically more homogeneous constituencies dominated by ethnic Hungarian population (i.e. Dunajská Streda, Komárno, Štúrovo or Kráľovský Chlmec), the success rate of these parties is relatively lower than in districts or constituencies located along the actual ethnic border;

– The motivation of Slovak voters from southern Slovakia to vote for parties of the national-socialist bloc (i.e. ĽS-HZDS – SNS – SMER-SD) changes from west to east as Slovak voters in the west are more likely to response to national-populist messages while their counterparts in the east are more sensitive to the social-populist appeal.

Electoral Behaviour Patterns of Slovaks from Micro-Regions in South-Western Slovakia

So far, we have examined electoral behaviour of Slovaks from southern Slovakia based on statistical data for districts or constituencies. In the fol-

lowing section, we intend to examine it on a lower level, i.e. on the level of micro-regions and municipalities.

The following cartogram illustrates the success rate of Ivan Gašparovič who triumphed in the 2009 presidential elections among Slovak voters from southwest Slovakia, i.e. in Senec, Dunajská Streda, Galanta, Šaľa, Komárno, Nitra, Nové Zámky, Štúrovo and Levice constituencies. It is interesting to compare it to the success rates of Vladimír Mečiar in the second round of presidential elections in 1999.

Map 10
Success rate of Ivan Gašparovič among Slovak voters from southwest Slovakia in the second round of the 2009 presidential elections
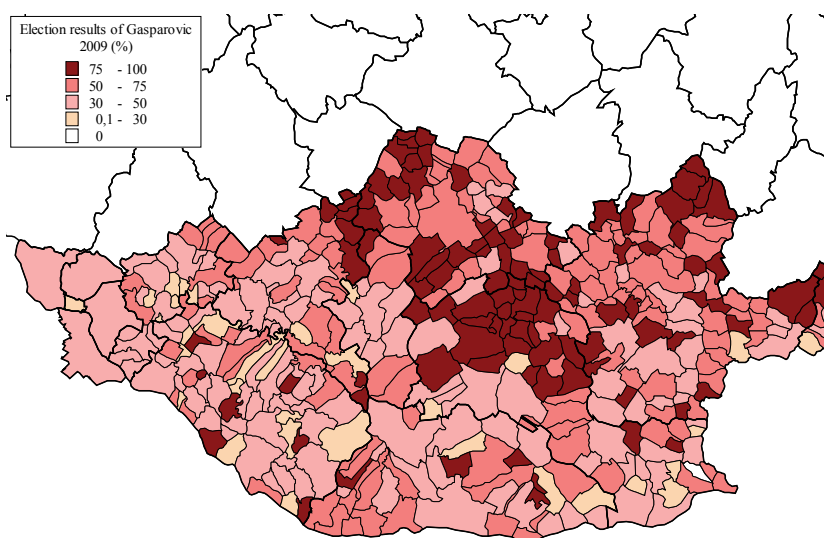
Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic; author's own calculations. Graphics: Tamás Hardi.

Map 11
Success rate of Vladimír Mečiar among Slovak voters from southwest
Slovakia in the second round of the presidential elections
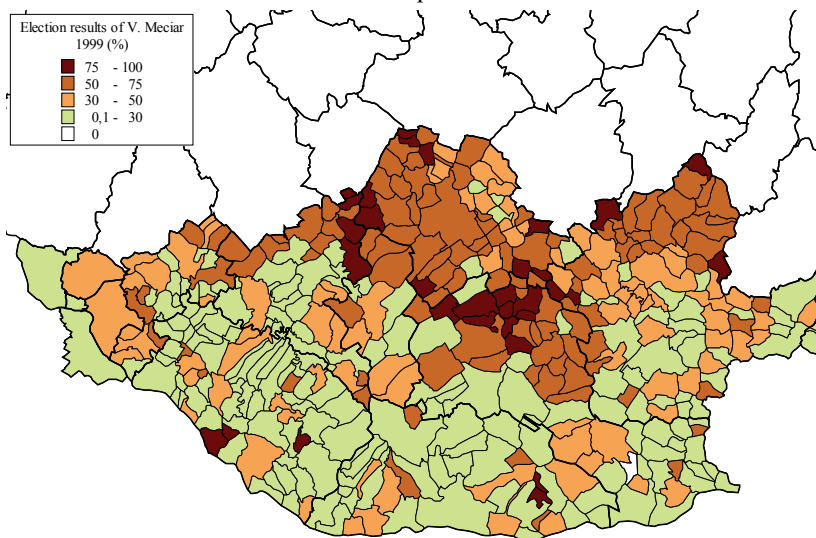
Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic; author's own calculations. Graphics: Tamás Hardi.

A comparison of both maps reveals several interesting facts. Most impor-
tantly, the northern part of the examined region (i.e. along the ethnic bor-
der and immediately above it) is very similar in terms of voter support. The
municipalities in this area are populated almost homogeneously by Slovaks.
Both cartograms show a broad and almost continuous stripe of territory
where both candidates received majority support from Slovak voters. A
rather important shift recorded in 2009 is a significant increase in the num-
ber of municipalities where the national-populist bloc's candidate received
over 75% of the popular vote. On the other hand, even this stripe of devo-
tion includes municipalities where his voter support was substantially lower;
they are enclaves dominated by ethnic Hungarians around Nitra and to the
west of Levice. But while voter support for Vladimír Mečiar among Slovak
voters from these villages did not exceed 30% in 1999, Ivan Gašparovič
received between 30% and 50% of their votes ten years later.

Let us now take a closer look at the patch of Slovak municipalities to
the north of Nové Zámky that strongly supported Ivan Gašparovič in 2009;
it is plain to see that he received over 75% of the popular vote in almost
all of these municipalities. A comparison of election results of Vladimír

Mečiar in the 1999 presidential elections and those of the HZDS – SNS bloc in the 1998 parliamentary elections on the one hand and election results of Ivan Gašparovič in the 2009 presidential elections and those of the SMER-SD – SNS – LS-HZDS bloc in the 2006 parliamentary elections on the other suggests a significant correlation. In all types of elections since 1989 (including municipal and regional ones), election results of the bloc of national-populist forces in the examined micro-region have been constantly better than the overall national results.

Table 7
Election results of the national-populist bloc in Slovak municipalities of the Nové Zámky constituency (%)

		HZDS	SNS	ZRS	TOTAL
1994		HZDS	SNS	ZRS	TOTAL
	Nové Zámky north	52.9	10.5	8.2	71.6
	Slovak voters total	38.9	6.0	7.0	51.9
1998		HZDS	SNS		
	Nové Zámky north	44.3	15.1		59.4
	Slovak voters total	29.8	10.0		39.8
2002		ĽS–HZDS	SNS+PSNS	SMER	
	Nové Zámky north	32.5	11.8	17.6	61.9
	Slovak voters total	22.0	7.9	15.1	45.0
2006		ĽS–HZDS	SNS	SMER–SD	
	Nové Zámky north	13.0	19.6	40.0	72.6
	Slovak voters total	10.0	13.3	33.0	56.3
2009		Ivan Gašparovič			
	Nové Zámky north	-	-	-	79.6
	Slovak voters total	-	-	-	61.5

Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic; Petőcz (2007); author's own calculations.

Table 7 features statistical data only for Slovak-dominated villages of the Nové Zámky constituency: Bánov, Branovo, Čechy, Černík, Dedinka, Dolný Ohaj, Hul, Jasová, Jatov, Kmeťovo, Kolta, Komjatice, Lipová, Maňa, Michal nad Žitavou, Mojzesovo, Palárikovo, Podhájska, Radava, Rastislavice, Semerovo, Šurany, Trávnica, Úľany nad Žitavou and Veľké Lovce.

These villages are located on a territory Frič (1996) dubbed a Russian doll as villages clearly dominated by Slovaks and by ethnic Hungarians alternate with each other while there are very few villages with truly mixed population; in fact, there is only one such a village in the entire micro-region: Bardoňovo or Barsbaracska in Hungarian.

It is plain to see that voter support for national-populist (i.e. national-socialist) parties is exceptionally high throughout this micro-region as it constantly hovers 15 to 20% above their nationwide election results. In the most recent presidential elections, these parties' candidate (i.e. Ivan Gašparovič) received almost 80% of the popular vote in these Slovak villages, this despite the fact that one ruling party (i.e. the ĽS-HZDS) refused to endorse him directly.

If we are to examine the reasons behind continuously high voter support for national-socialist forces in Slovakia's modern history, we should take into account a number of factors. Most importantly, the area where these 25 villages are located lies basically on the Slovak–Hungarian ethnic border. Following the Vienna Award of 1938, this area was annexed to Hungary although most of its inhabitants were Slovaks. While the overall share of ethnic Hungarians on the annexed territory was about two thirds, the said area was the largest enclave with a relatively homogeneous Slovak population. The local population apparently perceived this as a trauma that continues to be an important part of its collective memory. In this context, the threats of Hungarian autonomy and separation of southern territories from Slovakia that are often abused by national-populist politicians work better here than anywhere else. Apparently, local Slovaks' feeling of uncertainty was further amplified by the model of administrative and territorial organization enacted in 1960, which incorporated the said micro-region that had previously formed a separate district of Šurany into a large district of Nové Zámky where ethnic Hungarians prevailed and enjoyed strong influence in the district centre.

Generally speaking, the triangular region of Nitra, Nové Zámky and Levice ranks among those areas of modern Slovakia that experienced the greatest turmoil over the past five centuries in terms of the local population's citizenship as well as its ethnic and confessional make-up. Before Turkish raids, the territory was populated prevailingly by Hungarians and Roman Catholics. Later, it became the northernmost territory ruled by the Ottoman Empire. The territory became largely depopulated as a result of fierce struggles with the Turks followed by anti-Habsburg wars and uprisings while local rulers' denomination changed back and forth from Calvinist to Roman Catholic. The subsequent resettlement of war-ravaged territories brought mostly Slovak but also Moravian and German colonists to the Érsekújvár/Nové Zámky area. The currently existing 'Russian doll' type of settlement structure was created in the mid-18th century and has not changed much ever since.

After the Czechoslovak Republic emerged in 1918, settlers from northern Slovakia created several new colonies here but they left or were

expulsed after Hungary regained the territory in 1938. Most of them returned after reconstitution of Czechoslovakia in 1945, further strengthening the micro-regions Slovak ethnic character. But despite overall stability and relatively solid socio-economic situation of this region (compared to other regions), local Slovaks still seem to seek protection from some imaginary danger and tend to vote for strong political leaders (e.g. Mečiar or Fico) who they believe are able to provide this protection.

In order to corroborate this hypothesis, we intend to examine two more villages, namely Dulovce in the Komárno district and Kuraľany in the Levice district. Although both villages lie south of the micro-region in question, their Slovak character was formed in the same historical period, i.e. following the expulsion of the Ottomans at the turn of the 17th and the 18th century. Both villages are surrounded by villages dominated by ethnic Hungarians and in this sense they form true ethnic enclaves. As Table 8 shows, their inhabitants' electoral behaviour is almost identical to that of inhabitants of the cluster of Slovak-dominated villages to the north of Nové Zámky.

Table 8
Voting patterns in Slovak enclaves of Komárno and Levice districts (%)

		HZDS	SNS	ZRS+KSS	TOTAL
1998	Dulovce	44.1	13.0	7.7	64.8
	Kuraľany	47.6	10.7	3.2	61.5
	Slovak voters total	29.8	10.0	4.6	44.4
		ĽS–HZDS	SNS+PSNS	SMER	
2002	Dulovce	37.9	12.3	14.8	65.0
	Kuraľany	31.6	8.2	13.0	52.8*
	Slovak voters total	22.0	7.9	15.1	45.0
		ĽS–HZDS	SNS	SMER–SD	
2006	Dulovce	13.6	16.7	39.4	69.7
	Kuraľany	23.9	15.5	32.0	71.4
	Slovak voters total	10.0	13.3	33.00	56.3
			Ivan Gašparovič		
2009	Dulovce	-	-	-	77.7
	Kuraľany	-	-	-	77.0
	Slovak voters total				61.5

Note: *Here, the recently established HZD of Ivan Gašparovič and the KSS received another 10% of the popular vote combined.
Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic; author's own calculations.

In the following section, we intend to examine the patterns of Slovak voters' electoral behaviour in another category of Slovak enclaves in southern Slovakia, i.e. in villages that emerged as a result of 're-colonization' following World War I or World War II.

We selected three villages. The first of them – Šrobárová – is located in the Komárno district. It was incorporated in 1921 on the nationalized property previously owned by the Baranyais and the Pálffys in the cadastre of Marcelová (Marcelháza) and Modrany (Madar) villages. The colonists that settled here hailed mostly from northern parts of Slovakia, especially from Kysuce and Orava regions. Šrobárová has always preserved its pure Slovak character; the share of ethnic Hungarians is almost irrelevant (4%).

The village of Macov (Macháza) is located on the upper part of Žitný ostrov (Csallóköz) in the Dunajská Streda district. It was established in 1924 on the property hived off from the cadastre of Blatná na Ostrove (Sárosfa) and Rohovce (Szarva) villages. Most of its new inhabitants were Moravians and Czechs. Currently, Macov is a small village where ethnic Hungarians make up over 50% of its population.

The third examined village is Most pri Bratislave (Hidas, Brick). Before World War II, it was part of the ring of German-populated settlements surrounding Bratislava from the east. After the war, its German-speaking residents were transferred and the village was repopulated by Slovaks hailing mostly from Upper Nitra, Rajec and Orava regions. The village has maintained a pure Slovak spirit as the share of its ethnic Hungarian residents is currently at 3%.

In the case of Šrobárová and Most pri Bratislave, we disregarded the statistically irrelevant share of SMK–MKP voters; in the case of Macov, election results of examined parties were adapted by the coefficient expressing the share of its Slovak voters.

Table 9
Voting patterns of Slovaks who settled in southern Slovakia in recent decades (%)

		HZDS	SNS	ZRS	TOTAL
1994	Šrobárová	57.3	18.9	1.2	77.4
	Macov	29.4	2.2	2.2	33.8
	Most pri Bratislave	48.0	10.0	4.5	62.5
	Slovak voters total	29.8	10.0	4.6	44.4
		HZDS	SNS	ZRS+KSS	
1998	Šrobárová	59.6	14.0	1.7	75.3
	Macov	27.6	0.0	2.3	29.9
	Most pri Bratislave	28.5	11.9	2.3	42.7
	Slovak voters total	29.8	10.0	4.6	44.4
		ĽS–HZDS	SNS+PSNS	SMER	
2002	Šrobárová	41.0	11.9	16.1	69.0
	Macov	28.5	0.0	4.4	32.9
	Most pri Bratislave	23.9	7.6	14.0	45.5
	Slovak voters total	22.0	7.9	15.1	45.0
		ĽS–HZDS	SNS	SMER–SD	
2006	Šrobárová	21.2	32.0	25.6	78.8
	Macov	4.6	4.6	34.5	43.7
	Most pri Bratislave	10.6	17.2	25.2	53.0
	Slovak voters total	10.0	13.3	33.00	56.3
		Ivan Gašparovič			
2009	Šrobárová	-	-	-	72.6
	Macov	-	-	-	48.8
	Most pri Bratislave	-	-	-	50.6
	Slovak voters total	-	-	-	61.5

Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, author's own calculations.

A comparison of national-populist forces' performance in these three villages reveals perhaps the most interesting findings so far. A purely Slovak village of Šrobárová that emerged as a result of Slovak colonization almost 90 years ago and has ever since been isolated in the rural environment, surrounded by Hungarian-populated villages and relatively far from Bratislava and other large towns, has stalwartly stuck to traditional patterns of electoral behaviour. Voter support for national-socialist (or national-populist) political groupings is deeply rooted among local voters regardless of broader social developments. Even in 1998, when Slovakia experienced a small 'revolution' and turned away from Mečiarism, local voters remained faith-

ful to the HZDS and SNS, like other Slovak voters in the entire stripe of Slovak-populated villages between Nitra and Nové Zámky.

In the course of decades, Macov changed its ethnic profile from a Czech-Moravian-Slovak village to a Slovak-Czech-Hungarian village. It has remained a small rural settlement where Slovaks and ethnic Hungarians truly, physically live next to each other. Macov is surrounded by Hungarian-populated villages but is located relatively close to Bratislava. Apparently due to all these factors, local voter support for the national-populist bloc is substantially lower here than in Šrobárová. Over the past ten years, though, this support slowly but steadily increased and recently it reached almost 50%.

The third model village, Most pri Bratislave, was colonized by Slovaks after World War II. From the east, it is surrounded by a string of Hungarian-populated villages but in the west it borders directly with Bratislava. It is the closeness of the country's capital that apparently affects electoral behaviour of its residents, which shows a subtle yet opposite trend compared to Macov. In elections held early after the regime change, voter support for the national-populist bloc significantly exceeded the national average. In 1998, it first plunged below the national average and has continued to diverge from it ever since. In the light of this fact, it was hardly a coincidence that the leaflets accusing Iveta Radičová of endorsing Hungarian autonomy before the second round of the 2009 presidential elections first appeared in Most pri Bratislave.

The last pair of model villages from south-western Slovakia we intend to examine are Starý Tekov and Nový Tekov in the Levice district. While Starý Tekov is a purely Slovak village, Nový Tekov (or Újbars in Hungarian) was before World War II inhabited by mixed Slovak–Hungarian population that was in fact dominated by ethnic Hungarians. The border that was determined by the Vienna Award in November 1938 ran through the Hron (Garam) River's riverbed, separating both villages. While Starý Tekov remained on the Slovak side of the border, Nový Tekov was annexed to Hungary. After the war, Nový Tekov became one of the villages most affected by repatriation of population between Czechoslovakia and Hungary as a significant share of its Hungarian-speaking population was transferred to Hungary in exchange for ethnic Slovaks from the Hungarian Lowland. So, from a village dominated by Hungarians, Nový Tekov turned into a village dominated by Slovaks many of whom were repatriates from Hungary; in the 2001 population census, 85% of its residents declared Slovak nationality.

Let us now take a look at electoral behaviour patterns of these villages' Slovak residents in all parliamentary elections held in the history of independent Slovakia as well as in the 2009 presidential elections.

Table 10
Voting patterns of Slovak voters from neighbouring villages on the ethnic border (%)

		HZDS	SNS	ZRS	TOTAL
1994	Starý Tekov	54.6	9.1	5.3	69.0
	Nový Tekov	35.8	6.0	9.3	51.1
	Slovak voters total	29.8	10.0	4.6	44.4
		HZDS	SNS	ZRS+KSS	
1998	Starý Tekov	45.4	18.3	2.0	65.7
	Nový Tekov	30.4	6.4	4.9	41.7
	Slovak voters total	29.8	10.0	4.6	44.4
		ĽS–HZDS	SNS+PSNS	SMER	
2002	Starý Tekov	34.4	10.8	18.3	63.5
	Nový Tekov	18.4	3.9	18.1	40.4
	Slovak voters total	22.0	7.9	15.1	45.0
		ĽS–HZDS	SNS	SMER–SD	
2006	Starý Tekov	23.0	15.2	29.8	68.0
	Nový Tekov	7.0	9.5	34.5	51.0
	Slovak voters total	10.0	13.3	33.00	56.3
		Ivan Gašparovič			
2009	Starý Tekov	-	-	-	76.3
	Nový Tekov	-	-	-	64.7
	Slovak voters total	-	-	-	61.5

Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, author's own calculations.
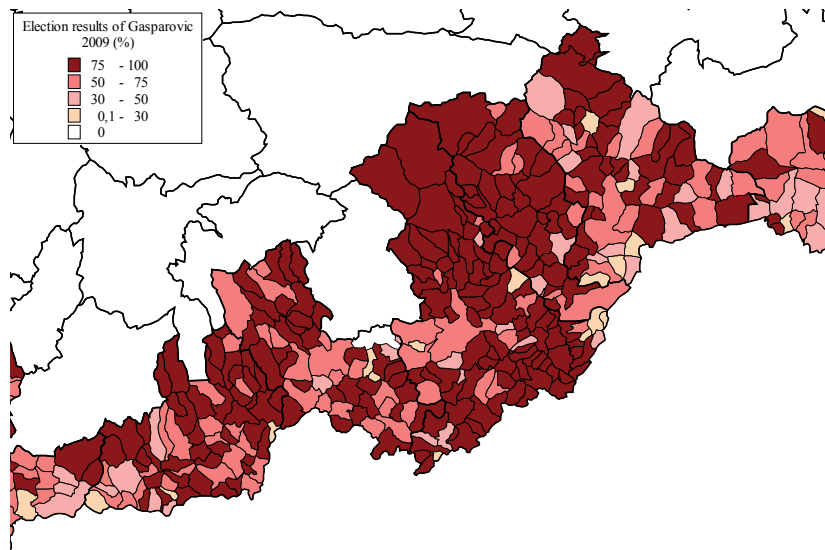
It is plain to see from Table 10 that electoral behaviour patterns of Slovak voters inhabiting two neighbouring villages located on the ethnic border are significantly different. While the purely Slovak village shows continuously strong support for national-socialist (i.e. national-populist) forces, in the neighbouring village with mixed population and a significant share of Slovak repatriates from Hungary (and their descendants) voter support for these forces is substantially lower although it shows an increasing trend. Nevertheless, a comparison of voter support for national populists (i.e. ĽS-HZDS and SNS) and social populists (i.e. ZRS, KSS and SMER-SD) in both villages justifies the following hypothesis: the growth in voter support for national-socialists in Nový Tekov has been driven by sensitivity to social rhetoric used by social populists (i.e. SMER-SD and Ivan Gašpa - rovič) whereas voters from Starý Tekov continue to respond to national-populist rhetoric used by the SNS and the ĽS-HZDS.

Electoral Behaviour Patterns of Slovaks from Micro-Regions in Central and Eastern Part of Southern Slovakia

A mere glimpse on the cartogram illustrating the success rate of Ivan Gašparovič in the 2009 presidential elections reveals a striking difference between electoral behaviour of Slovak voters from Novohrad and Gemer regions (i.e. Veľký Krtíš, Lučenec, Rimavská Sobota, Revúca and Rožňava districts) and from most districts in the stripe reaching from Bratislava to Štúrovo. A conclusion may be drawn that the incumbent president convincingly defeated his challenger on the entire territory of central and eastern part of southern Slovakia except larger towns (i.e. Veľký Krtíš, Lučenec, Rimavská Sobota, Tornaľa or Rožňava) and several villages strongly dominated by ethnic-Hungarian (but non-Romany) population.

Map 12
Success rate of Ivan Gašparovič among Slovak voters from southmiddle Slovakia in the second round of the 2009 presidential elections

Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic; author's own calculations. Graphics: Tamás Hardi.

When the total number of cast ballots is multiplied by the nationality coefficient (based on the assumption that most ethnic Hungarians voted for Iveta

Radičová), voter support for Ivan Gašparovič among non-Hungarian voters in many villages highly exceeds 100% and sometimes even 200%. How is this possible? This phenomenon may be observed in most villages with significant shares of Romany population. Only very few of these Roma actually declare their Romany ethnic affiliation as most of them adapt to the dominant language community in the micro-region, i.e. Roma from the southern part of the Gemer region declare Hungarian nationality while Roma from the northern part of the region declare themselves as Slovaks. Nevertheless, we must conclude that a significant share of the Roma from Gemer and Zemplín regions apparently voted for Ivan Gašparovič regardless of their formally declared nationality. We intend to corroborate this conclusion by the example of four villages in which the share of the Roma officially fluctuates between 6 and 8% according to the 2001 population census but their actual share of the local population is exponentially higher. Two of these villages – namely Sútor and Rimavská Seč – are located in the southern part of the Rimavská Sobota district, one is in the Lučenec district (Rapovce) and one is near the town of Veľké Kapušany that became part of the Michalovce district in 1996 (Drahňov).

Table 11
Results of the 2009 presidential elections in villages with large Romany population – aggregated data

Village	Slovaks (%)	Hungarians (%)	Roma (%)	Gašparovič	Radičová	G/S*
Rapovce	46	44	6	58.4	41.6	127
Rimavská Seč	5	88	6	6.5	93.5	130
Sútor	24	57	19	95.3	4.7	390
Drahňov	33	58	8	50.5	49.5	153

Imaginary election result of Ivan Gašparovič adapted to the set of Slovak voters.
Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic.

Here, we are witnessing a previously unseen phenomenon: Ivan Gašparovič recorded a relatively decisive victory in three out of four examined villages, although they are officially dominated by Hungarian population. In the case of Sútor, it was a total victory as the incumbent president received 100% of the popular vote in the first round. Here, we are compelled to point out that Sútor is an almost purely Romany village (regardless of the formal ethnic make-up) in which unemployment rate exceeds 70% in the long term. Gašparovič received a minor percentage of votes from Hungarian-speaking Roma also in the fourth village of Rimavská Seč; however, the overall pattern of its residents' electoral behaviour does not essentially differ from that

of inhabitants of most villages in south-western Slovakia dominated by ethnic Hungarian population.[29]

A plausible explanation may be that more integrated Roma inhabiting areas closer to regional capitals emulate electoral behaviour patterns of the dominant language community. The Roma who are less integrated, more marginalized or inhabit purely Romany settlements (e.g. Sútor) are more easily swayed by the social-populist rhetoric or various other motivational benefits.

An alternative explanation of the resounding triumph of Ivan Gašparovič in villages dominated by Hungarian-speaking population with a substantial share of the Roma is that even some 'pure' ethnic Hungarians supported the incumbent president, either based on his social rhetoric or due to some of his supporters' clear dissociation from the Roma; however, this explanation is not particularly plausible.

An equally implausible explanation is that local ethnic Hungarians voted for Gašparovič because of his 'social feelings' combined with the fact that their region ranked among the most backward regions in the whole country. It may be easily disproved by the fact that Iveta Radičová won in these districts by a landslide although ethnic Hungarians make up only about 40% of their total population. An obvious conclusion therefore is that most local Roma must have voted for Ivan Gašparovič, which is a paradox by definition as one of the incumbent president's most vocal supporters was the Slovak National Party whose leaders have become notorious for their xenophobic views and statements. This shows that patterns of electoral behaviour in West Slovakia significantly differ in certain aspects from those in Central and East Slovakia, which also applies to southern parts of these regions.

In order to understand the patterns of electoral behaviour in villages with relatively high share of Romany population, let us present a table illustrating election results of previously examined political parties as well as parties that officially represent Romany and Hungarian minorities. Unlike in previously featured tables, the data in Table 12 are aggregated, i.e. they are not adapted to the set of non-Hungarian voters, mostly because the calculation would hardly provide reliable figures due to these villages' complicated and constantly changing ethnic structure. A simple comparison of their ethnic make-up established by population censuses in 1991 and 2001 indicates that their residents quite commonly tend to change their declared ethnic identity. For instance, 89% of Sútor residents declared Hungarian nationality in 1991 but ten years later their share dropped to 57%; a similar change was recorded in the village of Rapovce. While the corresponding increase in Sútor was almost evenly split between Slovak and Romany nationalities, in Rapovce it strengthened primarily the Slovak nationality column.

Table 12
Parliamentary election results in select villages of Novohrad and Gemer regions (1994–2006) in %

		HZDS	SNS	ZRS+KSS	TOTAL	ROI	SMK–MKP	Share of ethnic Hungarians (%)*
1994	Rapovce	7.3	9.0	16.1	32.4	3.9	36.4	55
	Sútor	7.3	0.0	26.3	33.6	11.7	34.3	89
	Rimavská Seč	1.3	0.0	2.5	3.8	0.4	86.6	90
	Drahňov	9.3	0.4	6.6	16.3	7.7	47.4	50
	Slovak voters total	35.0	5.4	10.1	50.5	0.7	10.2	
		HZDS	SNS	ZRS+KSS				
1998	Rapovce	7.5	7.1	6.7	21.3	-	31.9	55
	Sútor	25.0	1.2	25.6	50.8	-	12.5	89
	Rimavská Seč	5.1	0.2	1.6	6.9	-	82.6	90
	Drahňov	20.0	0.6	3.4	24.0	-	55.1	50
	Slovak voters total	27.0	9.1	4.1	40.1	-	9.1	
		ĽS–HZDS	SNS+PSNS	SMER		ROMA+ROI		
2002	Rapovce	1.9	18.7	6.8	27.5	3.6	46.0	44
	Sútor	3.8**	1.9	8.9	14.6	9.0	5.8	57
	Rimavská Seč	0.3	0.2	7.1	7.6	4.4	79.0	88
	Drahňov	10.5	0.3	8.9	19.7	21.8	40.1	58
	Slovak voters total	19.5	7.0	13.5	45.0	0.5	11.2	9.7
		ĽS–HZDS	SNS	SMER–SD				
2006	Rapovce	3.9	10.1	15.3	29.3	-	52.4	44
	Sútor	0.0**	0.0	3.1	3.1	-	3.1	57
	Rimavská Seč	0.9***	0.7	2.4	4.0	-	85.0	88
	Drahňov	14.6	0.0	11.2	25.8	-	37.4	58
	Slovak voters total	8.79	11.73	29.14	49.66	-		9.7

* *According to the 1991 population census (applied for statistical data from 1994 and 1998) and the 2001 population census (applied for statistical data from 2002 and 2006).*
** *In Sútor, the HZD received 69.2% of the popular vote in 2002 and 91.2% (!) of the popular vote in 2006.*
*** *The HZD received 4.5% of the popular vote.*
Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic.

Table 12 clearly shows a difference between voting patterns (and value orientations) of Roma hailing from integrated and from segregated environment. For instance, residents of the purely Romany village of Sútor tend to change not only their voting patterns but also their declared ethnic affiliation. The most recent example of this volatility was regional elections held in November 2009. In the first round of elections, a crushing majority of Sútor residents voted for a HZD candidate who ran for the post of regional governor. Now that might seem understandable in the light of the fact that a similar majority supported HZD founder Ivan Gašparovič in the 2009 presidential elections; somewhat less understandable is that the local Roma

decided to support Gašparovič who had been endorsed by the SNS. Also, their choice might seem logical given the fact that the mentioned HZD candidate is the regional party boss, regional vice-governor and hails from this micro-region; somewhat less logical is that in the second round of the same elections, a candidate running on the SDKÚ ticket convincingly defeated a candidate supported by SMER-SD. The local Roma obviously did not mind that the policy line and value orientation of the SDKÚ is in sharp contrast not only to that of the HZD but also to that of Ivan Gašparovič. A plausible explanation may be that the SMER-SD candidate had also been endorsed by the ĽS-HZDS; local HZD functionaries who obviously gave electoral advice to Romany voters apparently did not mind supporting a SDKÚ candidate as much as supporting a candidate endorsed by the ĽS-HZDS (the HZD split from the HZDS shortly before the 2002 elections).

On the other hand, integrated Roma from the village of Rimavská Seč are much more 'faithful' to their voting preferences as well as their declared ethnic affiliation. One might even conclude that their voting patterns reflect relatively stable value orientations. In the first round of the most recent elections of regional governor, they also voted for the mentioned HZD candidate, but that may probably be attributed to his regional anchoring. Still, he received significantly fewer votes than a regional SMK–MKP leader who was the most successful candidate for the post in the regional parliament; the absolute ratio of all ballots cast for them was 162:249. After both the HZD and SMK–MKP candidates had been voted out of contention, the residents of Rimavská Seč virtually ignored the second round of the elections. The less than 10% of all eligible voters who came to the polling station eventually elected a SMER-SD candidate. Nevertheless, one could draw a conclusion that stalwart SMK–MKP voters largely ignored a (not very standard) recommendation by regional SMK–MKP leaders to vote for the SMER-SD candidate; on the contrary, many Hungarian-dominated villages in the area preferred a SDKÚ candidate despite SMK–MKP recommendation.

It is equally interesting that Romany parties that ran in 1994 and 2002 parliamentary elections did not score almost any success among integrated Roma from Rimavská Seč, much unlike among less integrated and socially challenged Roma from Sútor or Drahňov. Constantly good election results of the SNS in the mixed Slovak–Hungarian–Roma village of Rapovce in the Lučenec district deserve particular attention. In the 2002 elections, two nationalist parties received almost 19% of the popular vote, which amounts to over 35% when calculated for the set of Slovak voters only; this may be interpreted as high frustration of newly-settled Slovak inhabitants and a proof that they continue to fear some imaginary danger.

Let us now see whether we can find similar differences in voting patterns of Slovak voters inhabiting villages in eastern part of southern Slovakia that emerged as a result of colonization after World War I and II as we did in their western Slovak counterparts. We chose three such villages, namely Šiatorská Bukovinka and Ratka in the Lučenec district and Bottovo in the Rimavská Sobota district. The former two villages were settled in the 1920s by Slovaks from under Poľana in Central Slovakia while Bottovo had been colonized by Czechs, Moravians and Slovaks. Nowadays, all three villages may be considered purely Slovak settlements that are surrounded by Hungarian-dominated villages.

Table 13
Voting patterns in Slovak enclaves of Novohrad and Gemer regions (%)

		HZDS	SNS	ZRS	TOTAL
1994	Šiatorská Bukovinka	49.4	8.7	23.6	81.7
	Ratka	69.8	10.8	7.3	87.9
	Bottovo	51.9	4.4	5.9	67.8
	Slovak voters total	38.9	6.0	7.0	51.9
		HZDS	SNS	ZRS+KSS	
1998	Šiatorská Bukovinka	28.5	11.5	37.7	77.7
	Ratka	53.9	24.5	5.3	83.7
	Bottovo	44.9	2.2	5.1	52.2
	Slovak voters total	29.8	10.0	4.6	44.4
		ĽS–HZDS	SNS+PSNS	SMER	
2002	Šiatorská Bukovinka	33.5	17.4	10.4	61.3
	Ratka	23.1	16.1	32.7	71.9
	Bottovo	25.2	3.4	8.2	36.8
	Slovak voters total	22.0	7.9	15.1	45.0
		ĽS–HZDS	SNS	SMER–SD	
2006	Šiatorská Bukovinka	8.2	21.7	42.9	72.8
	Ratka	40.3	17.5	25.6	83.4
	Bottovo	12.1	11.2	41.4	64.7
	Slovak voters total	10.0	13.3	33.00	56.3
		Ivan Gašparovič			
2009	Šiatorská Bukovinka	-	-	-	85.9
	Ratka	-	-	-	88.0
	Bottovo	-	-	-	71.3
	Slovak voters total	-	-	-	61.5

Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic; author's own calculations.

An analysis of election results in the said three villages reveals several interesting findings. For instance, national-populist parties regularly post good election results in the village of Bottovo; there is a certain parallel between Bottovo and already mentioned Macov whose original inhabitants were also primarily Moravians and Czechs. Nevertheless, these results are significantly worse than in the case of the remaining two villages whose original inhabitants are primarily Slovaks. Also, voter support for the SNS (or the PSNS) in Bottovo is always substantially lower than in Ratka and Šiatorská Bukovinka where it is way above the average.

All Slovak enclaves located near the Hungarian border and surrounded by Hungarian-dominated villages are strong footholds of the national-populist bloc. Voter support for particular parties within the bloc may be caused by various coincidences. For instance, the strong election success posted by the Association of Slovak Workers (ZRS) in Šiatorská Bukovinka in 1994 and 1998 parliamentary elections was a direct result of the fact that it is the birthplace of ZRS founder and leader Ján Ľupták. Similarly, the HZD founded by Ivan Gašparovič posted relatively good election results in this micro-region although it is rather marginal from the nationwide viewpoint. In 2002, the party received 17% of the popular vote in Bottovo and over 42% in nearby Poltár, the incumbent president's hometown; four years later, though, it received a little over 4% of the popular vote as almost all of its voters supported SMER-SD.

Generally speaking, the 2002 parliamentary elections caused a complete chaos in voting patterns of Bottovo residents, which is quite unusual in small villages. According to Table 13, the national-populist bloc received only 36.8% of the popular vote in Bottovo; however, one must note the already mentioned 17% of votes for the HZD as well as almost 12% for the KSS, which adds up to approximately 65% of the popular vote. The liberally-oriented Alliance of a New Citizen (ANO) received 19% of votes while three established traditional parties (i.e. SDKÚ, KDH and SDĽ) combined for only 9% of the popular vote. One might conclude that the 2006 parliamentary elections marked Bottovo's return to normal electoral behaviour as 65% of local voters supported national-populist forces.

Let us now take a closer look at another triplet of villages located even farther to the east. All examined villages are purely Slovak and were annexed to Hungary following the First Vienna Award of November 1938. Pača is located on the ethnic border nearby the town of Rožňava. Trstené pri Hornáde is located south of Košice, not far from the Hungarian border and also on the ethnic border; the continuous stripe with a significant share of ethnic Hungarian inhabitants that stretches out to Slovenské Nové Mesto

located 50 kilometres eastward ends just west of the village. Trstené pri Hornáde was part of the group of about 30 Slovak-dominated villages in the greater Košice area that were annexed to Hungary along with Košice based on the First Vienna Award. Finally, Lekárovce was part of another group of about 30 Slovak-dominated villages that were also annexed to Hungary, only not immediately after the First Vienna Award but after the Slovak Wartime State emerged in March 1939 and Hungary annexed the territory of Carpathian Ruthenia. The eastern border between Slovakia and the newly-acquired Hungarian territory was moved about 5 to 25 kilometres westward compared to modern Slovakia's eastern border.[30]

Table 14
Voting patterns of Slovak voters from villages on the ethnic border in East Slovakia (%)

		HZDS	SNS	ZRS	TOTAL
1994	Pača	37.0	4.7	7.0	48.7
	Trstené pri Hornáde	27.0	4.5	15.1	46.6
	Lekárovce	53.2	2.9	8.4	64.5
	Slovak voters total	38.9	6.0	7.0	51.9
		HZDS	SNS	ZRS+KSS	
1998	Pača	40.1	9.4	4.9	54.4
	Trstené pri Hornáde	18.1	5.4	3.6	27.1
	Lekárovce	44.2	11.6	6.5	62.3
	Slovak voters total	29.8	10.0	4.6	44.4
		ĽS–HZDS	SNS+PSNS	SMER	
2002	Pača	23.1	6.1	19.4	48.6
	Trstené pri Hornáde	13.0	7.2	18.1	38.3
	Lekárovce	34.2	8.3	25.2	67.7
	Slovak voters total	22.0	7.9	15.1	45.0
		ĽS–HZDS	SNS	SMER–SD	
2006	Pača	11.5	18.9	34.0	64.4
	Trstené pri Hornáde	9.5	13.0	36.2	58.7
	Lekárovce	16.0	15.3	51.3	82.6
	Slovak voters total	10.0	13.3	33.00	56.3
		Ivan Gašparovič			
2009	Pača	-	-	-	74.9
	Trstené pri Hornáde	-	-	-	64.9
	Lekárovce	-	-	-	86.2
	Slovak voters total	-	-	-	61.5

Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic; author's own calculations.

Table 14 justifies several conclusions. Most importantly, like the closeness of capital Bratislava affects electoral behaviour of adjacent municipalities' residents, the closeness of the country's second largest town of Košice influences voting patterns of surrounding villages' inhabitants. In Trstená pri Hornáde, the examined parties regularly post worse performances than in the remaining two villages, although in the 2006 parliamentary elections their results here matched their nationwide results. Another interesting fact is that the Party of Civic Understanding founded by Košice Mayor and subsequent president Rudolf Schuster received 31.5% of the popular vote here in the 1998 parliamentary elections. In the remaining two villages, Schuster's magic did not work out as well, although his party still received 6.5% and 11.6% of the popular vote, respectively.

Equally importantly, voter support for the SNS increased generally since 1994, which indicates that the nationalist element of national populism is gaining importance even in the east, although socially-oriented rhetoric remains dominant; that explains why the KSS received 7% to 9% of the popular vote in examined villages in the 2002 elections. The improved election performance of the SNS is remarkable not only compared to its nationwide election results but especially in the light of its traditionally worse performance on the regional level in East Slovakia. A comparison of election results of all parties (i.e. including those that are not featured in Table 14) suggests that the growth in voter support for the SNS springs largely from the reservoir of former HZDS and KDH voters while SMER-SD has gradually attracted a significant part of former voters of all leftist parties (i.e. SDL, KSS, and SOP) as well as the remaining part of former HZDS voters.

Last but not least, Table 14 suggests that the village of Lekárovce differs to a certain degree from the remaining two villages in terms of electoral behaviour. In the next section we will therefore pay special attention to the entire Sobrance district (Lekárovce is located in its southern part). We intend to demonstrate that voting patterns of the entire district's residents are completely specific within the framework of the Košice region. Let us first illustrate it on the example of presidential elections.

Table 15
Election results of the national-populist bloc's candidates in presidential elections between 1999 and 2009 in the Sobrance district (%)

Year and round of elections	Sobrance district	Košice region	Slovakia total
	Vladimír Mečiar		
1999, 1st round	50.9	24.2	37.2
1999, 2nd round	56.8	27.3	42.8
2004, 1st round	45.0	28.3	32.7
2004, 2nd round	58.3	36.4	40.1
	Ivan Gašparovič		
2009, 1st round	64.0	42.3	46.7
2009, 2nd round	81.8	50.7	55.5

Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic; author's own calculations.

Table 15 corroborates our hypothesis that voting patterns of the Sobrance district are generally quite specific. On the nationwide level, Vladimír Mečiar advanced into the second round of 1999 and 2004 presidential elections but was more or less clearly defeated in all four rounds. He was particularly unsuccessful in the Košice region, especially in 1999 when he was annihilated by Rudolf Schuster, then mayor of Košice. However, most voters in the Sobrance district completely ignored Schuster's campaigning and clearly sided with Vladimír Mečiar. The story was repeated in 2002 when voters in the Sobrance district remained faithful to radical and more nationalistic Mečiar and largely indifferent to softer populism of Ivan Gašparovič backed by SMER-SD. In terms of voter support for Mečiar, the Sobrance district ranked second (!) of all districts in Slovakia, trailing only the Čadca district that is viewed as a traditional stronghold of national-populist forces in Slovakia. In 2009, voters were not forced to choose between 'harder' and 'softer' populism anymore, which transformed into massive support for Gašparovič. In fact, the only districts where the incumbent president posted better election performance than in the Sobrance district were Poltár (i.e. his hometown), Medzilaborce, Čadca and Kysucké Nové Mesto districts.

Let us take the comparison to another level and examine the Sobrance district's voting patterns in parliamentary elections. The relevant data are featured in Table 16.

Table 16
Parliamentary election results in the Sobrance region between 1998 and 2006 (%)

		HZDS	SNS	ZRS+KSS	TOTAL
1998	Sobrance district	39.7	8.0	6.0	53.7
	Slovakia total	27.0	9.1	4.1	40.2
2002		ĽS–HZDS+HZD	SNS+PSNS	SMER+KSS	
	Sobrance district	30.6	8.3	27.1	66.0
	Slovakia total	22.8	7.0	19.8	45.0
2006		ĽS–HZDS	SNS	SMER–SD	
	Sobrance district	12.3	16.1	42.1	70.5
	Slovakia total	8.8	11.7	29.1	49.6

Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic; author's own calculations.

It is plain to see that the micro-region of the Sobrance district shows very similar voting patterns as the previously examined micro-region north of Nové Zámky. In both cases, the micro-region comprises approximately 30 villages located along the ethnic border that were annexed to Hungary between 1939 and 1945. Apparently, this fact continues to form an important part of local inhabitants' collective memory. While it may not be the only factor determining their electoral behaviour, they obviously respond to national-populist impulses, be it from the Slovak or the Hungarian side. It is difficult to imagine any other relevant factor that would cause such strongly different voting patterns of the Sobrance district's inhabitants, even compared to voters from other districts of the Košice region that generally suffers from the lack of development impulses and relatively unfavourable economic and social situation.

Electoral Behaviour of Residents of Towns Located on Ethnically Mixed Territory

So far, we examined electoral behaviour of Slovaks (i.e. non-Hungarians or non-SMK–MKP voters) in small villages. We have demonstrated that voting patterns of Slovak voters from these villages do not essentially differ from those of Slovak voters inhabiting rural areas anywhere else in Slovakia. In some micro-regions and Slovak enclaves in southern Slovakia, voter support for the national-socialist bloc of Slovak parties is even substantially stronger than the national average.

Let us now take a look at the situation in larger towns located on ethnically mixed territory. Table 17 features the 2006 parliamentary elections results in 20 towns in southern Slovakia. We focused particularly on those Slovak parties that received more than 3% of the popular vote and have already been examined from the viewpoint of their voters' value orientation (please see Graphs 1 and 2). The columns marked 'civic bloc' and 'nationalist bloc' feature cumulated figures for two principal blocs comprising all parties running in the elections; individual parties' placement to particular blocs was determined by their programs, their historical legacy and their leaders' public statements. Therefore, the former (i.e. civic or right-wing) bloc includes not only the Slovak Democratic and Christian Union (SDKÚ), the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) and the Freedom Forum (SF) but also Mission 21–New Christian Democracy, the Alliance of a New Citizen, the Civic Conservative Party, Prosperity and Freedom, the Rural Agrarian Party and the Nádej [Hope] party. Except SMER – Social Democracy (SMER-SD), the People's Party – Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (ĽS-HZDS) and the Slovak National Party (SNS), the latter (i.e. national-socialist or national-populist) bloc also includes the Leftist Bloc, the Party of Civic Solidarity, the Party of Democratic Left, the Association of Slovak Workers, the Movement for Democracy, the Communist Party of Slovakia and the Slovak People's Party. The basic classification criterion was individual parties' placement on the value scale discussed earlier (please see Graphs 1 and 2). In the last column, the cumulated figure for the national-socialist bloc is compared to election results posted by Ivan Gašparovič in the 2009 presidential elections, as he clearly declared himself as this bloc's candidate. All data have been calculated for the set of Slovak voters (i.e. SMK–MKP non-voters). With a certain level of generalization, these data more or less truthfully reflect the voting patterns of Slovak voters inhabiting the examined towns.

The table is divided into two basic parts. The data in the table's upper part pertain to towns located along the ethnic border where the overall share of ethnic Hungarians is below 50%. The data in the table's lower part are for towns located on territories more or less homogeneously populated by ethnic Hungarians who make up at least 60% of the local population.

Table 17

Parliamentary elections 2006 and presidential elections 2009 in towns in southern Slovakia (%)

Parties/groupings	SDKÚ	KDH	SF	Civic bloc total	SMER –SD	HZDS	SNS	KSS	Populist bloc total	Gašparovič 2009
Towns located along the ethnic border (less than 50% of ethnic Hungarians)										
Senec	37.7	7.6	6.0	53.5	23.1	7.1	12.2	2.6	46.5	40.0
Galanta	33.0	5.0	4.6	46.8	28.9	7.3	10.2	4.5	53.2	42.8
Šaľa	33.2	5.1	4.6	45.5	31.7	7.3	10.9	2.9	54.5	45.4
Nové Zámky	29.3	4.8	5.4	44.8	32.9	7.3	10.3	4.3	55.2	44.1
Hurbanovo	24.6	2.5	3.0	34.1	29.4	9.7	13.6	9.3	65.8	56.1
Levice	28.1	6.0	5.2	44.4	33.5	7.4	9.1	3.7	55.6	52.1
Želiezovce	28.2	3.9	3.3	42.1	34.0	8.2	7.1	4.7	57.8	41.0
Lučenec	25.1	3.1	5.0	37.2	37.1	8.0	9.3	5.0	61.7	57.9
Rimavská Sobota	18.1	2.8	5.8	30.5	37.8	6.0	12.5	5.2	69.5	69.8
Rožňava	31.0	3.4	4.1	44.4	33.6	4.2	10.2	5.6	55.6	46.0
Moldava nad Bodvou	23.4	2.4	5.7	43.6	33.3	6.9	8.2	5.0	56.0	39.6
Slovak voters total	20.8	9.4	3.9	37.0	33.0	10.0	13.3	4.4	63.0	61.5
Towns located on territories homogeneously populated by ethnic Hungarians (over 60%)										
Šamorín	45.8	5.3	5.8	59.7	23.3	5.8	6.4	2.8	40.3	30.1
Dunajská Streda	35.2	3.3	4.4	48.4	20.2	20.2	4.7	3.6	51.2	34.5
Veľký Meder	30.0	1.8	4.3	41.7	21.5	21.2	6.1	3.9	57.6	35.3
Komárno	33.0	2.9	5.5	45.8	29.0	7.9	11.1	4.1	54.0	45.1
Štúrovo	35.0	3.5	4.6	47.5	24.3	11.7	11.3	2.6	52.1	45.0
Šahy	34.4	4.8	4.4	47.3	26.5	11.5	6.8	4.0	52.3	42.5
Fiľakovo	21.3	1.7	4.1	31.1	35.6	8.3	10.3	6.3	68.7	69.4
Tornaľa	17.5	2.7	2.4	27.1	37.8	5.4	9.4	11.4	72.7	67.0
Veľké Kapušany	23.9	4.4	3.3	36.1	43.8	6.9	6.0	4.9	63.3	52.5
Kráľovský Chlmec	36.0	4.1	4.5	52.3	31.8	5.8	1.5	3.2	47.4	60.8
Slovak voters total	20.8	9.4	3.9	37.0	33.00	10.00	13.3	4.4	63.0	61.5

Note: If the sum of percentages for civic and nationalist blocs does not make up exactly 100%, it is due to rounding up figures for particular towns to one decimal place.
Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic; author's own calculations.

The first significant finding revealed by the data analysis is a relatively specific electoral behaviour of voters from two towns that are in capital Bratislava's sphere of influence, namely Šamorín and Senec, where voting patterns of Slovak voters are very similar to those of Bratislava residents. In the 2006 parliamentary elections as well as in the 2009 presidential elections, these districts were dominated by parties of the civic (or civic-conservative) bloc and their joint presidential candidate, respectively. In 2006, parties of the national-socialist (i.e. national-populist) bloc won in all other examined towns, regardless of their share of Slovak and ethnic Hungarian residents; the margin of their victory was very thin in some towns and more convincing in others, but it marked a victory nonetheless.

Another interesting fact is that voter support for the national-socialist bloc was stronger in central and eastern parts than in the western part of southern Slovakia. The parties of this bloc enjoyed the highest voter sup-

port among Slovak voters from Novohrad and Gemer regions, i.e. in Lučenec, Fiľakovo, Rimavská Sobota and Tornaľa where they combined for almost 60% of the popular vote in 2006. This level of voter support in these towns remained largely unchanged also in the 2009 presidential elections. As far as other towns in southern Slovakia are concerned, overall voter support for the nationalist bloc declined since the 2006 elections. In both elections, the success rate of national-populist parties in all examined towns of southern Slovakia – that is, except those in Novohrad and Gemer regions – was lower than the national average. The difference increased further in the 2009 presidential elections, which indicates that voter support for national-populist parties shows a declining trend in these towns.

The average voter support for the national-socialist bloc is higher in Novohrad and Gemer regions than in the valley of Bodrog and Uh Rivers (i.e. the area around Kráľovský Chlmec and Veľké Kapušany) where people's socio-economic situation is comparably bad. A plausible explanation is that electoral behaviour of voters from Novohrad and Gemer regions is affected by two phenomena: first, a significant share of local Roma (including 'Hungarian' Roma) apparently shifted to the national-populist camp; second, Slovak voters whose voting patterns are strongly affected by their attitudes to national issues are more amply represented here.

Similar conclusions are corroborated by analyzing the internal structure of votes within the national-populist bloc. The mutual ratio of votes cast for SMER-SD and the ĽS-HZDS – SNS bloc is gradually tipped in favour of the former from west to east. Voter support for the SNS is very low in easternmost parts of the country. Overall voter support for the SMER-SD – ĽS-HZDS – SNS bloc is slightly lower in the west than in the east; however, the relative share of votes cast for the ĽS-HZDS – SNS bloc is higher in the west than in the east. Particularly interesting is the relatively strong voter support for the ĽS-HZDS in areas on Žitný ostrov that are almost homogeneously populated by ethnic Hungarians. In Dunajská Streda and Veľký Meder, voter support for Mečiar's party in 2006 doubled its national election results and matched that for SMER-SD. It is fair to venture a hypothesis that part of local Slovaks who are relatively isolated in the Hungarian-dominated language environment (subconsciously) vote for politicians they believe are able to protect their national interests; at the same time, they do not place their hopes in the vulgar and primitive style of SNS Chairman Ján Slota but rather in the authoritarian style of Vladimír Mečiar or Robert Fico.

If we compare election results posted by individual blocs in urban and rural areas of southern Slovakia, we may detect the same phenomenon as

everywhere else: voter support for the national-populist bloc in towns is slightly lower than in villages. Even here, though, the difference is not as significant as one might expect based on the assumption that voter support for civic-rightist parties would be substantially higher in areas where Slovaks and ethnic Hungarians live truly mixed and in constant interaction with one another than in areas where they live isolated from each other.

The following table compares overall results of the 2006 parliamentary elections and the 2009 presidential elections in southern districts to those in towns located in particular districts, all calculated for the set on non-Hungarian voters (i.e. SMK–MKP non-voters). Again, data for the 2006 parliamentary elections were calculated by the same formula as in Table 17, i.e. the ballots cast for all parties running in the elections were divided into two categories that were for the purposes of this study dubbed as 'civic bloc' and 'nationalist bloc'.

Table 18 is perhaps even more demonstrative than Table 17 in terms of exposing basic development trends. It is plain to see that on the level of districts, the nationalist bloc lost both elections only in Senec and Dunajská Streda districts. Most probably, the main reason for this was the influence of Bratislava. On the level of towns, we could also find only two such constituencies, namely Senec and Šamorín. In the 2006 parliamentary elections, the nationalist bloc also failed in Kráľovský Chlmec; three years later, though, Ivan Gašparovič won here by a relatively comfortable margin. We intend to explore the reasons behind this phenomenon by specifically examining the voting patterns of residents of four select towns in southern Slovakia, namely Šamorín, Komárno, Tornaľa and Kráľovský Chlmec.

In the 2006 elections, the nationalist bloc prevailed in all other districts and towns of southern Slovakia; however, it is interesting to watch changes in voting preferences between 2006 and 2009. Election results of the nationalist bloc's candidate declined significantly in all towns of south-western Slovakia; the difference fluctuated between 6% and 20%. The only exception was Levice, which is located *de facto* behind the ethnic border. A similar deterioration in the nationalist bloc's election performance could also be detected on the level of districts across the area. The only exceptions were the Nové Zámky constituency as well as Levice and Šaľa districts. Apparently, an important role was played here by the ethnic border factor that has been discussed in greater detail when analyzing the voting patterns of 30 Slovak-dominated villages to the north of Nové Zámky.

Table 18
Comparison of voting patterns on the level of districts and towns (%)

District/*Town*		Parliamentary elections 2006		Presidential elections 2009		Share of ethnic Hungarians (2001 census)
		Civic bloc total	Nationalist bloc total	Iveta Radičová	Ivan Gašparovič	
Senec		51.2	48.8	57.7	42.3	20.4
	Senec	*53.5*	*46.5*	*60.0*	*40.0*	*22.1*
Dunajská Streda		50.3	49.7	68.7	31.3	83.3
	Šamorín	*59.7*	*30.3*	*59.7*	*40.3*	*66.6*
	Dunajská Streda	*48.4*	*51.2*	*65.5*	*34.5*	*79.8*
	Veľký Meder	*41.7*	*57.6*	*64.7*	*35.3*	*84.6*
Galanta		34.7	65.3	42.7	57.3	38.6
	Galanta	*46.8*	*53.2*	*57.2*	*42.8*	*36.8*
Šaľa		42.0	58.0	43.9	56.1	35.7
	Šaľa	*45.5*	*54.5*	*54.6*	*45.4*	*17.9*
Komárno		38.7	61.3	36.9	43.1	69.1
	Komárno	*45.8*	*54.0*	*54.9*	*45.1*	*60.1*
	Hurbanovo	*34.1*	*65.8*	*43.9*	*56.1*	*50.2*
Nové Zámky (constituency)		29.0	71.0	34.4	65.6	26.7
	Nové Zámky	*44.8*	*55.2*	*55.9*	*44.1*	*27.5*
Štúrovo (constituency)		41.1	58.9	66.1	43.9	78.9
	Štúrovo	*47.5*	*52.1*	*55.0*	*45.0*	*70.5*
Levice		36.0	64.0	35.8	64.2	27.9
	Levice	*44.4*	*55.6*	*47.9*	*52.1*	*12.2*
	Želiezovce	*42.1*	*57.8*	*59.0*	*41.0*	*50.0*
	Šahy	*47.3*	*52.3*	*57.5*	*42.5*	*62.0*
Lučenec		29.5	70.5	30.6	69.4	27.4
	Lučenec	*37.2*	*61.7*	*42.1*	*57.9*	*13.2*
	Fiľakovo	*31.1*	*68.7*	*30.6*	*69.4*	*64.9*
Rimavská Sobota		22.7	77.3	37.8	62.2	41.3
	Rimavská Sobota	*30.5*	*69.5*	*30.2*	*69.8*	*35.3*
Revúca		21.8	78.2	22.1	77.9	22.0
	Tornaľa	*27.1*	*72.7*	*33.0*	*67.0*	*62.1*
Rožňava		27.9	72.1	34.1	65.9	30.6
	Rožňava	*44.4*	*55.6*	*54.0*	*46.0*	*26.8*
Košice area		42.6	57.4	38.0	62.0	13.2
	Moldava nad Bodvou	*43.6*	*56.0*	*60.4*	*39.6*	*43.7*
Trebišov		37.1	62.9	30.3	69.7	29.3
	Kráľovský Chlmec	*52.3*	*47.4*	*39.2*	*60.8*	*76.9*
Michalovce		30.2	69.8	26.5	73.5	11.7
	Veľké Kapušany	*36.1*	*63.3*	*47.5*	*52.5*	*57.0*
Slovakia total				38.5	61.5	9.7

Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic; author's own calculations.

Analyzing election results in central and eastern parts of southern Slovakia provides quite a different picture. On the level of districts, the nationalist bloc won relatively comfortably among Slovak voters in 2006 as well as in

2009; however, the situation was slightly different on the level of towns. Between 2006 and 2009, the nationalist bloc's position worsened especially in Rožňava, Moldava nad Bodvou but also in Veľké Kapušany. On the other hand, it preserved its dominance in towns of the Novohrad region and in western parts of the Gemer region. Plausible explanations include local inhabitants' generally difficult socio-economic situation and volatile voting patterns of local Roma that have been previously illustrated on the example of villages with high shares of Romany population.

The previous analysis justifies some preliminary conclusions. Most importantly, a superficial glimpse on aggregated election results from districts with ethnically mixed population may lead to an erroneous conclusion that voter support for parties of the national-populist bloc among Slovak voters inhabiting ethnically mixed territories of southern Slovakia is significantly lower than among Slovak voters from the north. As our analysis hopefully demonstrated, it is not entirely so. Nevertheless, an observation can be made that overall voter support for these parties has shown a declining trend since 2006, particularly in larger towns.

This conclusion is seemingly contradicted by the results of the most recent elections to regional self-governance bodies in November 2009 in which the civic-rightist bloc recorded only one 'net' victory by clinching the post of the Bratislava self-governance region's governor and lost a number of seats in regional parliaments across the country compared to 2005; however, we believe that one ought to be very cautious when interpreting these election results – for a number of reasons. Most importantly, voter participation was very low, barely exceeding 20%. Various bizarre coalitions were formed and various untraditional backstage agreements were concluded in Trnava, Nitra, Banská Bystrica and Košice regions that include territories populated by ethnic Hungarians. This peculiar election tactics brought about distortions that make it impossible to assess the actual power ratio between the civic-rightist and the national-socialist bloc in these regions.

To conclude this section, we intend to analyze in detail voting patterns of Slovak voters from four towns in southern Slovakia, i.e. Šamorín/Somor-ja, Komárno/Komárom, Tornaľa/Tornalja and Kráľovský Chlmec/Királyhel-mec. They were selected based on the following criteria. Two of these towns are located in south-western Slovakia. One of them – namely Šamorín – is in the capital Bratislava's zone of influence. The other one – namely Komárno – is a traditional cultural and symbolic centre of ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia, although it also has a relatively strong and conscious Slovak community that comprises 'ancient Komárnoans', post-war repatriates from Hungary, descendants of Slovaks (or Czechs) who settled

these areas after World War I or World war II as well as Slovaks who moved in from neighbouring Slovak enclaves. Both towns are located on the territory that has maintained a relatively high economic and social standard, although unemployment in the Komárno district is relatively high (in fact it is significantly higher than in Šamorín).

The other two towns – namely Tornaľa and Kráľovský Chlmec – are located on the territory plagued by poor economic development, high unemployment rate and relatively high shares of Roma on the local population; until recently, many of those Roma officially declared themselves as ethnic Hungarians.

Graph 3
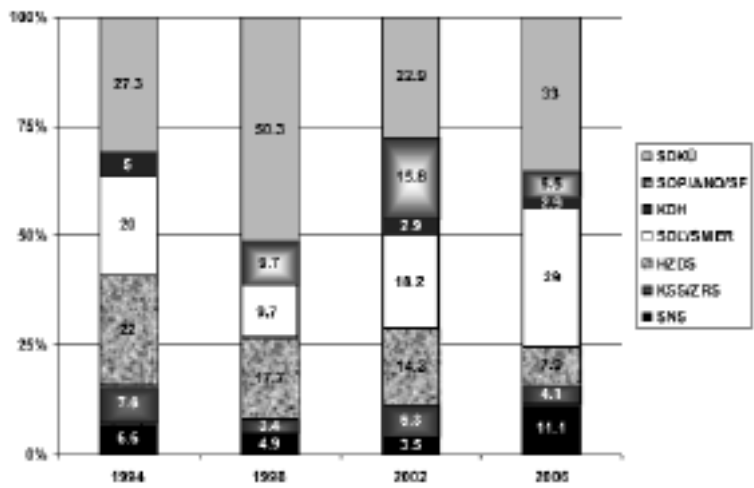Changes in voting patterns of Slovak voters from Šamorín/Somorja between 1994 and 2006
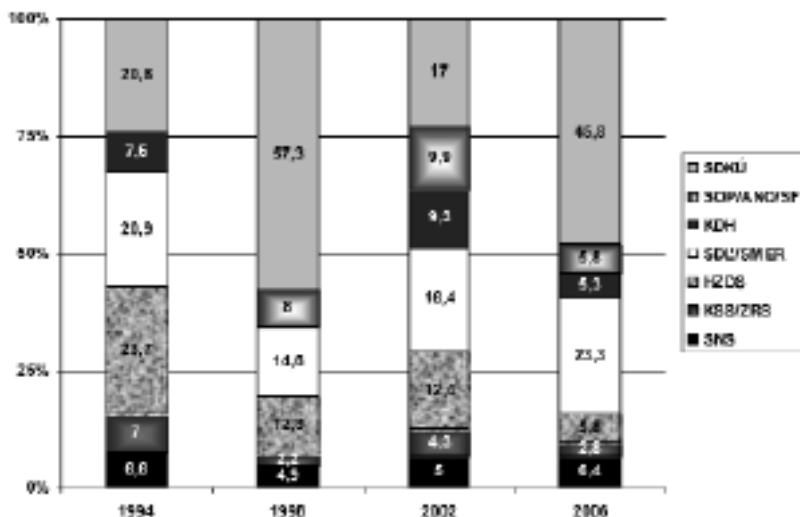
Note: The order of parties in columns of Graphs 3–7 corresponds to the list of parties featured in the graphs' legend. The 1994 figure for the SDKÚ is a sum of election results of the DÚ and the DS. The 1998 figure for the SDKÚ represents the election result of the SDK, an election party that comprised the coalition of DÚ – DS – KDH – SDSS – SZ. The figures for SDĽ/SMER represent the following: 1994 – Spoločná voľba [Common Choice], a left-wing election coalition of SDĽ – SDSS – SZS – HP; 1998 – SDĽ; 2002 – SMER; 2006 – SMER–Social Democracy. The 2002 figure for the SNS is a sum of election results of the SNS and the PSNS. The figures for SOP/ANO/SF should be interpreted as election results of the SOP in 1998, the ANO in 2002 and the SF in 2006.

Graph 4
Changes in voting patterns of Slovak voters from Komárno/Komárom between 1994 and 2006

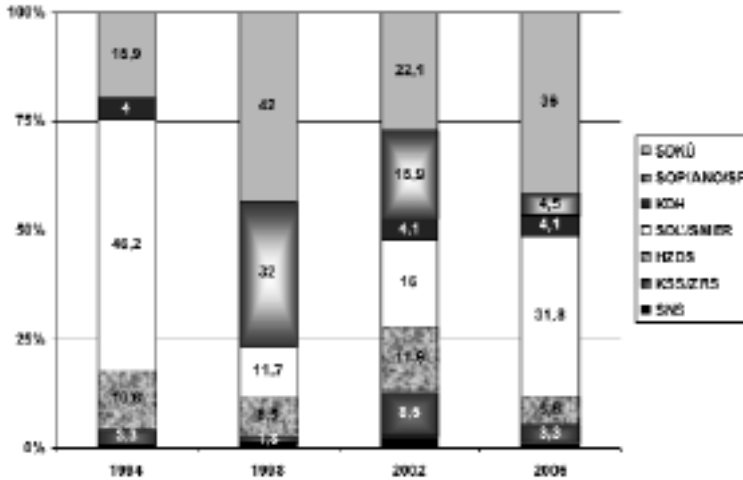*Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic; author's own calculations.*

Graph 5
Changes in voting patterns of Slovak voters from Tornaľa/Tornalja between 1994 and 2006

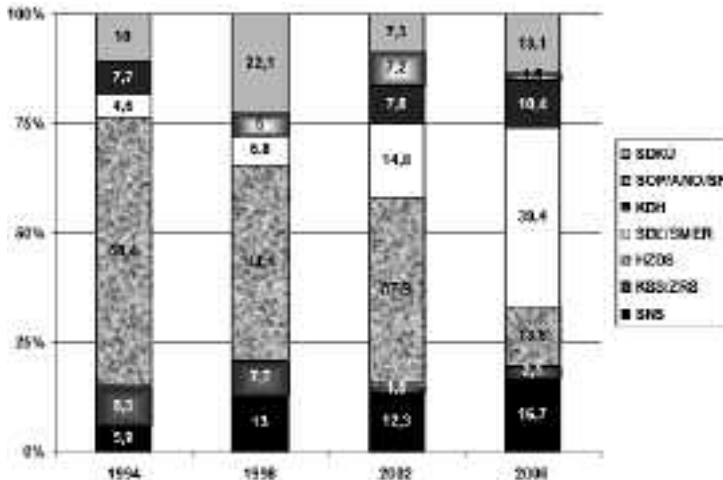*Source Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic; author's own calculations.*

154

Graph 6
Changes in voting patterns of Slovak voters from Kráľovský Chlmec/Király-
helmec between 1994 and 2006

Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic; author's own calculations.

Graph 7
Changes in voting patterns of Slovak voters from Dulovce (an example of
Slovak enclave in Hungarian-dominated language environment) between 1994
and 2006

Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic; author's own calculations.

155

A comparison of changes in voting patterns of Slovak voters from Šamorín and Komárno reveals several interesting findings. Most importantly, it is rapid and virtually constant deterioration in leftist-populist and national-populist parties' election performance in Šamorín; these parties' decline was slightly interrupted in 2002 but resumed again in 2006, despite their convincing triumph on the national level. In Komárno, the power ratio between the two principal blocs (i.e. civic-rightist and national-socialist) has remained relatively balanced, perhaps except 1998 when local voters joined the rest of the country and voted against Mečiar. There is a glaring difference between voting patterns in these constituencies and those in Slovak enclaves of the Komárno district, which may be illustrated on the example of Dulovce (please see Graph 7). Here, voter support for the national-socialist bloc is almost invariable and the only relevant changes take place within the bloc, i.e. between individual parties (for instance, HZDS voters gradually drift toward SMER-SD and SNS camps).

It is also interesting to compare the two towns in south-eastern Slovakia that are located in regions with strongly unfavourable development indicators. In Tornaľa, one may observe a gradual growth in voter support for the national-socialist bloc, particularly for its leftist-populist segment; however, there is also a disturbing trend of increasing voter support for parties standing on two extreme poles, namely the SNS and the KSS. In Kráľovský Chlmec, leftist voting patterns clearly prevail; however, there are significant fluctuations in voter support for individual parties. In 1998, local voters most likely responded to leftist-populist messages conveyed by parties we placed into the civic-rightist bloc, i.e. the SDK and the SOP (for instance, the promise of Mikuláš Dzurinda to double wages or a clearly leftist-populist presidential campaign of Rudolf Schuster a year later). It is plain to see that a significant share of former SDĽ voters defected to SOP and SDK camps during this period. In most recent two elections, though, the power ratio between both principal blocs levelled out. The data show that radical-nationalist parties play here a substantially less relevant role within the national-socialist bloc than elsewhere (please see Graphs 5 and 6).

Another peculiarity in voting patterns of Slovak voters from southern Slovak towns is very low voter support for the KDH; this political subject is much more popular in Slovak enclaves, as the Dulovce example clearly shows.

In all examined towns, voter support for individual parties shows relatively significant fluctuations from one election to another. We assume that this phenomenon has to do primarily with changes in voting patterns, not only of Slovak voters but also of ethnic Hungarians and the Roma, particularly in central and eastern part of southern Slovakia.
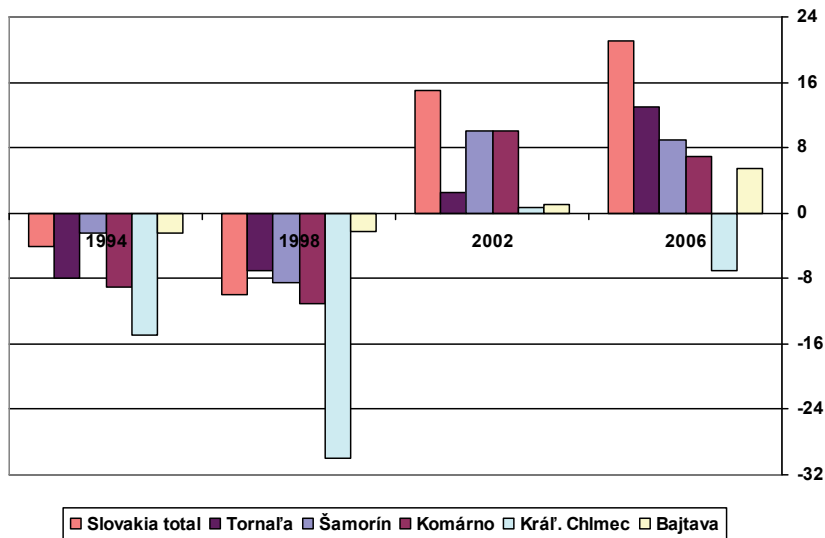
Electoral behaviour of ethnic Hungarians

Graph 8 illustrates changes in voting patterns of ethnic Hungarian voters from certain villages. The projected deviations oscillate around zero, depending on whether election results of SMK–MKP were relatively worse or relatively better than the overall share of ethnic Hungarians on Slovakia's total population as established by population censuses carried out in 1991 and 2001. Graph 8 shows that in 1994 and 1998 parliamentary elections, election results of SMK–MKP were relatively worse than the overall share of ethnic Hungarian voters.

This finding may be attributed to one of the following factors. In 1994, the three relevant Hungarian parties formed a coalition after a series of lengthy negotiations that also included very sharp rhetoric used by individual party leaders; the principal problem was whether the Hungarian Civic Party would become a third segment of the already established Coexistence – MKDH coalition. This apparently discouraged some ethnic Hungarian voters from voting for the Hungarian coalition. Also, one should not forget the factor of prevailingly leftist voting patterns in southern Slovakia, which is clearly documented by all presented graphs and tables. Back then, even the SDĽ had a relatively strong ethnic program and its candidates' lists regularly included several ethnic Hungarian candidates seeded to electable places. If featured graphs show relatively strong election results of the SDĽ, especially in eastern parts of southern Slovakia, it is partly due to the fact that some ethnic Hungarians (and most probably some Roma as well) voted for the SDĽ.

A similar phenomenon could be observed in the 1998 elections; in fact, the deviation from ethnic Hungarians' traditional voting patterns was even more significant than four years before. A relatively significant share of ethnic Hungarian voters voted for the SDK. Apparently, the main motive for their voting preference was to contribute to election defeat of Vladimír Mečiar and his administration. The deviation was the most obvious in Kráľovský Chlmec where most local ethnic Hungarians and Hungarian Roma apparently voted for Rudolf Schuster's party and, to a lesser degree, for the SDK.

Graph 8

Willingness of ethnic Hungarian voters to vote for SMK–MKP (a deviation between the share of ethnic Hungarians and SMK–MKP election results in %)

Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic; author's own calculations.

Voting patterns of ethnic Hungarians changed relatively profoundly in 2002. Graph 8 suggests that in 2002 as well as in 2006, almost 100% of the country's ethnic Hungarians most probably voted for SMK–MKP. This was probably caused by several factors. Most importantly, SMK–MKP had become an established, stable and respected party since 1998. Previous animosities between former MPP–MOS, MKDM–MKDH and Coexistence members had disappeared (at least on the outside) or had been overcome by everyday executive activity in various government and self-governance organs, institutions and authorities. Secondly, Slovak political subjects had largely abandoned the ethnic dimension of their political programs, which negatively affected their willingness to nominate ethnic Hungarians to party posts or candidates' lists. Last but not least, one should not forget about the factor of increased turn-out of ethnic Hungarian voters.

The latter was also caused by a number of factors: first, anti-Hungarian campaign of the SNS mobilized many ethnic Hungarian voters, particularly in 2006; second, the average age of Slovakia's ethnic Hungarians is higher than that of Slovaks and if past election statistics justify any hard-and-fast conclusion it is that older voters are more disciplined than younger

ones; finally, ethnic Hungarian voters are more rural than Slovak ones and voter participation in small villages is traditionally slightly higher than in larger towns. For the sake of comparison, Graph 8 illustrates changes in voting patterns of ethnic Hungarian voters from Bajtava, a small village where ethnic Hungarians make up close to 100%. It is plain to see that voting patterns of these voters are relatively stable and do not experience as rapid fluctuations as in four examined towns. Generally speaking, here the election results of SMK–MKP correspond to ethnic Hungarians' share of the local population, which means that SMK–MKP always receives almost 100% of the popular vote here.

But there are even more factors that made national election results of SMK–MKP in two most recent parliamentary elections exceed ethnic Hungarians' overall share on Slovakia's population. As Zsuzsanna Lampl pointed out in a separate chapter featured in the present publication, the total number of persons who officially declare their Hungarian nationality is lower than the total number of those who view themselves as ethnic Hungarians. The one hard figure we may cite here is a difference between persons who declare Hungarian nationality and persons who view Hungarian as their mother tongue. In the 2001 population census, the total number of those who declared Hungarian to be their native language was by approximately 30,000 higher than the total number of those who declared themselves as ethnic Hungarians.

The election performance of SMK–MKP may have been improved to a certain extent by Slovak voters. As the author of this chapter pointed out in one of his previous studies (Petőcz, 2007), 'pure' Slovaks' contribution to SMK–MKP's overall election result in 2006 (11.68%) was approximately 0.5% of the popural vote. This chapter does not offer the necessary space for a detailed description of how we came to this conclusion. One thing is for sure, though: public statements presented by some SMK–MKP leaders that ethnic Slovak voters may have improved their party's overall election result by 1.5 to 2 percent of the popular vote were quite exaggerated.

This hypothesis may be corroborated by the fact that voting patterns according to ethnic criteria grew stronger in the most recent parliamentary elections. It may be further corroborated by the results of elections to regional self-governance organs in November 2009. In June 2009, SMK–MKP split up, giving birth to a new party called Most–Híd [Bridge] led by former SMK–MKP Chairman Béla Bugár. As a would-be bridge between Slovaks and ethnic Hungarians, the party commissioned a relatively intense campaign even on purely Slovak-language territories in hopes of attracting a relevant share of Slovak voters' votes; however, election

results did not materialize its leaders' expectations as the duel between SMK–MKP and Most–Híd took place largely within the ethnic Hungarian electorate. In the Prešov region, a candidate for Most–Híd ran independently for the post of regional governor but received only 0.5% of the popular vote.

Conclusion

In this study, we analyzed electoral behaviour of voters inhabiting ethnically mixed territories of southern Slovakia. We were particularly interested in areas where Hungarian-speaking population constitutes a majority. We examined especially voting patterns of Slovak voters who were for the purposes of this study defined either as non-Hungarians or as SMK–MKP non-voters. We also partially focused on electoral behaviour of ethnic Hungarians.

We examined several types of municipalities:
– Slovak municipalities located along the ethnic border;
– Slovak enclaves surrounded by territories more or less homogeneously populated by ethnic Hungarians;
– Slovak villages founded during the process of organized colonization after World War I and World War II; in this category, we distinguished between villages colonized prevailingly by Slovak settlers from northern parts of the country, villages colonized largely by Moravians and Czechs and villages populated predominantly by Slovaks repatriates from Hungary;
– Municipalities with mixed population comprising Slovaks, ethnic Hungarians and Roma;
– Towns located on ethnically mixed territories.

At the same time, we tried to take into account other possible factors that may affect voters' electoral behaviour, such as proximity of large towns or state affiliation of examined municipalities or micro-regions during the period of 1938–1945.

Our principal objective was to find out whether and to what degree is it possible to capture trends of improvement or deterioration in mutual Slovak–Hungarian relations by analyzing electoral behaviour of people who inhabit ethnically mixed territories. Slovak–Hungarian relations rank high on the list of issues that are frequently abused in political agenda of all national-populist subjects on Slovakia's political scene as well as on the other side of the Slovak–Hungarian border; however, this study focused

exclusively on analyzing the impact of national populism on voting patterns of voters in southern Slovakia.

We based our research on the assumption that the key to solving Slovak–Hungarian relations was mutually advantageous and acceptable solution to the status of Slovak and ethnic Hungarian community in southern Slovakia. We were also aware that the camps of so-called national-populist and leftist-populist parties' supporters are dominated by voters with ambiguous, easy-to-influence or simply negative positions on the status and rights of members of the Hungarian minority. Therefore, it was important to establish whether these voters represent a majority of Slovak voters in southern Slovakia.

We found out that in certain micro-regions, particularly those located along the ethnic border, in Slovak enclaves surrounded by territories dominated by Hungarian-speaking population and among Slovaks who settled in southern Slovakia as part of colonization programs after World War I or World War II, this type of voters prevails and constitutes a relatively stable and unchanging electorate. In larger towns, the overall share of these voters is also relatively high; however, it shows a tendency to decline in time. Our principal conclusion is that a detailed analysis of election results on ethnically mixed territories failed to corroborate the frequently presented view that coexistence of Slovaks and ethnic Hungarians in southern Slovakia is free of problems, in fact almost idyllic, and that the absence of accommodating attitudes with respect to demands or aspirations of ethnic Hungarians is typical rather for those Slovaks who live outside ethnically mixed territories.

Political parties and the intellectual elite in general (i.e. pedagogues, journalists, artists, civic activists, etc.) are vital to overcoming this myth. It makes a world of difference whether they cultivate the views and positions of inhabitants of southern Slovakia in a positive way or, on the contrary, abuse existing stereotypes, prejudices and lack of objective information in order to increase distance and escalate tensions between members of the Slovak and ethnic Hungarian community. Whether and in what way is the country's political elite prepared to shoulder its responsibility for this issue shall be the focus of other partial studies featured in the present publication.

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NOTES

1   According to the Law No. 515/2003 that took effect in 2004, organization of presidential elections (as well as all other types of elections) was divided into 50 newly-created constituencies. They became local state administration bodies in the field of general internal administration that also included organization of elections. The said law amalgamated many out of 79 districts established by the Law No. 221/1996 on Territorial and Administrative Organization of the Slovak Republic. In southern Slovakia, it concerned

Lučenec and Poltár districts (merged into a new Lučenec [LC] constituency) as well as Rimavská Sobota and Revúca districts (merged into a new Rimavská Sobota [RS] constituency). As we see, the Lučenec constituency (marked LC on the map) comprises a larger south-western part (i.e. the Lučenec district) and a smaller north-eastern part (i.e. the Poltár district). There was only one case of the opposite change as the territory of the Nové Zámky district was split into two new constituencies, namely Nové Zámky and Štúrovo.

2 Marek Vagovič: "Slota útočí, prezident mlčí" ['Slota Reviles, President Silent'], *Sme* daily, March 30, 2009.

3 Veronika Šutková: "Maďarská karta zabrala" ['Hungarian Card Worked Out'], *Sme* daily, April 6, 2009.

4 See, for instance, Krivý et al (1996) or Krivý (2006).

5 The National Council of the Slovak Republic eventually passed the law on June 30, 2009.

6 These districts were enacted in 1996 by the Law No. 221/1996 on Territorial and Administrative Organization of the Slovak Republic that divided the country's territory into 79 districts. According to the previously valid Law No. 517/1990 that largely preserved the territorial and administrative organization enacted by the Law No. 130/1970, Slovakia's territory was divided into 38 districts; 11 to 13 of those districts were viewed as ethnically mixed. Slovak scholars normally worked with data from the following districts: Dunajská Streda, Galanta, Komárno, Nové Zámky, Nitra, Levice, Veľký Krtíš, Lučenec, Rimavská Sobota, Rožňava, Košice area and Trebišov. Their Hungarian colleagues usually added districts of Bratislava area and Nitra to the pool while paying increased attention to Slovakia's two largest cities of Bratislava and Košice that according to the 1991 population census were home to 31,000 ethnic Hungarians, which matches the population of a smaller district.

7 Sometimes, Slovak authors include only 15 districts (excluding Nitra) into the category of ethnically mixed territory; some surveys even list only 12 districts in southern Slovakia as ethnically mixed.

8 According to available data, ethnic Hungarians form an absolute majority in three constituencies as enacted by the Law No. 515/2003: Komárno, Dunajská Streda and Štúrovo.

9 The sole exception is a stretch between Košice and Slovenské Nové Mesto where the continuity of Hungarian-speaking population's settlement has been broken (please see Map 1).

10 One of such ideological or political conclusions could be that this territory would strongly remind one of the territory separated from Czechoslovakia based on the Vienna Award of 1938; however, that shall not prevent the efforts to demarcate the real 'ethnically mixed territory' for the sake of correct research methodology.

11 Frič, Pavol: "Základné črty konfliktu Slovákov a Maďarov na Slovensku" ['Basic Features of the Slovak–Hungarian Conflict in Slovakia'] in Hunčík et al: *Mýty a kontramýty* [Myths and Counter-Myths], (Bratislava – Dunajská Streda: Nadácia Sándora Máraiho), 1995, pp. 13-14; 24.

12 Please see footnote 6.

13 There are only 12 such districts, i.e. four less than if the applied criterion was the 10% limit for ethnic Hungarians' representation; the four eliminated districts would be Senec, Košice area, Michalovce and Revúca.

14 Gyurgyík 2004, pp. 161-162.

15 They were enacted by the Law No. 472/1990 on Organization of Local State Administration.

16 Later, the Law No. 517/1990 on Territorial and Administrative Organization enacted municipalities as basic territorial units and districts as basic administrative units of the government.

17 The exact figure was 59.24%; please see Petőcz, 1998, pp. 165-166.

18 Legal predecessors of the Party of Hungarian Coalition included the following: the Hungarian Civic Party (Maďarská občianska strana–Magyar Polgári Párt), the Coexistence Political Movement (Politické hnutie Spolužitie–Együttélés Politikai Mozgalom) and the Hungarian Christian Democratic Movement (Maďarské kresťanskodemokratické hnutie–Magyar Kereszténydemokrata Mozgalom). These political organizations were founded in the first months of social changes following November 1989; the Independent Hungarian Initiative (Maďarská nezávislá iniciatíva–Független Magyar Kezdeményezés), a direct predecessor of the Hungarian Civic Party, was founded on November 18, 1989. The three parties formed SMK–MKP before the 1998 parliamentary elections.

19 Except the Nové Zámky district that is on the map divided into Nové Zámky and Štúrovo constituencies.

20 In a separate chapter featured in this publication, Zsuzsanna Lampl-Mészáros argues that approximately 7–8% of all inhabitants of southern Slovakia who officially declare Slovak ethnic nationality are in fact ethnic Hungarians in terms of identity. That would justify a conclusion that the success rate of President Gašparovič among 'real' Slovaks from southern Slovakia was yet a couple of percent higher than official statistical data seem to suggest.

21 Please see also Petőcz (2007), p. 7. All ballots not cast for the Party of Hungarian Coalition were viewed as votes of non-Hungarian (i.e. Slovak) voters. These votes were subsequently calculated by the ratio corresponding to election results posted by individual Slovak parties. At the same time, we assumed that almost all ethnic Hungarians but only a statistically irrelevant proportion of Slovak voters voted for SMK–MKP. This assumption may be justified by several arguments: first, the actual overall election result of SMK–MKP that received 11.68% of the popular vote nationwide; second, the election campaign waged by the SNS rang strong anti-Hungarian undertones, providing additional motivation for ethnic Hungarians to vote for SMK–MKP; last but not least, the way of dissolving the previous ruling coalition in February 2006 as well as some negative social effects of the reforms it implemented probably discouraged ethnic Hungarian voters from voting for the SDKÚ that was relatively successful among ethnic Hungarian voters in previous elections, especially in 1998. Other parties that previously attracted ethnic Hungarians' votes (e.g. the Party of Democratic Left of the Party of Civic Understanding) de facto ceased to exist although they formally ran in the elections. It is true that if particular Slovak parties' election results reflected the number of ethnic Slovak as established by the 2001 population census, the resulting figures would be slightly lower. We shall explain the difference between these two sets of figures in Table 5.

22 The interval between the two figures in the table's far-right column expresses the different methodology of calculating voting preferences of voters with Slovak ethnic background. The higher figure was calculated by the method used also in Table 2 (i.e. all votes not cast for SMK–MKP were considered as votes of Slovak voters). The lower figure was calculated as breaking down election results of particular Slovak parties to the number of Slovak inhabitants in each given district (constituency) established by the 2001 population census.

23 Voter participation in the 2006 parliamentary elections was 62.62% in the Dunajská Streda district and 61.51% in the Štúrovo constituency; voter participation in the 2009 presidential elections was 64.71% in the Dunajská Streda district and 60.20% in the Štúrovo constituency.

24 Please see footnote 16.

25 According to the author's own analysis, the ballots cast by Slovak voters made up approximately 0.5% of the overall election result of SMK–MKP (11.68%). Please see Petőcz (2007), p. 8.

26 They include the Communist Party of Slovakia, the Association of Slovak Workers, the Party of Democratic Left, SLNKO, the Slovak People's Party, the Movement for Democracy and the Leftist Bloc.
27 We assume that in the most recent presidential elections, Ivan Gašparovič received votes mostly from voters who support parties of the incumbent ruling coalition two of which officially endorsed his candidature. While Gašparovič was not officially endorsed by the ĽS-HZDS, we believe that ĽS-HZDS voters who came to polling stations preferred Ivan Gašparovič to Iveta Radičová.
28 On the cartogram, the Nové Zámky district is divided into Nové Zámky and Štúrovo constituencies; however, the legend interprets it as a single district.
29 The study compared Slovakia's districts in the following categories: employment, urbanization, education index, environmental infrastructure, economic productivity, mobility, technical service and information infrastructure, social standard, settlement, population index and situation of landscape ecology.
30 The figure in the far-right column is a little bit confusing as it is distorted by truly low representation of Slovaks.
31 The border ran approximately along the line of Lekárovce – Sobrance – Stakčín – border with Poland.

ZUZANA MÉSZÁROSOVÁ-LAMPLOVÁ:
Magyars and Slovaks in Southern Slovakia – Exercising Language Rights

"Let Thy hand guide us, protect our morals, bread and speech."
(Single Catholic Songbook, psalm No. 299)

Repeatedly presented statements by political and cultural leaders about alleged threats to language rights and national identity of the Slovaks inhabiting ethnically mixed territories of southern Slovakia may – and often do – create an impression that ethnic Hungarians living on these territories oppress the Slovaks in every way possible and thus actually force them to assimilate. Are these statements based on truth? What are the Slovaks' opportunities to use their native language in southern Slovakia? Is their right to use mother tongue merely declared but denied or is the actually exercised? Is there language assimilation? The present chapter will try to answer these questions. It is not based on various assumptions, hypotheses, myths or rumours but rather on the views of people who are most concerned by the issue, i.e. inhabitants of ethnically mixed territories.

These people formed the principal target group of a sociological survey carried out jointly by the Forum Institute for Minority Research in Šamorín and the Cultural Observatory of the National Educational Centre in Bratislava. The survey took place in 2007 on a sample of 821 respondents comprising almost evenly Slovaks (47%) and ethnic Hungarians (53%). The sample was representative in terms of respondents' nationality, sex, age structure, education status, and municipality size. Besides these data, the present study also used certain findings from a qualitative survey that was carried out on the same territory in 2008–2009, applying the methodology of focus groups.[1]

National identity refers to historic, language and cultural identity, i.e. identity that is not innate but is gradually formed and constantly shaped throughout every individual's live. Consequently, we speak of factors affecting emergence and formation of national identity. It is a complex of factors, ranging from family background and parents' national identity to socio-cultural, economic and political macro- as well as microenvironment in which the individual lives to globalization and many other factors. Naturally, the importance of particular factors varies from one individual to another. In certain life stages, some of them gain greater importance than others. In other life stages, previously crucial factors may be pushed to the background while previously less important factors may become pivotal. Nevertheless, there are also factors that are of constantly great importance in terms of forming and shaping individuals' national identity. One of them is native language as well as conditions and/or opportunities to use it.
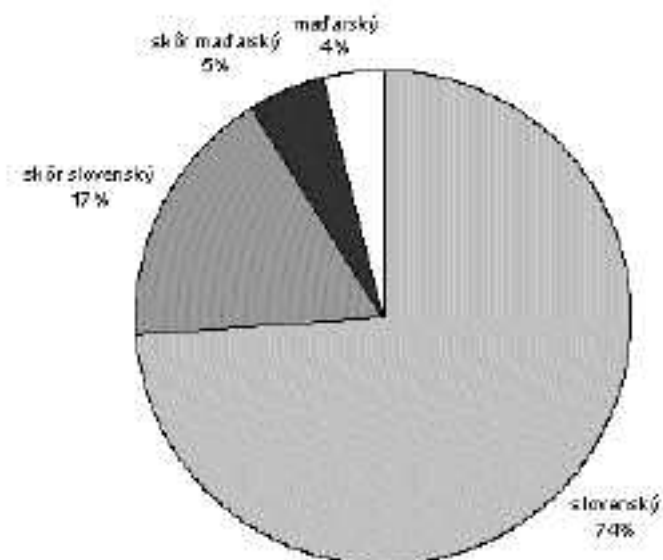
Dominant Communication Language

Family Communication in Respondents' Childhood

The survey did not primarily inquire about respondents' native language but rather about the language they used to communicate with their parents at home throughout their childhood. We assumed that the dominant language of family communication was Slovak for Slovaks and Hungarian for ethnic Hungarians. While this assumption has been corroborated with most respondents, the survey established that there were also Slovaks who communicated exclusively or prevailingly in Hungarian as well as ethnic Hungarians who communicated exclusively or prevailingly in Slovak.

Three in four Slovaks (74%) spoke exclusively Slovak to their parents during childhood. The remaining share of Slovak respondents encountered with Hungarian as the complementary language of family communication, although its occurrence varied. One in six respondents of Slovak nationality (17%) also used Hungarian but their family communication was dominated by Slovak; one in eleven respondents (9%) spoke prevailingly or exclusively Hungarian. These data justify a conclusion that while Slovak was the dominant language of family communication for most Slovaks, one in eleven Slovaks grew up in a family environment where Hungarian was the dominant language (please see Graph 1).

Graph 1
Dominant family communication language of the Slovaks in the past


Legend (top down): Slovak, preferably Slovak, preferably Hungarian, Hungarian

Respondents of Hungarian nationality may also be divided in two categories in terms of the dominant language of family communication. Naturally, most of them (97%) grew up in a family environment where Hungarian was spoken exclusively or predominantly; four in five of these respondents (80%) spoke Hungarian exclusively while one in six of them (17%) spoke it prevailingly. On the other hand, only three percent of ethnic Hungarian respondents identified Slovak as the dominant language of family communication (please see Graph 2).

Graph 2
Dominant family communication language of ethnic Hungarians in the past
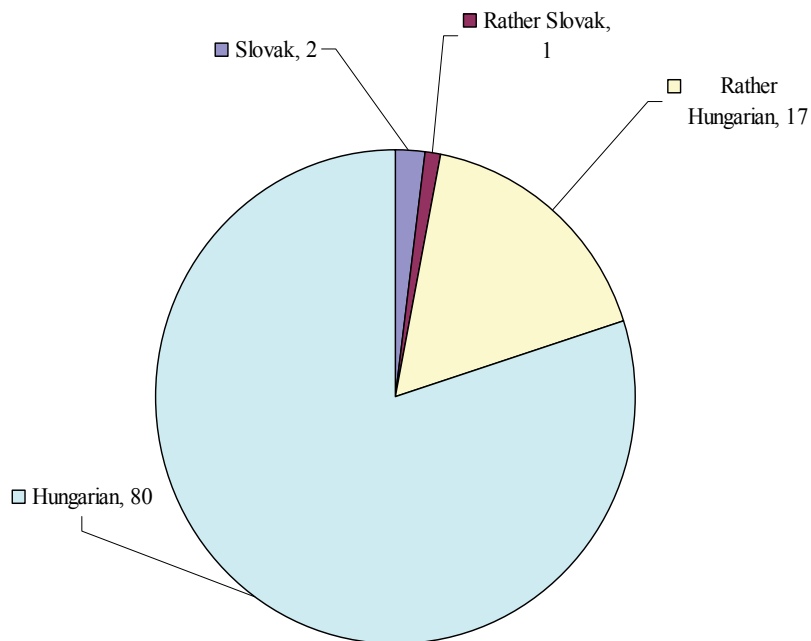
Although one in eleven Slovaks grew up in a family environment domi-nated by Hungarian language, 99% of them enrolled in primary schools with Slovak as the language of instruction after they reached the stipulated age; only one percent of Slovaks attended a primary school where the lan-guage of instruction was Hungarian. So, regardless of the dominant lan-guage of family communication, parents of Slovak children clearly preferred primary schools with Slovak as the language of instruction. At the higher stage of education system (i.e. secondary schools), Slovak children exclu-sively attended schools where Slovak was the language of instruction.

Family Communication Today

One in four married Slovaks (25%) currently lives in a mixed Slovak–Hungarian marriage. A vast majority of these couples' children (97%) attended or attend primary schools with Slovak as the language of instruc-tion while only 3% attended or attend primary schools where the language of instruction is Hungarian. Also, family communication of Slovak respon-

dents is currently dominated by Slovak language (please see Graph 3). The same is true for mixed marriages, with the sole exception of mutual communication between ethnic Hungarian parents and their children as half of these parents speak Hungarian to their children.

Graph 3
Dominant family communication language of Slovaks in mixed marriages nowadays
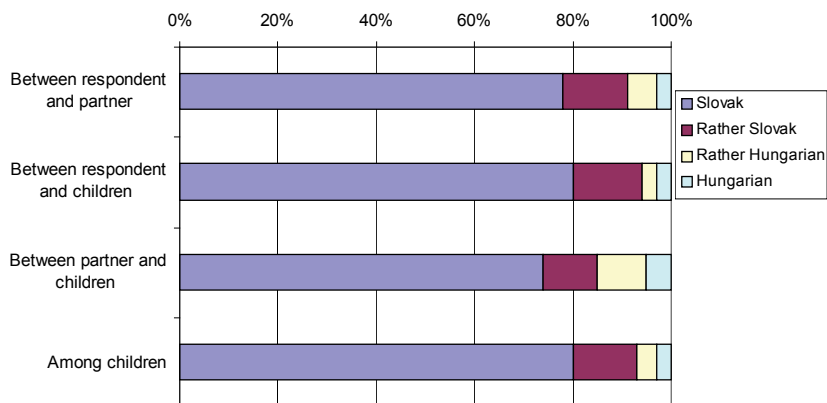
What was the outcome of similar examination in the case of ethnic Hungarians? We have already pointed out that 97% of ethnic Hungarians hail from families that communicated exclusively or prevailingly in Hungarian; however, only four in five of them (80%) enrolled in primary schools where the language of instruction was Hungarian while 20% of them enrolled in Slovak primary schools. One in four children of all Hungarian respondents (25%) attend primary schools where the language of instruction is Slovak; however, only about half of these children (13%) hail from mixed Slovak–Hungarian marriages. So, it is plain to see that the dominance of Hungarian as the language of family communication among ethnic Hungarian respondents is currently not as strong as in the case of Slovak respondents. In mixed marriages, language of communication largely depends on individual family members: Hungarian language dominates in communication between ethnic Hungarian parents and their children and in mutual communication between children. On the other hand, Slovak language is preferred in mutual communication between parents and especially in communication between Slovak parents and their children (please see Graph 4).

171

Graph 4
Dominant communication language of ethnic Hungarians in mixed marriages nowadays
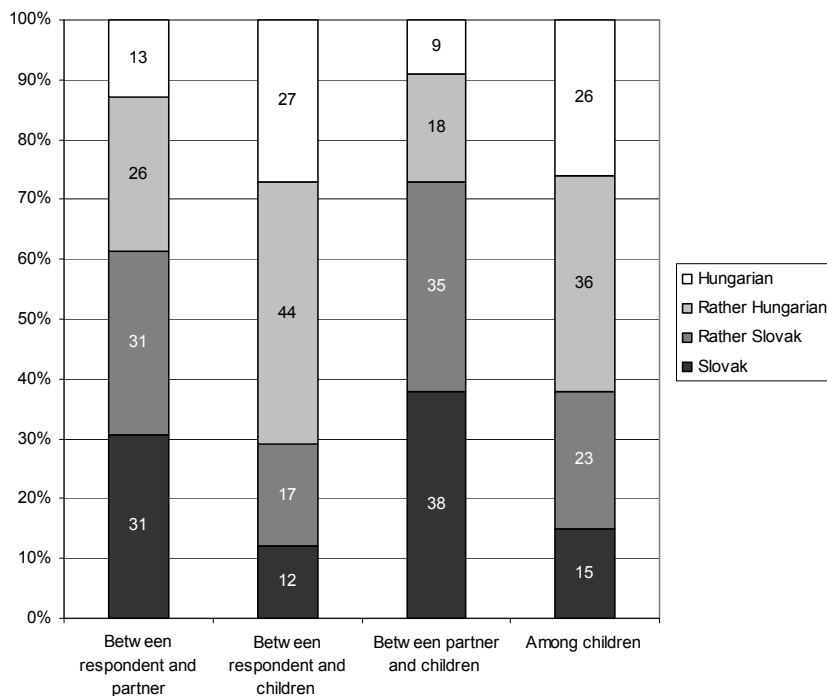
In homogeneous marriages of ethnic Hungarians, the principal language of family communication nowadays is significantly determined by the language of instruction used in primary schools attended by individual respondents. If they attended Hungarian primary schools, the dominance of Hungarian as the language of family communication is uncontested; if they attended Slovak primary schools, the dominance of Hungarian is strongly undermined (please see Graph 5).

Graph 5
Share of ethnic Hungarians using Slovak language
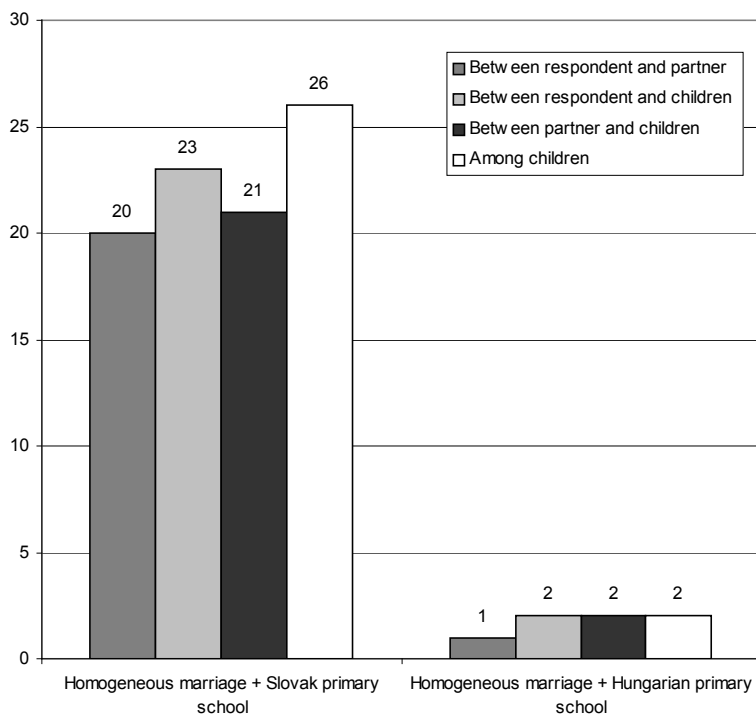
Extra-Family or Public Communication Today

Let us now say a few words about languages used by Slovaks and ethnic Hungarians from southern Slovakia as the principal language of extra-family communication, i.e. at workplace, in official contact, in shops and in communication with their neighbours.

The shares of Slovaks and ethnic Hungarians who communicate in Slovak and Hungarian, respectively, are illustrated in Graphs 6 and 7. These data indicate that Slovaks living in southern Slovakia encounter no problems when speaking Slovak as a vast majority of Slovaks use their native language in extra-family communication. On the other hand, ethnic Hungarians encounter no problems when speaking Hungarian either as most ethnic Hungarians use their mother tongue, although to a lesser extent than Slovaks.
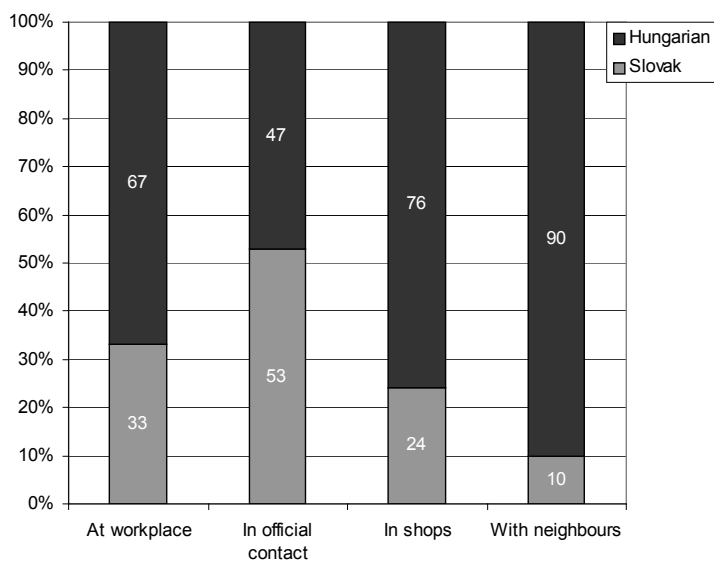
Graph 6
Languages used by Slovaks
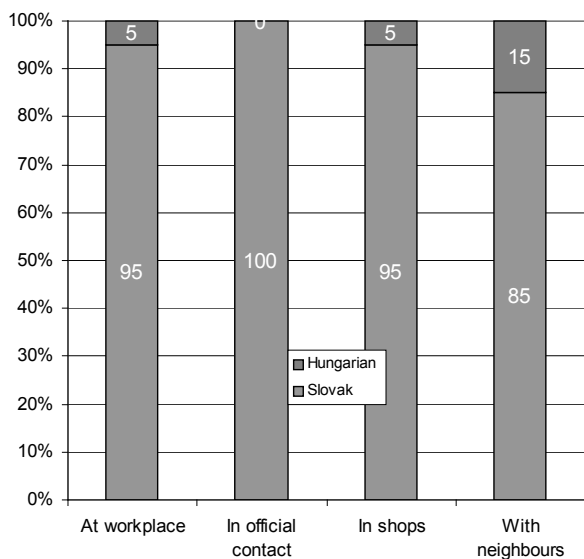
Graph 7
Languages used by ethnic Hungarians

So that Slovaks and ethnic Hungarians can communicate together, i.e. communicate in their second language, it is inevitable that they have good command of that language. Three in five Slovak respondents (60%) said they spoke Hungarian; half of them assessed their knowledge of Hungarian as fluent while the other half evaluated it as sufficient. At the same time, 13 in 14 Slovaks (93%) believe that ethnic Hungarians should have sufficient command of both Hungarian and Slovak.

Only one percent of ethnic Hungarian respondents said they did not speak Slovak while others answered in affirmative; three in four of them (76%) assessed their knowledge of Slovak as fluent while the remaining share (23%) evaluated it as sufficient. The command of Slovak largely depends on respondents' age and education status; pensioners with primary education as well as the youngest and the oldest category of unemployed with primary education showed the worst command of Slovak.

Let us sum up what we have learned about verbal communication of Slovaks and ethnic Hungarians inhabiting ethnically mixed territories of southern Slovakia. We found out that 3% of respondents who now consider themselves ethnic Hungarians hail from families where Slovak was the dominant language of family communication. Is it fair to call them assimilated? Perhaps yes. But in that case the 9% of respondents who now view themselves as Slovaks but hail from families whose communication used to be dominated by Hungarian must be viewed as equally assimilated.
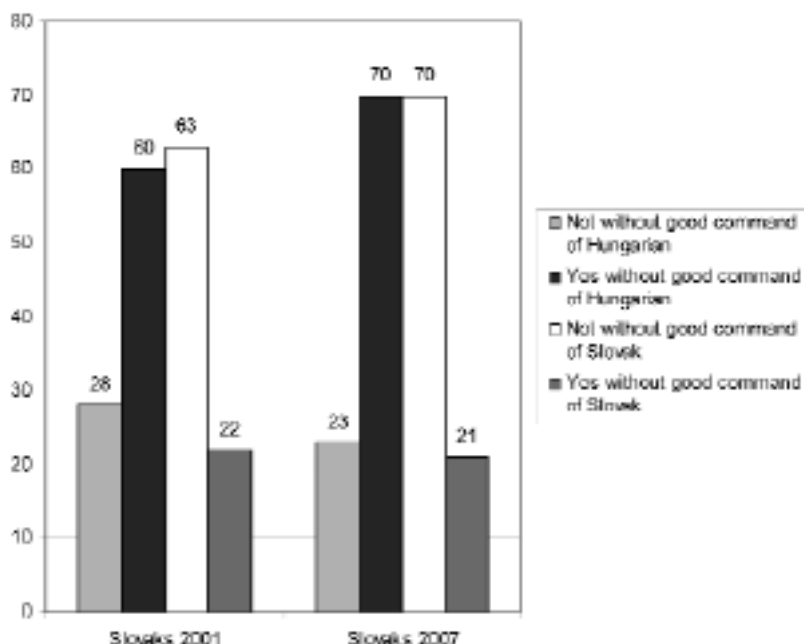
These figures along with all other cited statistical data indicate that national identity of ethnic Hungarians living on ethnically mixed territories is threatened more than that of their Slovak neighbours. Through attending primary schools where Slovak is the language of instruction as well as through family and extra-family communication that is dominated by Slovak language, Slovaks continue to use their language, which is one of essential factors of preserving and strengthening national identity. The fact that 60% of them also speak Hungarian does not threaten their identity in any way; if it was so, the share of ethnic Hungarians inhabiting southern Slovakia would also include these Slovaks. Good command and use of Hungarian language cannot threaten Slovaks' national identity but merely improve mutual communication with ethnic Hungarians; the same is true vice versa. What may threaten ethnic Hungarians' national identity, though, is their gradual abandoning of Hungarian language, which shows through the fact that some ethnic Hungarian parents communicate in Slovak with their children and enrol them to Slovak primary schools.

Slovaks' Views Regarding Opportunities to Use their Native Language in Southern Slovakia

Between 2001 and 2007, the importance of Slovak language in southern Slovakia increased, which may be documented by Graph 8. The share of Slovaks who believe it is impossible to make do without good command of Hungarian on ethnically mixed territories declined during this period. At the same time, the share of Slovaks who believe it is possible to make do without good command of Hungarian but not without good command of Slovak increased over the same period. These data suggest that Slovak is gradually becoming a dominant language also in southern Slovakia.

Graph 8
Is it possible to make do without good command of Slovak/Hungarian on Slovakia's ethnically mixed territory?*


*Note: * – The data were gathered during a survey carried out by the Cabinet for Public Opinion Research at the National Education Centre in 2001.*

Most Slovaks do not complain about opportunities to use Slovak language on ethnically mixed territories, quite the contrary; according to a survey carried out in 2007, six in seven of them (86%) expressed satisfaction regarding opportunities to use Slovak in official contact while seven in nine of them (78%) were satisfied with opportunities to be educated in their mother tongue.

The evaluation of opportunities to be educated in respondents' native language in their district of residence clearly indicates that most Slovaks and ethnic Hungarians are satisfied with the current *status quo* and that Slovaks are slightly more satisfied than ethnic Hungarians. According to ethnic Hungarians, there is no difference in opportunities to receive education in Slovak and in Hungarian from the viewpoint of particular types of educational establishments; the only exception is the insufficient number of secondary schools where Hungarian is the language of instruction. According to Slovaks, opportunities to study in Slovak are better than in Hungarian (please see Graph 9).

Graph 9
Respondents' satisfaction with opportunities to study in native language in the district of residence

177
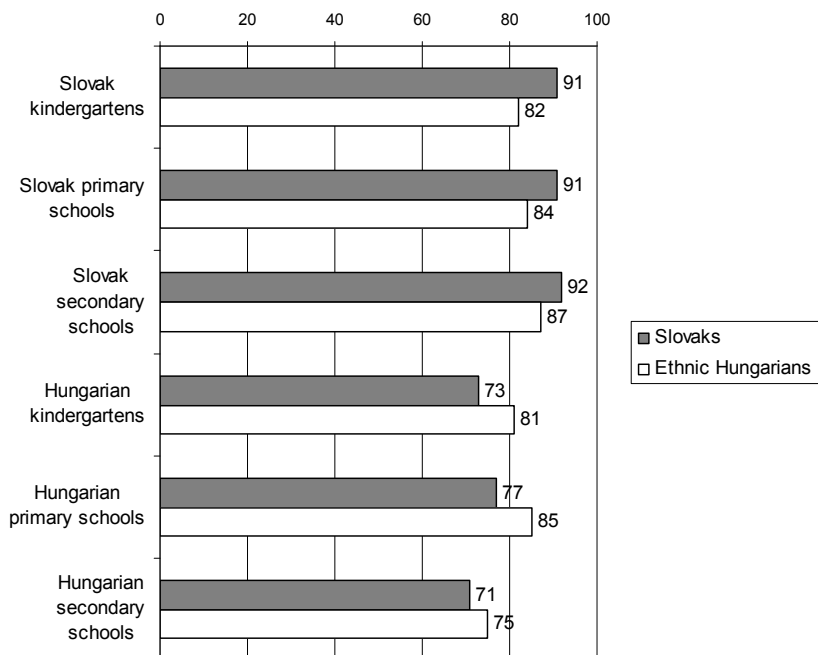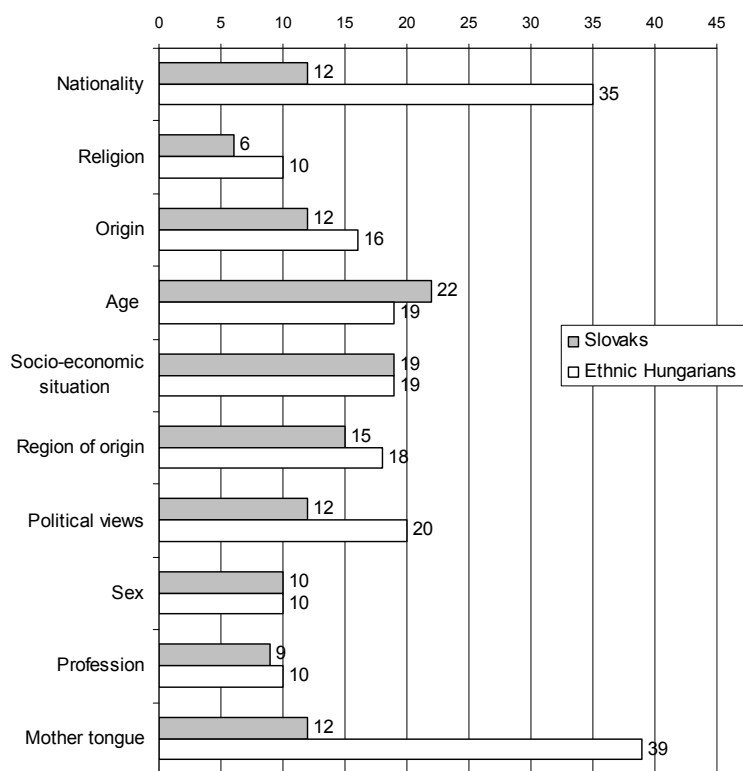
Such opinions of a vast majority of Slovaks living in southern Slovakia do not testify to discrimination against Slovak language. Slovaks do not even feel pressured to learn Hungarian as communication in Slovak on this territory is everyday practice no one tries to contest. It is a normal practice nowadays that if there is but one Slovak in a group of ethnic Hungarians, the majority automatically switch to speaking Slovak.[2]

Discrimination and its Causes

Graph 10 illustrates the share of respondents who have encountered discrimination due to different reasons in their lives.

Graph 10
Slovaks and ethnic Hungarians who feel discriminated against

While discrimination based on age was more frequently perceived by Slovak respondents and although both groups of respondents equally frequently complained about discrimination based on socio-economic situation, sex and profession, ethnic Hungarians feel discriminated against generally more frequently. From the viewpoint of our principal topic, it is particularly important that the most frequent reason for discriminating against them is their native language and nationality. Almost two in five ethnic Hungarian respondents (39%) mentioned a negative experience due to speaking Hungarian; more than one in three of them (35%) feel discriminated against because they view themselves as Hungarian.[3] While some Slovaks have similarly negative experience regarding the use of mother tongue and nationality, their share is substantially lower compared to that of ethnic Hungarians. Of course, discrimination has no minimum 'tolerance' as every single case is unjust and unjustifiable; however, statistical data again prove that oppression of Slovaks by ethnic Hungarians in southern Slovakia is a myth.

NOTES

1 The survey formed part of the project called *Challenging National Populism and Promoting Interethnic Tolerance and Understanding in Slovakia*.

2 During interviews in focus groups, several Slovak and ethnic Hungarian respondents mentioned that 'newcomers' (i.e. everyone who married into an ethnic Hungarian family) learned to speak Hungarian in the past; while respondents were unable to put a time frame on it, almost all of them had this kind of experience. In the words of one female respondent: *"This is something completely new. Whether it was in Rožňava or at home, in the countryside, if Gypsies or Slovaks became members of a family, they learned Hungarian and no one was forced to switch languages. Everybody spoke Hungarian. Nowadays it is kind of strange as even children from Hungarian families refuse to speak Hungarian and they remind their parents and grandparents to speak Slovak because they are ashamed of speaking Hungarian."* Another female respondent expressed ambivalent feelings by saying: *"My daughter learned to speak Slovak. I am proud that she had an 'A' in Slovak language. But then she met a Slovak man and now she turned into a Slovak woman. That bothers me so. I am happy that she is happy with him but I am afraid that she will not teach her children to speak Hungarian. I feel ... I don't know, I guess I feel betrayed. The man is agreeable but when he comes to our place, he just withdraws into a corner and does not say anything. I tune on to Pátria* [the Slovak Radio's frequency for minorities] *and my daughter tells me right away: Mom, would you turn it off, please ..."*

3 The focus group survey indicates important changes in terms of discrimination occurrence in certain areas, for instance during local football games. In the words of one male respondent: *"I played football since I was a kid. As a football player, I have visited all surrounding villages. Ten or fifteen years ago, it was totally normal to treat us to refreshments both before and after the game; [the hosts] served us pastry and everything was jolly good. Nowadays, we hear more and more aggressive chants such as fucking Hungarians during games in the same villages. And residents of those Slovak villages gawk at us as if we ate their bread."*

179

ZSOLT GÁL:

Argentina on the Danube – Populist Economic Policy as the Biggest Enemy of Sustainable Economic Growth[1]

> *"I think, then, that the species of oppression by which democratic nations are menaced is unlike anything that ever before existed in the world ... I seek to trace the novel features under which despotism may appear in the world. The first thing that strikes the observation is an innumerable multitude of men, all equal and alike, incessantly endeavouring to procure the petty and paltry pleasures with which they glut their lives ... Above this race of men stands an immense and tutelary power, which takes upon itself alone to secure their gratifications and to watch over their fate. That power is absolute, minute, regular, provident, and mild. It would be like the authority of a parent if, like that authority, its object was to prepare men for manhood; but it seeks, on the contrary, to keep them in perpetual childhood: it is well content that the people should rejoice, provided they think of nothing but rejoicing. For their happiness such a government willingly labours, but it chooses to be the sole agent and the only arbiter of that happiness; it provides for their security, foresees and supplies their necessities, facilitates their pleasures, manages their principal concerns, directs their industry, regulates the descent of property, and subdivides their inheritances: what remains, but to spare them all the care of thinking and all the trouble of living? Thus it every day renders the exercise of the free agency of man less useful and less frequent; it circumscribes the will within a narrower range and gradually robs a man of all the uses of himself."*

<div align="right">

Alexis de Tocqueville: *Democracy in America*, Volume II, 1840.[2]

</div>

Since the dawn of first modern democracies, great thinkers were aware that the rule of the people was not a perfect political system and could degenerate into tyranny of the majority. The founding fathers of the United States of America feared a situation in which – in the words of James Madison who would later become the Secretary of State and the fourth President of the United States – *"the public good is eclipsed by disputes between antagonized parties"* and *"measures are too often adopted not according to principles of justice or with respect to the rights of the minority but based on*

prevailing force of the prejudiced and arrogant majority" (Hamilton et al, 2002, p. 116). A partial remedy according to Madison would be vastness and diversity of the federation in which a great number of factions, religions and parties would prevent any of them from gaining supremacy.[3] Against tyranny of the majority, the founding fathers strove to put up a constitution that – in compliance with Charles Montesquieu's ideas – introduced the principle of power division (into legislative, executive and judicial), a federal constitution in which powers are divided between the Union and individual states and the system of 'checks and balances', or balancing and mutual control between particular power constituencies and state institutions on various levels of government; also, it guaranteed fundamental human rights that are universal and inalienable in compliance with the concept of natural rights formulated by John Locke. After his journey to the United States in 1831–1832, a French political scientist, historian and politician Alexis de Tocqueville wrote a book titled *Democracy in America* that in great detail described, analyzed and compared the unique and young American democracy. Tocqueville also believed that the greatest threat to the system originated in omnipotence of the majority and related phenomena such as excessive centralism and expanding government powers along with meticulous and futile bureaucratic planning and paternalistic government. *"If ever the free institutions of America are destroyed, that event may be attributed to the omnipotence of the majority, which may at some future time urge the minorities to desperation and oblige them to have recourse to physical force. Anarchy will then be the result, but it will have been brought about by despotism"* (Tocqueville, 2009, p. 416).

At the turn of the 19th and 20th century, a Swedish economist Knut Wicksell pointed out that the system of voting based on a simple majority might lead to the majority adopting a budget whose expenditures would benefit it while transferring the tax burden onto the minority that would always be outvoted (Johnson, 1997, p. 165). Gordon Tullock also argued that the system of majority voting might lead to the majority redistributing the minority's resources and allotting them mostly to its own members, which would cause inefficient allocation of resources (Tullock, 1959, p. 579). In this case, the majority hinders overall economic effectiveness because tends to embrace redistribution of the minority's resources even when its own benefits are lower than the minority's costs.

The other model of democratic decision-making known to modern political economy, i.e. that of lobby groups, also fails to achieve maximization of economic effectiveness. In this model, interest groups lobby the government into pursuing certain policies that benefit themselves at the expense

of the majority (Olson, 1965). Most interest groups are well organized and focus on concrete areas in which they strive to bend the rules in their favour that subsequently bring significant and concentrated profits to (a limited number of) their members while only slightly increasing the costs borne by a large number of unorganized majority members. Even in most developed democracies, the greatest problem is that particular interests of too many lobby groups tend to form a cobweb around government, paralyzing effective resource allocation, hindering economic growth and causing the economy to operate below its potential.

Practically since the dawn of modern democracies, political and economic thinkers realized that this form of government – even though they considered it the best of available options – may not guarantee effective economic policy that will secure sustainable development. The greatest problems of democracy stemmed primarily from the model of majority voting but also from existence of interest groups. The single most important challenge central European democracies are facing today is the phenomenon of populism. The goal of the present study is to analyze its economic pillar, i.e. populist economic policy. I believe that its principal vital force is continuous demand for such policy on the part of voters, which is closely related to the already described basic problem of the democratic system of government, i.e. majority voting.

The opening part of the study defines populist economic policy and compares its Central European modification to the 'classic' Latin American version. The second part will demonstrate why this kind of economic policy (especially its most important segment, i.e. fiscal expansion) is completely ineffective and even destructive for small and open economies in Central Europe. The final part tries to find an answer to the question of why political leaders keep reviving this policy despite its proven ineffectiveness and harmfulness. That answer is the already mentioned demand on the part of voters that ensues from a blend of rational interests of the government-financed majority and economic values, concepts and preferences of a substantial part of the population that are irrational from the viewpoint of mainstream economy.

Phenomenon of Populist Economic Policy

While is quite problematic to define the phenomenon of populism in general,[4] its economic mutation is easier to describe. For the purposes of the present study, *economic populism shall entail pursuance of such policies that do not hesitate to sacrifice the country's long-term economic stability*

183

in return for short-term political gains. By short-term political gains, we refer especially to popularity of political parties and their leaders that shows in elections and is subsequently reflected in political mandate and participation in power. Principal indicators of popularity include public opinion polls, election results and ensuing distribution of mandates in various elected bodies. By long-term economic stability, we refer particularly to balanced and sustainable economic growth of a country and ensuing growth in citizens' standard of living; it makes a lot of sense to monitor this development in relative comparison to other countries.

The macroeconomic growth is balanced and sustainable as long as it does not cause substantial internal or external economic imbalances, i.e. it is not achieved at the expense of ballooning budgetary and/or balance-of-payments deficits that lead to a substantial increase in internal and external indebtedness. Simultaneously, on the microeconomic level the economy must avoid a significant increase in the total volume of (inter)corporate debts or overdue claims among financial institutions.

Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries traditionally suffer from the lack of (local) capital, which is why they had to rely largely on foreign capital since the beginning of transformation. Consequently, the growth in their budgetary deficits and public debt goes usually hand in hand with ballooning balance-of-payments deficit and foreign indebtedness; this leads to parallel deficits experts refer to as double deficit. Principal indicators of (un)balanced and (un)sustainable growth include especially deficits of public budgets and the balance of payments as well as public and foreign debts, but also corporate debts on the microeconomic level.

The principal features of populist economic policies Slovakia and Hungary pursued over the past two decades included excessive (explicit and/or implicit) budgetary deficits and simultaneously occurring high balance-of-payments deficits that led to an enormous growth in public and foreign debts and brought both countries on the verge of economic collapse. What followed was stabilization through restrictive fiscal policy measures and structural reforms with painful social effects (at least short-term) that usually required assistance from international institutions. This cycle of populist policy strongly resembles economic experiments various Latin American countries carried out since the 1970s. Another similarity is that both categories of countries caught up with economically developed countries with a varying degree of success. Therefore, it may be interesting to learn about basic hallmarks of the 'classic' Latin American populism.

In May 1990, the Inter-American Development Bank played host to a conference on Latin American populism; proceedings from the conference

were published a year later. In the introductory study of this book, authors Dornbusch and Edwards (1991, pp. 7–9) defined Latin American economic populism as an approach to economy that neglects the risks of inflation and deficit financing of public budgets, external limitations and economic players' reactions to aggressive non-market policies. In order to increase economic growth, wages, employment and achieve more just redistribution of the national income, policy makers substantially increase public expenditures (typically through wage growth), which eventually leads to high inflation and great external economic imbalances. The populist experiment usually leads to economic collapse and there is no other alternative but to implement a drastic austerity package with heavy social costs, typically with assistance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Populism is therefore self-destructive and populist policies are bound to fail; those population groups that were originally supposed to benefit the most usually turn out to be the greatest losers, mostly through a decline in employment, wages and income.

In the next chapter, Kaufman and Stellings (1991, p. 16) define this kind of Latin American populism as a set of economic policies (tools) designed to achieve specific political goals. These goals usually are: (1) drumming up principal support among organized workers and members of the lower middle class; (2) drumming up additional support from local enterprises that focus on the domestic market; (3) achieving political isolation of the rural oligarchy, foreign corporations and domestic industrial tycoons. The economic tools designed to achieve these goals include (but are not limited to) the following: (1) inflating budgetary deficits aimed at stimulating economic growth; (2) increasing nominal wages and controlling prices in order to influence redistribution of income; (3) controlling the national currency's exchange rate or its artificial appreciation in order to wrestle down inflation and increase wages and profits in sectors that produce untradeable goods.[5] According to Dornbusch and Edwards (1991, pp. 11–12), economic populism in Latin American countries occurs in irregular cycles; each of these cycles may be divided into four stages:

1st stage. At the beginning, populist economic policies seem to work as production, employment and wages continue to grow while price checks keep inflation on the leash and the demand for scarce goods is temporarily saturated by imports.

2nd stage. The economy begins to face a critical shortage of goods and foreign exchange while inflation pressures increase. The budgetary deficit reaches exorbitant levels. Releasing the grip on price control and foreign exchange control as well as devaluation of the national currency and protection of the domestic market seems increasingly inevitable.

3rd stage. Great scarcity, galloping inflation that often turns to hyperinflation and obvious overvaluation of the national currency causes a massive withdrawal of capital from the country and causes demonetarization of national economy. The already exorbitant budgetary deficit deepens even further because continuously high budgetary expenditures are suddenly combined with declining tax revenues. The government grows desperate and decides to cut expenditures and devalue the national currency, which leads to a substantial drop in real wages. This usually causes an abrupt political change, such as a violent toppling of the government.

4th stage. An austerity stabilization package put through by the new government (usually with assistance from the IMF) leads to significant cuts in expenditures, a further decline in real wages compared to when the populist cycle started. To make matters worse, wages tend to remain at low levels for an extensive period of time because the capital has lost confidence in the national economy and investments stagnate.

Since there are differences between CEE and Latin American countries, there are several significant differences between the natures of populism in both regions as well. They stem mostly from the fact that CEE countries (except for Poland) are substantially smaller, their economies are more open and they are members of various integration groupings (particularly the European Union) or at least strove for full-fledged membership in these groupings during the transition period. Therefore, it has been virtually impossible or at least very difficult for them to apply a whole range of tools of Latin American populism such as controlling monetary policy or mounting political pressure on the central bank, controlling foreign exchange rates and flows, protecting the domestic market, meddling and distorting pricing, etc. Because of that, populism is manifested mostly through expansive fiscal policy. Also, the population is not as heterogeneous in CEE countries in terms of ethnic or income disparities; last but not least, big domestic landowners and industrial tycoons were naturally non-existent after the fall of communism, which is why populist politicians were not urged to fight them.

Another, rather seeming, difference is that CEE countries in the final stage of the populist cycle usually managed to avoid total economic collapse, hyperinflation, disintegration of the financial system, fall of the national currency and eventual violent toppling of the government; however, that was not because such a scenario would be improbable in this region but rather due to the fact that the political elite (in the nick of time but still) managed to adopt inevitable measures aimed at avoiding a total breakdown (i.e. stabilization packages in 1995 and 2008-09 in Hungary and in

1999 in Slovakia). An exemplary exception confirming that the 'Argentine on the Danube' scenario was not merely a figment of international press's imagination was the collapse of Bulgarian economy in 1996–1997 that came as the result of enormous foreign debt, belated and slow implementation of market reforms and lingering soft budgetary restrictions in the field of public finance and banking sector.[6]

Despite the described differences, Latin American and Central European populism have more in common than meets the eye. The most important similarities may be summed up as follows:

– The most frequently applied and virtually ubiquitous tool is fiscal expansion, i.e. stimulating economy through increasing budgetary expenditures. Populist politicians in both regions tend to underestimate the risks (e.g. galloping inflation and ballooning debt) of deficit financing of their megalomaniac projects.

– In both cases, fiscal expansion leads to high double deficits (i.e. budgetary and balance-of-payments ones); the economic growth is increasingly less balanced and sustainable; inflation and devaluation pressures continue to mount.

– At the end of the populist cycle, economy is threatened by a dramatic increase in inflation, falling exchange rate of the national currency, withdrawal of capital from the country and collapse of the financial sector that is followed by a deep recession with grave social implications. Unless the government adopts an emergency stabilization package (i.e. restrictive measures and structural reforms usually consulted with the IMF), the collapse becomes a reality and forces the government to adopt an even more drastic austerity package with even graver social consequences. The political elite are usually very reluctant to endorse such packages and tend to postpone them until it is too late. If it manages to introduce them before the actual collapse, it is in the nick of time before economy crumbles away; usually it is at the point when capital already began to withdraw, national currency began to lose its value (often due to speculative attacks against it) and inflation got out of hand.

– Populist economic policy is self-destructive and eventually leads to reducing the standard of living that often falls even below the level from before launching the populist cycle; paradoxically, those who hoped to benefit from it the most (i.e. workers, members of the lower middle class, public servants, pensioners) end up as the greatest losers. Even the political elite that introduced populist economic policy are unable to preserve its political power in the long run, particularly in a democratic environment.

187

–   Populists' other favourite tools include furthering state ownership (either via introducing nationalization or postponing privatization, often under the pretext of protecting 'national interests') and controlling prices, currency's exchange rate and financial flows; however, due to already mentioned limitations, CEE countries cannot apply them as often and to as great an extent as it was or is the case in 'traditional' Latin American countries.

Another hallmark of populist economic policy is that populists who are considered 'soft' from the political viewpoint are able to ruin economy just as efficiently as 'hard' populists. The only difference between them is that 'soft' populists do not tend to destabilize basic institutions of liberal democracy unlike 'hard' populists who may thus undermine the democratic system of government (Smilov – Krastev, 2008, p. 9).[7] A good example may be served by the coalition of socialists and free democrats that ruled in Hungary between 2002 and 2006. The Hungarian Socialist Party that was the dominant ruling party during this period certainly does not belong to 'hard' populists in terms of threatening liberal democracy in the country; still, it was very 'effective' in bringing the economy on the verge of collapse by completely ignoring fundamental economic rules.

László Csaba recently pointed out a new kind of macroeconomic populism, using the example of new EU member states, particularly Baltic countries, Romania and Bulgaria. Csaba observes that these countries did not post high budgetary deficits or ballooning public debts after the turn of the millennium but they failed to keep private consumption on leash; the loan boom that ensued was accompanied by unsustainable, sometimes vast deficits on the current account of the balance of payments (reaching 15-22% of GDP) and caused overheating of economy. In other words, populism did not show on the expenditure side but rather on the revenue side of these countries' budgetary policies, mostly because governments failed as regulators.[8] While these countries' economic development and economic policies rather resemble countries of East and Southeast Asia before the Asian financial crisis (1997–1998), there are also certain parallels with western countries before the contemporary economic crisis. But as I already foreshadowed, populism in Hungary and Slovakia resembles especially the 'classic' Latin American model and therefore examining the new kind of macroeconomic populism shall not be the goal of the present study.

Total Ineffectiveness and Harmfulness of Populist Economic Policy in CEE Countries

There are two countries in the Central European region that experienced textbook cases of the classic populist cycle: the beginning with consolidated public finance as well as balanced and sustainable economic growth; subsequent fiscal expansion that caused significant internal and external imbalances and a ballooning debt; the crisis when economy faced imminent collapse of the financial sector and government became insolvent due to mass withdrawal of capital and significant devaluation of the national currency; and finally adoption of an emergency austerity and stabilization package designed in cooperation with international institutions. The two countries were Slovakia between 1996 and 1999 and Hungary between 2002 and 2008/09. Other countries in different periods faced various hallmarks of economic populism but none of them experienced the entire cycle since the major change in political and economic system in CEE countries in 1989. There is every reason to believe that Slovakia entered another populist cycle approximately in 2007/08 but it remains to be seen whether it will complete it; in order to do that, the incumbent administration would have to remain in office for another electoral term and continue to produce similar public finance deficits that are projected for 2009 and 2010.

A characteristic feature of both the Slovak and the Hungarian populist cycle was that fiscal expansion took place during the period of solid economic growth and amidst generally favourable international economic situation; this suggests that both countries' economic policies defied all economic textbooks.[9] An interesting coincidence is that the Slovak and the Hungarian cycle had opposite amplitudes, i.e. one country pursued populist economic policy while the other country implemented stabilization measures and vice versa. A partial difference was that a significant proportion of budgetary deficits in Slovakia was implicit in nature and only later was it transformed into public debt while in Hungary a vast majority of deficits appeared explicitly in budgets and debts of the public sector. The most recent Slovak cycle is essentially different in two aspects: first, fiscal expansion coincided with world economic crisis; second, the deficits increased after Slovakia had adopted the single European currency.

The experience of both countries indicates that fiscal incentives failed even in the short term to bring about an essential increase in economic growth or employment, even though their public finance deficits and deficits of the current account of the balance of payments reached sizeable

proportions (7 to 10 percent of GDP) and hovered at this level for three of four years in a row. The only thing the fiscal expansion accomplished was maintain the growth pace and the level of employment; in Hungary where a significant share of public expenditures was channelled to wages and welfare benefits it also caused a significant though temporary boost in citizens' real income. Toward the end of the populist cycle, though, the growth pace began to slow down substantially, wages and employment began to plummet while inflation buoyed up; eventually, the crisis forced both governments to adopt austerity packages in order to avoid economic collapse. Completely in line with the Latin American experience, the fiscal expansion failed to stimulate economy even in early stages of the populist cycle. The main reason behind complete ineffectiveness of government incentives in the region is great openness and small size of most CEE countries' domestic markets as well as minimum or none barriers to the free movement of goods, services and more and more importantly of production factors (i.e. capital and labour). The following table shows that all Visegrad Four (V4) countries except Poland, the only new EU member state with a sizeable domestic market, export more than three quarters of their production; similarly high is their imports intensity expressed as the high imports/GDP ratio.

Table 1
GDP, exports and imports of goods and services, export performance and import intensity of select EU member states (as of 2008, in million eur)

Country	Population (million, 2007)	GDP	Exports	% of GDP	Imports	% of GDP
Slovakia	5.4	64,884	53,587	82.6	55,169	85
Hungary	10.1	105,842	85,715	81	84,138	79.5
Czech Republic	10.3	148,555	114,135	76.8	106,706	71.8
Poland	38.1	362,095	144,007	39.8	157,393	43.5
Germany	82.4	2,491,400	1,177,040	47.2	1,022,570	41
EU-27	495.1	12,504,353	5,156,793	41.2	5,124,039	41
USA	304.5	9,698,531	1,264,210	13	1,719,200	17.7

Source: Eurostat 2009/a. Statistics, National Accounts, Main Tables and author's own calculations.

The high export/GDP ratio means that regardless of their volume, government's fiscal incentives can never substitute the demand on export markets; on the other hand, they are very likely to stimulate imports due to economy's high dependence on imports and low or none trade barriers. For instance, Slovakia exported more than 80% of its total production in 2008. The country's exports were strongly concentrated in the hands of several supranational corporations operating in the field of automobile and electri-

cal industry, as ten largest exporters' share on the country's total exports reached 40.3%. In five out of ten largest exporters (three automobile producers and two producers of flat monitors), the export /turnover ratio exceeded 95%.

Table 2
Largest exporters in Slovakia, their share on the country's total exports and their export/turnover ratio

Spoločnosť	Export (tisíc eur) 2008	Export (tisíc eur) 2007	Zmena (%) 2008/07	Export/ tržby 2008, %	Podiel na exporte SR
1. Volkswagen Slovakia, a.s., Bratislava	5 348 885	6 304 630	-15,4	99,5	10,5 %
2. Samsung Electronics Slovakia, s.r.o., Galanta	5 523 102	5 665 593	-0,4	100	7,1 %
3. U.S. Steel Košice, s.r.o., Košice	2 375 582	2 470 645	-3,8	91,1	4,9 %
4. Slovnaft, a.s., Bratislava	2 328 531	2 177 271	6,9	57,7	4,7 %
5. Kia Motors Slovakia, s.r.o., Žilina	2 170 592	1 763 087	23,5	97,8	4,4 %
6. PCA Slovakia, s.r.o., Trnava	1 716 503	1 714 182	0,3	99,0	3,5 %
7. Sony Slovakia, s.r.o., Nitra *	1 399 000	996 954	40,4	100	2,9 %
8. Mondi SCP, a.s., Ružomberok	393 565	449 064	-12,2	93,1	0,8 %
9. Slovnaft Petrochemicals, s.r.o., Bratislava	356 665	449 225	-20,8	56,6	0,7 %
10. Continental Matador Truck Tires, s.r.o., Púchov	350 707	317 870	10,4	99,7	0,7 %
Celkový export Slovenska	48 503 566	..	5,1	..	100 %

Note: The data have been converted from Slovak crowns into euro using the official conversion rate of 30.126 SKK/EUR, which is stronger than the actual average exchange rate for 2007 (33.781) and 2008 (31.291), which is why the featured data are slightly overvalued compared to actual export contracts. * The data on Sony Slovakia's exports were not available; the featured data are based on an assumption that the export/turnover ratio was also 100%, which was the case of Samsung, the other electronic giant listed.
Source: Trend Špeciál Top 200, July 2009; Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic 2009/a. Celkový dovoz a celkový vývoz podľa kontinentov a ekonomických zoskupení krajín v roku 2008 [Total Imports and Total Exports by Continents and Economic Groupings in 2008] and author's own calculations.

Given this dependence on foreign consumers, it is plain to see that domestic fiscal incentives cannot possibly substitute the role of exports. In simpler terms, the Slovak Government cannot afford to purchase 600,000 cars and 9 million LCD TV sets instead of foreign consumers. On the other hand, once it begins to encourage domestic consumption through public spending, most money spent by Slovak consumers may well end up abroad; a good case in point was the scrap bonus (i.e. state subsidy designed to encourage consumers to replace old cars with new ones) introduced in 2009.[10] Another reason for the failure of fiscal incentives was that contrary to recommendations of the Keynesian economic theory they were applied in the time of economic growth; besides, a significant proportion of total funds spent was literally frittered away on food (e.g. welfare benefits, wage increase, price subsidies) or channelled into the black hole of inefficient
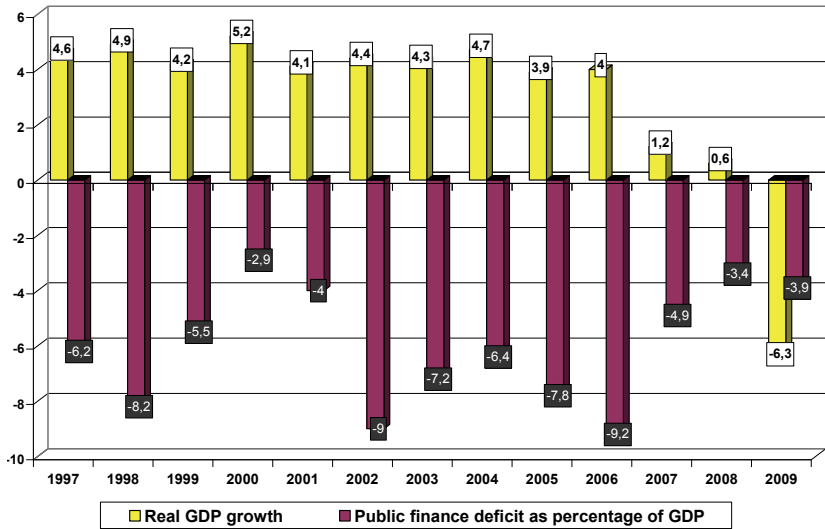
191

state sector instead of more efficient investments (i.e. developing infra-structure, improving the quality of business environment or supporting edu-cation, research and development).

Perhaps even more illustrative of ineffectiveness and harmfulness of fis-cal expansion was the populist cycle in Hungary between 2002 and 2007–2009. Before the 2002 elections, two principal political forces in the country, namely ruling Fidesz and opposition Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP), got entangled in a spiral of populist promises. After elections, the victorious MSZP began to act on its promises by proclaiming a so-called 100-day program of the Péter Medgyessy administration; however, one must add that the previous Viktor Orbán administration was the first to resort to populist measures and that Fidesz also supported the 100-day program in parliament. In fact, all parliamentary parties except one small conservative party (Hungarian Democratic Forum – MDF) embraced and endorsed open-handed populism that had nothing to do with accountability; in other words, sinking the public finance system was a consensual decision.

In the period of 2002–2006, Hungary regularly posted the highest pub-lic finance deficits not only within the EU but out of all relevant economies in the world; the largest budgetary deficits were recorded in election years of 2002 and 2006, which documents that politicians tend to think and decide in political rather than economic cycles. In spite of vast fiscal incen-tives, the country failed to boost its economic growth and employment; in fact, Hungary's growth was lower compared to any other V4 country and in the year that followed the four years of generous public spending (2007) it dropped to 1.2%, i.e. lower than the average of old member states (EU-15), which meant that Hungarian economy had ceased to converge toward the EU average and had begun to lag behind again. One tangible result of the populist cycle was an increase in public debt from 52.1% of GDP in 2001 to 73% of GDP in 2008 (Eurostat 2009/b). When the global economic crisis arrived in Central Europe in fall of that year, Hungary found itself on the brink of insolvency; in October 2008, the IMF, the EU and the World Bank rescued it by extending a lifesaver loan worth 20 billion.

Ineffectiveness of fiscal expansion in small open economies of CEE countries – the case of Hungary

Note: Data for 2009: projected GDP decline is Eurostat's forecast while projected deficit is the plan of the Hungarian government according to a reviewed agreement with the IMF.
Source: Eurostat 2009/b. Structural Indicators, General Economic Background (real GDP growth rate, public balance).

Slovakia experienced strong fiscal expansion in the period of 1996–1999. Like in Hungary, it caused significant internal and external imbalances, a ballooning debt and an imminent threat of economic collapse, which eventually forced the new administration to adopt a package of stabilization measures in May 1999. Unlike in Hungary, though, a significant proportion of budgetary deficits was implicit in nature and did not appear in official debt statistics until later. Besides obvious tricks designed to cover up deficit financing (e.g. creation of extra-budgetary state funds), most implicit public debt emerged in one of the following ways: 1. Government provided guarantees for loans extended to state enterprises or private companies that were unable to pay them off and the claims were subsequently transformed into public debt. 2. State-run or private banks that were later nationalized and closed accumulated a large chunk of classified loans that later became part of public debt. 3. Claims with respect to public institutions (i.e. taxes, contributions, customs duties and fees) that later turned into irrecoverable debts. 4. Debts of various

government and public institutions that had to be disencumbered later on (e.g. various health service establishments).

There were three principal sources of implicit indebtedness: first, grandiose investment projects financed from loans with government guarantees such as construction of highways, the Gabčíkovo hydroelectric power plant or the Mochovce nuclear power plant; second, soft budgetary restrictions applied by government and quasi-government institutions as well as by state-run and privatized banks; last but not least, one must not forget about poor law enforceability and flawed bankruptcy legislation. Table 3 shows a rapid growth in the volume of classified (i.e. overdue) claims that occurred as the result of soft budgetary restrictions and poor rule of law institutions.

Table 3

Implicit form of fiscal expansion: growth in total volume of overdue claims in Slovakia between 1995 and 1999 (billion SKK)

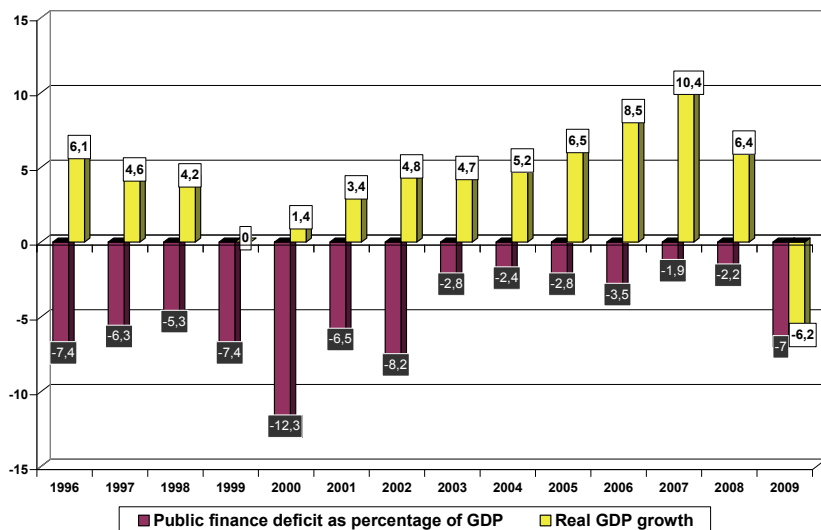|	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999 *
Social Insurance Company	5.8	8.6	20.6	34.7	43.0
National Labour Bureau	0.0	0.0	5.6	7.0	8.7
Health insurance companies	1.3	2.8	6.8	13.0	15.0
Tax offices	16.7	19.8	25.8	34.6	52.0
Customs administration	3.4	2.9	3.7	4.1	4.5
State and quasi-state organizations	27.2	34.1	62.5	93.4	96.0
Non-financial subjects (enterprises)	109.4	112.6	117.7	139.4	145.2
Classified loans of banks	125.5	112.0	120.1	145.1	170.7
Total	289.3	292.8	362.8	471.3	534.4
Year-on-year growth (%)	15.7%	1.2%	23.9%	29.9%	13.9%

*Note: * As of September 30, 1999.*
Source: "Pohľadávky po lehote splatnosti v SR" ['Overdue Claims in the Slovak Republic], Trend No. 15/2000, April 12, 2000, 4A.

Classified loans accumulated by Slovak banks turned out to be the greatest source of debt. During subsequent consolidation of the country's banking sector, a substantial part of this debt was converted into public debt; the costs of consolidation (1999–2000) exceeded 200 billion crowns (6.64 billion) and were five times higher than revenues generated by privatization of banks.[11] These costs did not inflate public finance deficits and public debt until 1999–2001; but although this indicator of expansive fiscal policy was manifested belatedly, it was a direct consequence of implicit deficits produced by the previous Vladimír Mečiar administration that ruled between 1994 and 1998. The second indicator of populist policies indicated the economic growth's unsustainable nature from the very outset. *"The deficit of the current account in the period of 1996–1998 averaged 10% of GDP and*

due to minimum foreign direct investments it led to a substantial growth in foreign indebtedness" (Tóth, 2000, p. 86). The country's foreign debt increased from 30.6% of GDP in 1996 to 49.9% of GDP in 2000 while the public debt grew from 33.8% of GDP in 1997 to 50.3% of GDP in 2000 (Marcinčin, 2005, p. 46; Eurostat 2009/b).

Graph 2
Ineffectiveness of fiscal expansion in small open economies of CEE countries – the case of Slovakia

Note: Data for 2009: projected GDP decline is the Finance Ministry's forecast while projected deficit is the author's estimate.
Source: Eurostat 2009/b. Structural Indicators, General Economic Background (real GDP growth rate, public balance) and Marcinčin, Anton: Politický vývoj a ekonomické záujmy [Political Development and Economic Interests] (deficit for 1996 and GDP growth for 1996–1998), 2005.

Not even in Slovakia was fiscal expansion able to boost GDP growth and employment as it merely sustained both indicators in the short term but for a dear price of macroeconomic as well as microeconomic, internal as well as external imbalances, a ballooning debt and an imminent threat of economic collapse. After the new administration adopted the inevitable stabilization package, GDP growth saw a dramatic decline (reaching zero in 1999) and unemployment grew from 12.5% in 1998 to 19.2% in 2001

(Marcinčin, 2005, p. 46). While fiscal policy was not the only reason behind the economic crisis, it ranked among the most important ones.[12]

The cases of Hungary and Slovakia justify a conclusion that in small and open economies of CEE countries, even massive fiscal expansion is unable to bring about a perceptible boost in GDP growth or employment; at best, it is able to sustain them temporarily at their original levels for a dear price of economic imbalance and indebtedness. This kind of policy proves very destructive already in the mid-term horizon as it brings economy to the verge of collapse; in the best case scenario, the government may react by adopting a restrictive stabilization package with painful social effects such as drops in GDP growth, employment and real wages. At the same time, Slovakia's own experience during the period of 1999–2007 provides a very successful alternative to the populist economic policy. Following the period of stabilization and thorough structural reforms introduced particularly by the second Mikuláš Dzurinda administration between 2002 and 2006 (e.g. taxation and pension reforms, public administration reform, health service, labour market and social security system reforms), the country's economy got on track toward rapid but balanced and sustainable growth.

Another area in CEE countries where populist economic policy causes immense economic losses is the government sector, particularly large state-run enterprises. Inefficiency, kleptocracy and corruption of the ruling elite and their party and business cronies along with constant political pressures cause costs to increase and profits to decline; this is another case in point of precious resources' inefficient allocation that is eventually paid for by all taxpayers. The causes and symptoms of the government sector's failure were described in detail by American economists, Andrei Schleifer and Robert W. Vyshny. In their book titled *The Grabbing Hand: Government Pathologies and Their Cures*, the authors argue that *"state enterprises are extremely inefficient and their inefficiency is the result of pressures on the part of politicians who control them"*, or, in simpler terms, that *"state enterprises pursue political goals"* (Shleifer – Vishny, 2000, pp. 200-202). This inefficiency is a ubiquitous system malfunction; the only variable is its degree. The reason why state enterprises are so attractive to politicians (despite their obvious economic inefficiency) is that they offer a whole range of potential political benefits. Government meddling with state enterprises provides politicians with a diapason of means to influence the public opinion, gain or maintain their voters and reward their supporters and 'friendly' entrepreneurs. On the flipside of the same coin, these advantages for politicians are simultaneously disadvantages for the entire society:

- *Excessive employment.* *"Most state enterprises submit to pressures from politicians (who solicit for voters' votes) and employ too many people"* (Shleifer – Vishny, 2000, p. 200). The result is that their operating costs are considerably higher than in the case of comparable private corporations. A typical example is served by state-run railroad companies that rank among the largest employers as well as the largest losses 'producers' in CEE countries.
- *'Maecenatic' jobs.* Politicians use a significant share of available lucrative jobs in the government (or public) sector to 'reward' their party cronies, political supporters and 'friendly' businessmen who are appointed to lucrative management posts shortly after elections. Most of these political appointees subsequently serve partial (i.e. partisan, government or their own) interests instead of the public one. A direct result is treating state enterprises as gold mines and siphoning off public funds to line one's own pockets and/or party coffers. A perfect example of this practice is Lesy SR, a state enterprise that administers a vast majority of Slovakia's forests. Shortly after the 2006 elections, the incumbent ruling coalition of SMER – SNS – HZDS divided the corporation's management, supervisory board and particular regional branches along party lines. The political appointees did not take long to bring the previously profitable enterprise to its knees; eventually, they were forced to ask the cabinet for a 67 million loan under the pretext of staving off the global economic crisis.[13]
- *Supporting regions.* State enterprises often transfer their production capacities to regions where ruling parties enjoy high voter support. This way, government investments become the means of rewarding voters regardless of the region's economic attractiveness.[14] A good example of this practice was an orchestrated effort by the third Vladimír Mečiar administration (1994–1998) to relocate several state enterprises' headquarters from Bratislava to Banská Bystrica, i.e. from the country's capital that was a traditional stronghold of opposition parties into one of ruling parties' bastions.
- Meddling with pricing. Control over large state monopolies provides politicians with possibilities to adjust certain prices in order to fit their political goals. The case in point of this practice may be MÁV, Hungarian state railroad company that introduced 'socially acceptable' prices for its customers. Before the reforms introduced in the period of 2007–2009, MÁV offered 46 various discounts including 'free' travelling for people over 65, company employees and members of their families, a 67.5% discount for students and a 50% discount for public servants. According to available estimates, up to 85% of all passengers

travelled for free or for discounted prices while even full-price tickets covered only about one third of real costs. Government meddling with pricing regularly appears also in energy corporations; however, politicians' manoeuvring space in this area was curbed significantly by their privatization as well as by adoption of the common European legislation.

Besides fiscal expansion and inefficient state ownership, a (less important) part of the self-destructive populist economic policy was repeated attempts to regulate or influence prices (especially prices of gas, electricity but also of heat and rent) and related pressures on independent regulatory bodies or even efforts to control them in order to force them to enact 'socially acceptable' prices. During the third Mečiar administration's tenure, energy monopolies were state-owned and independent regulatory organs did not exist; therefore, this administration's meddling with pricing also belong to described forms of abusing state enterprises.

Sources of Populism on the Demand Side: Voters' Rationality and Irrationality

Economic populists and their parties in CEE countries comply with the following profile:

– They promise and carry out grandiose projects that lead to a substantial increase in public expenditures or strong fiscal expansion. Regardless of whether these expenditures appear immediately or belatedly, whether they are explicitly or implicitly included in public budgets, whether they are channelled to large infrastructure projects or to social security system, they always cause external and internal macroeconomic (and often microeconomic) imbalances, high double deficits and ballooning indebtedness, i.e. unbalanced and unsustainable growth. But populist politicians are not too concerned about it because they prefer short-term political goals (i.e. popularity) to which they are prepared to sacrifice the country's long-term sustainable economic development.

– They promise and pursue programs they know they do not have funds for and they know are completely unrealistic from the very outset. For instance, Hungarian socialists (MSZP) promised and introduced the 13th annual pension although they were perfectly aware that revenues generated by pension contributions were not enough to cover even pensions disbursed in 2002 and that they had to make additional contributions from the state budget. Fidesz not only supported the proposal in parliament but it even promised to introduce the 14th annual pension in the 2006 election

campaign. Also, the Robert Fico administration must have been aware that the pension fund of the Social Insurance Company was running a deficit, especially since it refused to increase the retirement age and halted privatization that might have generated additional funds to saturate the first pillar that had been depleted due to the pension reform. Despite that, they introduced a 'Christmas' bonus for pensioners. Similarly, the third Vladimír Mečiar administration promised to complete highway D1 (Bratislava – Žilina – Prešov – Košice) by 2005 instead of the originally planned 2015; before the 1998 elections, cabinet officials accompanied by foreign celebrities opened half-profiles of highway sections, which was, in a word, embarrassing. The Robert Fico administration revived the issue in 2006 and again promised to complete the highway, this time by 2010, which is yet another unrealistic deadline.

- They oppose privatization, particularly its transparent forms (i.e. selling property in international tenders to bidders who offer the best terms and the highest purchase price) and particularly in the case of large state monopolies from energy and transport sectors. The main reasons include losing all previously mentioned advantages state ownership offers, especially the liberty to allot state enterprises to their cronies and friendly entrepreneurs. A potentially important role may also be played by economic nationalism of populist parties and their voters, which guides their effort to keep 'strategic' state enterprises in the 'national hands' and oppose their sale to foreign investors. A partial exception in this respect is represented by Hungarian socialists who privatized a great number of large state enterprises during their term in office, provoking fierce criticism from the opposition Fidesz; in order to provide a full picture, though, one must add that the Hungarian government at this point was under mounting pressure of increasing public debt and was often forced to rely on privatization revenues to patch gaping holes in the state budget.
- They often try to interfere with pricing, either via abusing state enterprises, pressuring private firms or taking steps aimed at controlling regulatory organs, primarily in order to score political points with their voters.
- They oppose economic reforms that are inevitable to achieve a sustainable economic growth but are highly unpopular, especially introducing fees in the field of health service and (higher) education, jacking up prices (particularly regulated ones or those charged by state enterprises from energy and transport sectors), but also a pension reform (as it limits the scope of resources they may decide on) and already mentioned privatization.

The following graph illustrates that populist, anti-reform and left-wing parties (judged by the type of economic policy they further) won every single parliamentary elections in Slovakia since 1992 and always obtained more than half of all cast ballots.

Graph 3

Results of parliamentary elections in Slovakia between 1992 and 2006: continuous dominance of anti-reform and populist parties
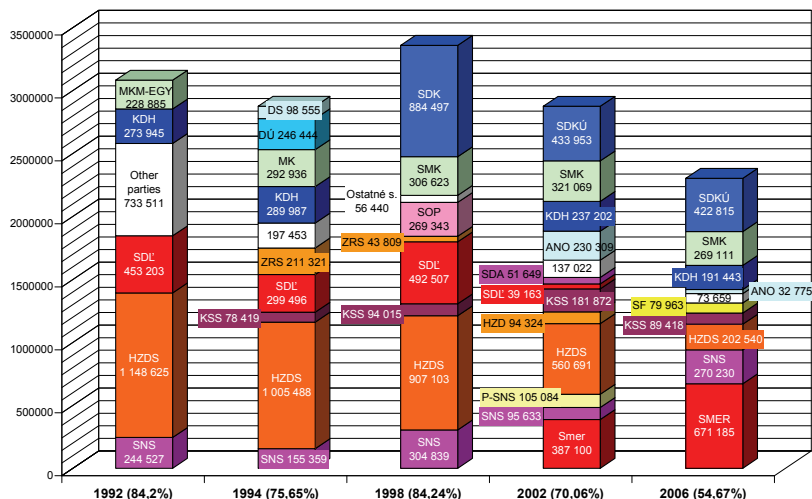
Note: The abbreviations in columns refer to political parties, absolute numbers refer to the number of valid ballots cast for these parties, and percentages at the bottom of columns refer to voter participation (i.e. the ratio of participating and eligible voters). Left-wing populist anti-reform parties: HZDS – Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (in 1994 in alliance with the Party of Slovak Farmers), HZD – Movement for Democracy, SDĽ – Party of Democratic Left (in 1994 led the Common Choice coalition), SDA – Social-Democratic Alternative, ZRS – Association of Slovak Workers, KSS – Communist Party of Slovakia, SNS – Slovak National Party, P-SNS – Genuine Slovak National Party. Right-wing pro-reform parties: DS – Democratic Party, DÚ – Democratic Union, SDK – Slovak Democratic Coalition, SDKÚ – Slovak Democratic and Christian Union-Democratic Party, SMK–MKP – Party of Hungarian Coalition, MK – Hungarian Coalition, MKM-EGY – Hungarian Christian Democratic Movement–Coexistence, KDH – Christian Democratic Movement, ANO – Alliance of a New Citizen. Subjects that are difficult to classify: SOP – Party of Civic Understanding, SF – Freedom Forum.
Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic: Volebná štatistika. Parlamentné voľby [Election Statistics: Parliamentary Elections], 2009.

The only reason why Mikuláš Dzurinda was able to form two consecutive reform-oriented administrations (1998–2002 and 2002–2006) was a favourable coincidence of political circumstances. In 1998, the entire spectrum of democratic forces (including left-wing parties) united against hard

populists and formed a single 'mother of all coalitions'. In 2002, the anti-reform bloc of populist parties saw too many of their voters' ballots forfeited because some of these parties split up and most of their smaller successors failed to get over the prescribed 5% threshold.[15]

Since 2002, Hungary's political scene has been dominated by two principal archrivals, the MSZP and Fidesz; these two parties combined for almost 80% of all votes cast in the 2002 parliamentary elections and for 85% of all votes cast four years later (Országos Választási Bizottság, 2009). In the campaign before the 2006 elections, both parties got entangled in a verbal battle of populist promises. Socialists boasted about social results of their rule that had ruined the country's public finance system; trying to play an equal card, Fidesz promised the 14th annual pensions. The only party that had opposed introduction of the 13th annual salaries and pensions and warned about foolishness of populist election promises, namely the conservative Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF), struggled for its very survival and qualified to the assembly by the skin of its teeth, receiving 5.04% of the popular vote.

Unless early elections are called, the upcoming parliamentary elections will be held in spring 2010. For the time being, voting preferences indicate that the socialists will suffer a crushing defeat while liberal free democrats (SZDSZ) will not even qualify to parliament. On the opposite side of the political spectrum, Fidesz stands a realistic chance to receive more than half of all votes; the far-right radical Jobbik party is also very likely to clinch parliamentary seats with approximately 10% of the popular vote while the MDF will continue to struggle for its very survival. It is plain to see that disenchanted former voters of socialists have not strengthened the ranks of liberals or conservatives (i.e. small parties with a right-wing economic program) but joined the camps of the undecided, Fidesz or even Jobbik. In other words, disillusioned voters of one populist party have joined other populist parties' camps.

This phenomenon is paralleled in Slovakia as the camp of HZDS supporters continues to shrink and the party is facing the risk of being relegated from the assembly after the 2010 elections; like in Hungary, though, its former voters are joining the camps of other populist parties, particularly that of SMER.

The recent experience of Hungary and Slovakia shows that a failure of populist economic policies (i.e. general decline of GDP, employment, wages and income) does not compel voters to reject populism as such; the worst result of the failure is dooming some populist parties and/or their leaders but their supporters will join another party with a populist agenda. So, populist policies are continuously popular and politicians stand a good chance to benefit from them at least in terms of short-term political gains, mostly because of strong demand

on the part of voters. The theory of public choice says that *"political parties are firms on the political market while politicians are its entrepreneurs ... Political parties on the political market exploit resources and create party programs in an effort to gain political power"* (Johnson, 1997, p. 236).

As long as there is continuously high demand for populist policies, emergence of a party with a populist agenda is merely a matter of time; like in economy, demand in politics will always create its supply. The key to understanding populism is to understand demand on the part of voters, popularity of offered slogans, programs, solutions and pseudo-solutions. As long as there is demand for populism, there will be supply of populism. The principal question therefore is why economic populism is so much in demand among voters or why voters continuously vote for populist parties.

There are two plausible explanations that are alternative to one another but do not exclude each other:

– *Voters are rational* in the sense of rational egoism, i.e. they want to snatch as many government-disbursed advantages as possible. Since most voters in Hungary as well as in Slovakia are those who are financed by the government (i.e. their income originates in the state budget), they selfishly tend to vote for parties that promise to increase public expenditures, which leads to fiscal expansion.

– *Voters are irrational* in terms of a significant share of their views, values, convictions and concepts that are not rational from the viewpoint of mainstream economy. In other words, they believe economic myths, they believe the opposite of what economic science has proven; based on these erroneous believes and false convictions, they subsequently vote for populists who repeatedly advertise the same myths voters want to hear.

Let me first explain the first hypothesis, i.e. rational egoism of the majority of people who existentially depend on the state budget. Using the example of Swedish economy, Assar Lindbeck pointed out a dangerous trend of the deteriorating ratio of those whose income originates from the market and those whose income depends on the state budget. The former group of 'market-financed' comprised all people employed in the private sector; the latter group comprised all people financed by the former group, i.e. pensioners, the unemployed, public sector employees and people who are temporarily outside the labour market and live off various welfare benefits (e.g. people on parental leave, people collecting sickness benefits but also those employed in various labour market programs). While in 1960 Sweden had 0.4 government-financed persons per each person employed in the private sector, by 1995 their number increased to 1.8 (Lindbeck, 1998, p. 9).

Naturally, this implies the necessity of high tax and contribution burden by which Lindbeck partially explained why Sweden's rate of redistribution is among the highest in the world. Hungarian economist János Kornai pointed out that the ratio of those who "live off the state budget" to those who "live off the market" was even worse in Hungary in 1993 (1.65 to 1) than that in Sweden in 1989 (Kornai, 1998, p. 84). This further strengthened his earlier opinion that Hungary had become a "prematurely evolved welfare state" that finances social transfers beyond its means and has a similar redistribution rate and welfare spending as countries that often surpass Hungary in terms of economic development.

The ratio between people financed by the market and those financed by the government may perhaps explain the demand for populist economic policy, more concretely the demand for increased public expenditures on the part of groups that "live off the state budget". The measures adopted by the Hungarian administration comprising socialists and free democrats between 2002 and 2006 (e.g. introducing the 13th annual pension and the 13th annual salary for public servants, a 50-percent increase in salaries within the public sector and a 50-percent increase in allowances for people on parental leave) perfectly demonstrate this hypothesis; in fact, the populist handing out covered all principal categories of the government-financed population.

The following table illustrates the ratio of persons paid from private and public sectors in three Central European countries. Due to different social security systems, different statistical methodologies and different time frameworks, the numbers do not always allow for a totally precise comparison; however, they roughly show the ratio between the two principal categories.

Table 4
Number and ratio of persons paid from private and public sectors in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary in 2008 (,000)

	Czech Republic	Slovakia	Hungary
0. Total population	10,430	5,412	10,045
1. State administration and services (public sector)	727	485	722
2. Pensioners	* 2,754	* 1,266	3,027
3. Unemployed **	325	230	477
4. People employed in employment programs	14	* 11	14
5. People on sickness benefits ***	237	97	90
6. People on parental leave ***	358	134	259
7. Categories 1 through 6 total	4,415	2,223	4,589
8.1. Total employed ****	5,002	2,434	3,849
8.2. Employed in the private sector	4,275	1,949	3,127
9. Ratio of categories 7 to 8.2	1.03	1.14	1.47

*Note: The data are rounded and represent average values for 2008 in thousands (except line 9), unless specified otherwise. * As of December 31, 2008. ** Number of jobless registered by*

employment agencies. *** Data for Hungary are from 2007. **** Data provided by Targeted Labour Force Surveys carried out by national statistical bureaux in the 4Q 2008.
Sources: Czech Republic: Czech Statistical Office (lines 0, 1, 5, 8.1), Czech Social Security Administration (line 2), Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (lines 3, 4); Slovakia: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (lines 0, 1, 3, 8.1), Headquarters of Labour, Social Affairs and Family (lines 4, 6), Social Insurance Company (lines 2, 5); Hungary: Central Statistical Office (lines 0, 1, 3, 5, 6, 8.1), Central Directorate of Pension Security (line 2), State Employment Agency (line 4).

Table 4 shows that the ratio is the worst in Hungary and the best in the Czech Republic; Slovakia is somewhere in between, although closer to the latter. This corresponds to the overall support for populist parties, which is the strongest in Hungary (over 80%), lower but still considerable in Slovakia (between 55–60%) and the lowest in the Czech Republic; however, the overall support for populist subjects is still higher than the ratio of government-financed to market-financed citizens would suggest. There are several plausible explanations for this:

– The table does not include all population groups that are financed by government, for instance many people participating in requalification training programs that are financed from public budgets, people who are employed in the private sector but their jobs are (partially) subsidized by government, and hundreds of thousands of young people whose university studies are (completely or partially) financed from the state budget.

– The sole fact that people are employed in the private sector does not necessarily rule out their support for populist economic measures, which is often driven by completely rational and selfish reasons. For instance, people who have few years to retirement are likely to endorse jacking up pensions; people who are planning to have children are likely to embrace the idea of increasing children's allowance or extending the parental leave, etc. Besides, politicians may also offer a broad range of incentives to private sector employees, such as enacting higher minimum wage, longer paid leave, more luncheon vouchers, shorter work hours, higher overtime bonuses, better protection against layoffs (i.e. period of notice, severance pay), etc.

– Significant differences in voter participation of government-financed and market-financed citizens may shuffle election cards thoroughly and cause a victory/defeat of one group or another; however, there are no essential differences between the two principal categories' voter participation in CEE countries.

– Voters may not vote rationally as their values and views, personal sympathies or traditions may prevail over their own financial interests. For instance, a pensioner may oppose introduction of the 13th annual pension because he is aware of the measure's unsustainable and harmful

nature; on the other hand, an employee (who would pay for it eventually) may endorse the measure out of ignorance or his irrational convictions. However, here we are touching upon the second alternative hypothesis, i.e. the model of irrational voters.

Further criticism of the hypothesis has one wonder about the Swedish example. Although Lindbeck documented an even worse ratio between market-financed and government-financed people, economic populism did not have as devastating effects on Sweden as it had on some CEE countries. How is this possible? Again, there are several plausible explanations:

– Due to traditionally strong taxation discipline, Sweden was usually able to cover its hefty public expenditures from tax revenues. People in CEE countries are much less willing to pay high taxes and contributions. During periods of fiscal expansion, the ratio of public expenditures to GDP in Slovakia and Hungary reached Swedish levels (i.e. around or over 50%) but the ratio of public revenues to GDP remained 7 to 10 percent lower, which led to enormous deficits and ballooning debt.

– Scandinavian countries regularly rank on top of various statistics measuring corruption prevalence, i.e. they have the lowest corruption rate in the world in the long term. Consequently, they can afford to redistribute half of their national income through public budgets without having to fear embezzlement, misappropriation and corruption. The situation is quite different in CEE countries that regularly rank several dozens of places below Scandinavian countries in corruption statistics.

– Abusing welfare benefits is a relatively rare phenomenon in Sweden, largely due to long-cultivated social ethics. On the other hand, a significant share of Central European countries' population was socialized during the communist regime. Here, people did not perceive stealing from the state as something condemnable but rather as savoir-faire or a necessary evil that allowed one to survive in difficult conditions; in fact, they invented many popular sayings such as "If you don't steal, you steal from your own family".

An alternative (or rather complementary) hypothesis to explain high voter support for populist economic policy is the model of irrational voters. In his book titled *The Myth of the Rational Voter: Why Democracies Choose Bad Policies*, Bryan Caplan argues that the main reason why democracies adopt bad policies is irrationality of (most) voters; in other words, democracies fail because they do exactly what the majority of voters want them to (Caplan, 2007, pp. 1 – 3). According to Caplan, the views of the American public are biased and erroneous in many respects when

juxtaposed to findings of economic science; the problem is that voters in polling stations often decide based on these erroneous concepts and popular myths.[16] In CEE countries one may also find several erroneous views, values and visions that strongly influence voters' decision-making:

Paternalism, egalitarianism and etatism: People in these countries are convinced that government's attempts to meddle with economy and take care of citizens are necessary, correct and successful. Here, governments are expected to plan, steer, regulate and control economy; own, subsidize, tax and fine enterprises; take care of citizens' well-being 'from cradle to coffin' and ensure the highest possible equality of citizens, not only at the starting line (i.e. guaranteeing equal opportunities) but also at the finish line (i.e. levelling income and property). The national income should be redistributed as equitably as possible and there should not be excessive disparities between people's income. The governments should not only guarantee citizens' right to free and high-quality education, health service and social security but also employment, rights of employees and provision of social assistance, even to citizens who never contributed a single cent to the common budget.

Lack of faith in market forces: Market economy leads to imbalances, unemployment and crises; since it is not the most advantageous economic model, it should be limited, regulated and controlled in order to eliminate its imperfections. Free market is *a priori* anti-social and morally wrong because it is based on chasing profits and cut-throat competition.

Preference of state ownership: Government is a better owner than private entrepreneurs because it focuses on well-being of society and the 'people' as opposed to prosperity of owners. That is why state enterprises and institutions should never be privatized; this is particularly true about health service and education.

Economic nationalism and protectionism: Most state property should remain in the national hands. International trade is an equation with a zero total, i.e. the profit of one party inevitably amounts to the loss of the other. Foreign products threaten our producers, which is why foreign producers' access to our market should be limited while our producers should be privileged and supported. Foreign firms may exploit our workers, which is why we should not let in foreign investors and sell out our economy to them; in the most recent elections, the Slovak National Party came up with the following slogan: "We don't covet someone else's but we won't give up ours".

The strength of these irrational visions, views and values directly ensues from socialization patterns and lingering world views people acquired dur-

ing the communist regime as well as the fact that most ordinary people never had a chance to study modern economy and do not understand its *modus operandi*.

Many surveys carried out by the Institute for Public Affairs have documented the continuously high prevalence of paternalism and egalitarianism n Slovakia. Paternalistic values were embraced by 65.4% of respondents in October 1997, 66.1% in January 1999 and 63.9% in March 2000; as far as egalitarianism is concerned, identical surveys produced the following figures: 51.7%, 58.9% and 55.8% (Krivý, 2001, p. 300).[17] To the question of "to what degree was it inevitable to change the economic model from before 1989?" most respondents (particularly older ones) answered "none" or "cosmetic" while only a minority of respondents preferred free market economy.

Table 5

Views of the Slovak public regarding inevitability of the economic reform after 1989 and preferred type of economy

Age category	Question: Was it inevitable to carry out the economic reform after 1989? The degree of inevitable change according to respondents should be:			
	None	Cosmetic	Fundamental	I don't know
18-34	7%	40%	33%	21%
35-54	13%	51%	32%	4%
Over 55	28%	49%	20%	4%
Age category	Question: If you could choose, what type of economy would you prefer?			
	Socialist	Social-market	Free market	I don't know
18-34	8%	43%	35%	15%
35-54	23%	50%	22%	5%
Over 55	38%	40%	11%	12%

Note: A public opinion survey carried out by the Institute for Public Affairs in September 2003.
Source: Krivý, Vladimír: "Are There Any Changes at All?" in: Mesežnikov, Grigorij – Gyárfášová, Oľga (eds.): Slovakia: Ten Years of Independence and the Year of Reform (Bratislava: Institute for Public Affairs, 2004, p. 162).

Paternalistic and egalitarian attitudes were the strongest among supporters of anti-reform and left-wing (i.e. populist) parties. The survey divided respondents into three categories according to their value orientations; the first category comprised respondents with weakest paternalistic attitudes while the third comprised the strongest paternalists. In March 2000, almost half (48.2%) of all HZDS supporters belonged to the latter category while only one in six of them (16%) belonged to the former one; SNS sympathizers declared similar values (39.6% vs. 30.7%) while SDKÚ supporters stood on the opposite pole as only 10.5% of them were in the latter category and 72.2% of them were in the former category (Gyárfášová – Krivý – Velšic et al, 2001, p. 381). Public opinion surveys also revealed that

paternalism usually coincides with values such as authoritarianism, ethnic intolerance and anti-Western attitudes.

The Hungarians manifest similarly strong paternalistic attitudes as the Slovaks; perhaps the only difference is that there are no significant disparities between particular political parties' supporters, which goes especially for the two major parties, i.e. the MSZP and Fidesz. According to a survey carried out in 2007, supporters of 'right-wing' Fidesz proved to be even stronger paternalists than potential voters of the socialists! This came as little surprise considering Hungary's political discourse in recent years in which Fidesz advocates citizens' right to free medical care and education and opposes further privatization.

Table 6

Paternalistic attitudes of Hungarian society – views on government's role in particular areas (average answers on the scale of 0-100)

	Fate	Labour	Education	Social affairs	Housing	Agriculture
Population total	46.5	68.2	69.9	63.4	39.6	59.2
Supporters of:						
Fidesz	50.5	70.1	77.4	64.2	39.8	63.9
MSZP	38.4	64.2	57.4	60.1	37.8	51.1
MDF	50.8	63.4	65.6	66.3	38.1	57.6
SZDSZ	49.1	57.4	58.7	55.4	42.8	55.6

Note: The average grades have been transformed from the original four-grade scale to a 100-point scale. Higher numbers correspond to stronger paternalistic attitudes. Answers in particular areas: Fate (0 = People themselves are responsible for their fates; 100 = Government should take greater responsibility in taking care of the people); Labour (0 = Tackling employment problems should be left up to market forces; 100 = It is government's obligation to give jobs to the unemployed); Education (0 = Education is a form of investment and only tuition fees can guarantee proper functioning of universities; 100 = It is government's obligation to provide higher education of young people even without tuition fees); Social affairs (0 = Reducing taxes should take precedence even at the expense of reduced funds for health service, education system and various welfare benefits; 100 = It is an important function of the government to provide more funds to health service, education system and various welfare benefits); Housing (0 = Young people should solve their housing problems themselves but government should help them through soft loans and tax allowances; 100 = Solving the problem of young people's housing in only thinkable through government-financed housing projects); Agriculture (0 = Agricultural products are like any other and their producers should depend on market forces; 100 = Government must financially support agricultural production, otherwise farmers would face existential problems).
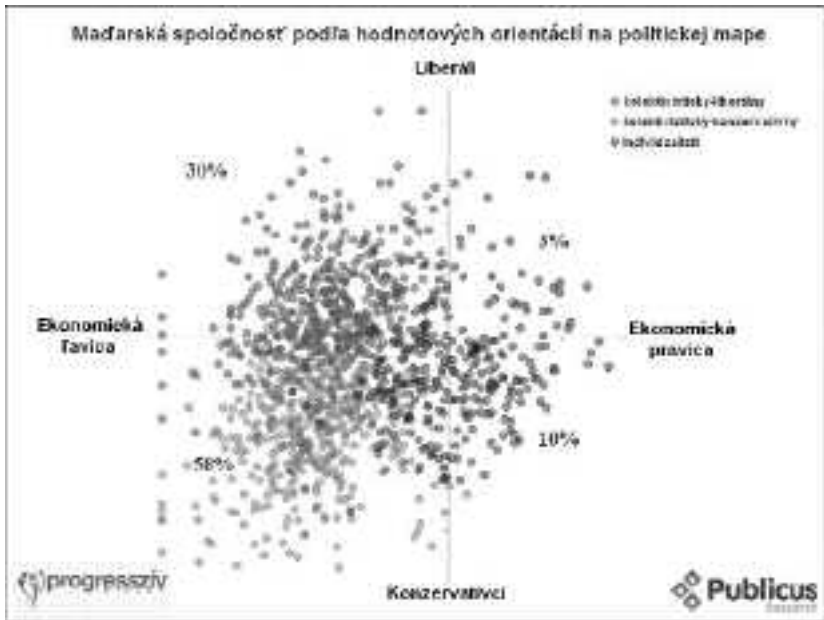*Source: Fábián, Zoltán – Tóth, István György: Pártpreferencia-csoportok politikai azonosulása és redisztribúciós attitűdjei, 2008, pp. 398–399; 413–414; quoted from: TÁRKI Háztartás Monitor, 2007.*

Another survey from 2008 also illustrated the dominance of (economic) left-wing and paternalistic values as seven in eight (88%) of Hungarian citizens

older than 18 shared these values; on the other hand, the right-left economic division line that is pivotal in western European democracies plays a rather insignificant role in Hungary (*Politikai térkép 2008–2009*). It is plain to see from the political map featured in Graph 4 that most Hungarians are attracted to economic left wing and that the principal division line between political camps are cultural rather than economic issues.

Graph 4
Hungarian society's value orientations on a political map divided by economic (horizontal) and cultural (vertical) axes

Hungarian society's breakdown by value orientations on a political map			
	Liberals		
Economic left		Economic right	
	Conservatives		
			Collectivist liberals
			Collectivist conservatives
			Individualists

Note: Based on a questionnaire survey commissioned by Progresszív Intézet [Progressive Institu - te] and carried out by the Publicus research institute between October 1–9, 2008, on a representative sample of 1,196 respondents who represent Hungarian adult population in terms of age and gender structure as well as education status and residence structure. The views and positions presented by the sample based on the probability rate of 95% and standard tolerance of +/-2.9% represent views and positions of the entire Hungarian population with the right to vote.

Another finding produced by the survey was that particular population categories divided by age, education status, domicile or political preferences (i.e. MSZP and Fidesz camps) did not show essential differences in terms of professing paternalistic values. The map of political orientations together with the already discussed ratio between government-financed and market-financed citizens explains why the two dominant parties chose populist rhetoric and policies; they merely reacted to the social demand, although they did so completely recklessly and irresponsibly from the viewpoint of the country's long-term development.

Like in the ratio of government-financed and market-financed people, the Czech Republic shows the most favourable indicators in terms of professing paternalistic values. Unlike in Hungary, the right-left economic rift is the decisive political division line within society and there are essential differences in views of particular parties' supporters. Paternalistic attitudes grow gradually stronger on the right-left political continuum as they are the weakest among supporters of the right-wing Civic Democratic Party (ODS) and the strongest among sympathizers of the Czech and Moravian Communist Party (KSČM); the camps of Christian democrats, liberals and social democrats were located between these two poles.

Table 7
Views of the Czech population regarding social justice and government's role in economy in 2002 – a breakdown by party affiliation (% of respondents)

| Assertions:	Approval/ disapprova	Rate of approval by party affiliation			
		ODS	Coalition	ČSSD	KSČM
The most just way of distributing goods is to give all people equally.	17/79	8.4	13.2	12.1	38.4
If all people have equal opportunities, it is correct that some have more money or property than others.	76/20	81.1	78.3	81.1	66.9
People with low income should receive everything they need for living, even if it means taking money away from those who earn more.	54/36	41.9	50.6	52.4	75.2
Government should guarantee only the necessary minimum; otherwise everyone should take care of themselves.	45/52	72.5	62.8	39.5	18.2
Government should guarantee jobs for all who want to work.	79/16	64.7	65.7	81.5	95.0
There can be no limits imposed on the size of private property.	63/27	79.6	72.4	58.8	33.8
As much state property as possible should be concentrated in private hands.	34/53	53.3	55.3	29.3	5.0
Everything that a society produces must be distributed in a way so that differences between the rich and the poor are not excessive.	53/38	29.4	46.6	61.4	81.0
Market economy is the way toward higher standard of living.	58/23	84.4	70.5	51.7	28.9

Note: Based on two questionnaire surveys carried out on January 21 – 28, 2002 and March 25 - April 2, 2002, on a representative sample of 1,020 and 1,072 persons older than 15, respectively. Approval means that respondents decisively or prevailingly agreed with present- ed assertions; similarly, disapproval combines answers of "definitively disagree" and "rather disagree". Together they should make up 100% minus percentage of those who answered "I don't know". Party abbreviations: ODS – Civil Democratic Party; the coalition comprises KDU-ČSL – Christian and Democratic Union-Czechoslovak People's Party and US-DEU – Freedom Union-Democratic Union; ČSSD – Czech Social Democratic Party; KSČM – Czech and Moravian Communist Party.
Source: Socioekonomická hodnotová orientace české společnosti [Czech Society's Socio- Economic Value Orientation], Centre for Public Opinion Research, 2002.

The principal difference with respect to Slovakia is that there are more sup- porters and potential voters of economic right-wing parties in the Czech Re - public; in recent years, parliamentary elections (i.e. elections to the House of Representatives) usually produced very similar (or even totally equal) numbers of seats for left-wing and right-wing political parties. The division line between leftist and rightist voters runs somewhere through the middle and splits the electorate into two approximate halves. This was the main reason for interesting government-formation patterns, for instance forming an admin- istration that relied on a majority of one or two votes (sometimes provided by defectors from the opposite camp) or a minority administration that ruled based on an 'opposition agreement' concluded with the largest opposition party.

Graph 5

Results of elections to the Czech Parliament's House of Representatives (1996–2006)
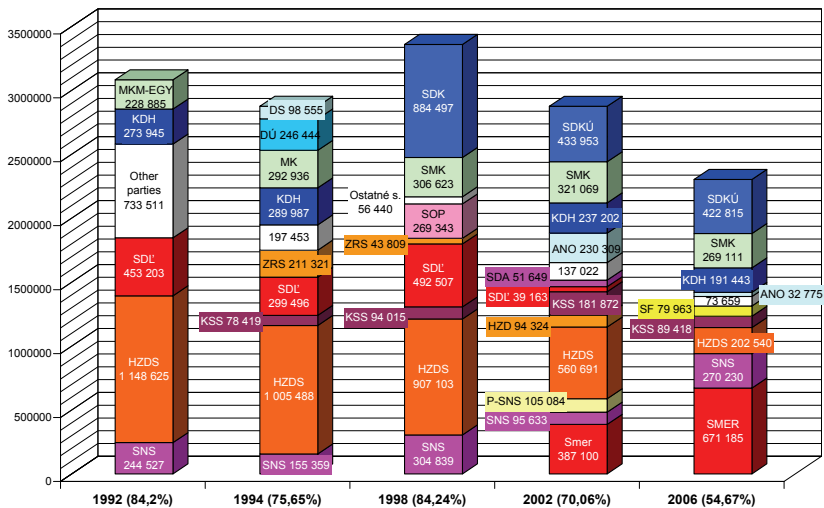
Note: The abbreviations in columns refer to political parties, absolute numbers and percentages refer to the total number of valid ballots cast for these parties and their share of the popular vote, and percentages at the bottom of columns refer to voter participation (i.e. the ratio of participating and eligible voters). Party abbreviations: ODS – Civic Democratic Party; KDU-ČSL – Christian and Democratic Union-Czechoslovak People's Party; ODA – Civic Democratic Alliance; US – Freedom Union; SZ – Greens' Party; ČSSD – Czech Social Democratic Party; KSČM – Czech and Moravian Communist Party; Rep. – Alliance for Republic-Czechoslovak Republican Party.
Source: Volební výsledky [Election Results], Czech Statistical Office, 2009.

Both described hypotheses may explain different popularity of economic populism in three Central European countries. The ratio of government-financed and market-financed people is the worst in Hungary, slightly better in Slovakia and the best in the Czech Republic. Similarly, the highest share of voters with left-wing and paternalistic economic views is to be found in Hungary where these voters make up a majority of every relevant party's supporters and their share in particular parties' electorates does not differ essentially. Paternalistic attitudes also prevail in Slovakia but there are significant differences between individual parties' electorates; for instance, supporters of the largest right-wing party (SDKÚ) rarely incline toward paternalism, which is one of chief characteristics of hard populist parties' (i.e. SNS or HZDS) sympathizers. In the Czech Republic, voters are even more clearly divided along the line of subscribing to paternalistic values; based on these values, individual parties may be neatly placed on the right-left continuum. One thing is for sure: (econom-

ically) right-wing parties regularly post better election results here than in Slovakia. Although findings of public opinion surveys are not fully comparable (and therefore do not fully support the conclusion), everything indicates that paternalism is the strongest in Hungary and the weakest in the Czech Republic; also, it is the Czech political landscape that is the most clearly profiled on the right-left continuum of economic policy.

While the two hypotheses largely complement each other, the two principal voter categories overlap significantly; those who live off government expenditures are likely to embrace strongly paternalistic views and tend to vote for populists while those who live off the market (i.e. mostly businesspersons and tradesmen) profess right-wing economic values and vote accordingly. Exceptions from these voting patterns are larger than the hypotheses would suggest and may probably be explained by other, less important factors such as political system (e.g. the combined electoral system in Hungary plays into the hands of two strongest parties, has a strong majorization effect and supports government stability), historical tradition (e.g. strict monetary and fiscal policy in the Czech Republic on the one hand and excessive deficits and higher inflation in Hungary on the other) but also accidental factors (e.g. the already described fragmentation of the left-wing populist bloc in Slovakia that in 2002 put in charge the most 'pro-reform' administration in the region so far).

Conclusion

In 2007, Slovakia entered another populist cycle and started another round of fiscal expansion. While budgetary deficits of approximately 2% of GDP recorded in 2007 and 2008 seem rather low, the 8 to 10 percent economic growth that accompanied the first half of the Robert Fico administration's term in office is hardly an excuse for any budgetary holes. During such 'good years', the state budget should be at least balanced if not producing a surplus.

It is also possible to rephrase the question slightly: If 10 percent is not enough, how high must economic growth be to allow the government to pass a balanced state budget? With the commencement of 2009, the fat growth years are over and Slovakia's economy expects to drop by 6% of GDP due to global economic crisis; although budgetary revenues dropped significantly, the incumbent administration has been unable – or rather unwilling – to cut back expenditures. It was most probably deterred by 'serious' political reasons (i.e. presidential elections followed by elections to the European Parliament and regional elections) that will continue to exist in 2010 (i.e. par-

liamentary elections followed by municipal elections). It is highly improbable that the incumbent administration will embrace restrictive fiscal policy in the election year; but if it doesn't, public finance deficit may climb to 6–8% of GDP and public debt to 40% of GDP in 2009–2010.

Other measures adopted by the incumbent administration also document existence of the new populist cycle: halting most structural reforms (even destruction of already reformed health service system and permanent attempts to destroy the pension reform) and privatization that pose further threats for the public finance sector. State enterprises keep posting losses and public institutions keep running on deficit budgets, i.e. they will continue to require rescuing from state budget funds. The country's health service again began to pile up implicit public debt and the program of highway construction through public-private partnerships (PPP) brings immense risks of creating further implicit debts; in PPP contracts, government agreed to make annual payments to highway developers and operators for periods of 20 to 30 years).

Should excessive deficits be sustained even after 2010, along with implicit debts they might bring the country's public finance system to the verge of collapse by 2014 (like in Hungary in 2008 or in Slovakia a decade earlier). The only available solution is to reduce expenditures and launch further structural reforms, an idea the incumbent administration is highly unlikely to embrace before the end of the current electoral term.

Public opinion polls continue to suggest very high popularity of Premier Robert Fico and his party; it is very likely that the new administration formed after the 2010 elections will again be dominated by SMER-SD. It is very unrealistic that such an administration will embrace restrictive fiscal policy or structural reforms; on the contrary, it will try to increase budgetary revenues through jacking up taxes (Finance Minister Ján Počiatek has already mentioned such an option), which is a rather limited tool that is unlikely to bring the desirable and necessary effect.[18]

Consequently, the country's fiscal condition may continue to deteriorate until the imminent threat of government's insolvency, i.e. the final stage of the populist cycle. The only difference compared to the most recent populist cycle is that Slovakia already managed to adopt the single European currency, i.e. the crisis caused by irresponsible national fiscal policy cannot cause the collapse of euro. But Slovakia still runs the risk of cumulative loss of competitiveness since higher inflation in Slovakia as a direct result of fiscal expansion will not be matched by a parallel growth in labour productivity; in other words, Slovakia is likely to experience problems of southern members of euro-zone that may only be cured by the painful mix of restrictive fiscal

policy and thorough structural reforms. So, the Slovaks' struggle with wind-mills may continue even though they have euros in their pockets.

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Notes

1   The title "Argentina on the Danube" was borrowed from an article published by *The Economist* weekly on February 19, 2009 (*Eastern Europe: Argentina on the Danube?*). The present study was supported from *Domus Hungarica Scientiarium et Artium*, a scholarship awarded by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the Ministry of Education.

2   Tocqueville, Alexis de: *O demokracii v Amerike* (Bratislava: Kalligram, 2009, pp. 986–987).

3   James Madison wrote: *"The influence of party leaders may be able to fan flames within their own states but it is unable to start a conflagration involving other states; a religious sect may degenerate into a political faction in one part of the Confederation but different sects scattered around the Confederation provide a certain guarantee that central organs will not face any imminent danger. A fierce campaign for printing out paper money, for abolishing debts, for equal distribution of property or any other erroneous or dangerous proposal is more likely to engulf an individual state rather than the entire Union; similarly, it is more likely that such a malady may sweep some parish or county rather than an entire state. Therefore we believe that spaciousness and suitable structure of the Union is a remedy for most frequent maladies of the republican government"* (Hamilton – Madison – Jay: *Listy federalistov*, (Bratislava: Kalligram, 2002, pp. 124-125).

4   For a more detailed description of populism in Central Europe and Slovakia, please see Smilov – Krastev, 2008, pp. 7-10, or Mesežnikov – Gyárfášová et al, 2008, p. 101.

5   Based on these characteristics, the authors labelled the following administrations in Latin American countries in the 1970s and 1980s as populist: Salvador Allende (Chile, 1970–1973), Juan Perón (Argentina, 1973–1976), Alán García (Peru, 1985–1990), José Sarney (Brazil, 1985–1990), Luis Echeverría (Mexico, 1970–1976) and Andrés Pérez

(Venezuela, 1974–1978); the former three administrations particularly strongly fit the definition in terms of political goals pursued and economic tools applied (Kaufman – Stellings 1991, p. 16).

6   The Bulgarian government was unable to implement a decisive and drastic austerity package and the consequences were catastrophic: hyperinflation, the national currency's fall, the banking system's collapse, a significant GDP decline, mass protests, eventual fall of the cabinet and holding early elections. As a direct result of the banking system's breakdown, 17 banks (approximately one third of the country's banking system) folded; in 1996, nine out of ten state-run banks that controlled 80% of the country's financial reserves posted negative capital reserves and half of all private banks declared technical bankruptcy. People stood in long lines before exchange offices in order to exchange the Bulgarian currency into any foreign currency. With respect to American dollar, the Bulgarian currency depreciated by 589.3% in 1996 and by 264.5% in 1997. Due to the currency crisis, political instability, financing budgetary deficits by printing uncovered money and strong inflation expectations, the year-on-year inflation rate exceeded 2000% in March 1997. The average annual inflation rate reached 310.8% at the end of 1996 and 578.5% in 1997. The gross domestic product dropped by 10.9% in 1996 and by further 6.9% in 1997. The currency's breakdown, the banking system's collapse and hyperinflation strongly devalued the population's savings. In early January 1997, mass rallies and strikes engulfed the country, forcing the government in February 1997 to agree to call early parliamentary elections for April 1997. In elections that followed, the ruling socialist party suffered a crushing defeat (*Bulgaria: the Dual Challenge of Transition and Recession*, 2001; Tomšík, 1999, pp. 28–32).

7   While 'soft' populists threaten only parties of the incumbent administration (i.e. they want to replace them at helm), 'hard' populists pose a threat to very foundations of a democratic constitutional system (e.g. minority rights or independent institutions) and strive to criminalize their political opponents. In Central Europe, typical representatives of the former are Fidesz from Hungary or -SD from Slovakia; typical representatives of the latter include the HZDS and SNS from Slovakia or various parties in Poland such as the League of Polish Families and Self-Defence but also the Law and Justice (Smilov – Krastev, 2008, p. 9).

8   Csaba admits that in the globalized economy of the 21st century, these countries may have lost the leverage to inhibit unsound growth in consumption and credit in a significant way but still criticizes them for failing to use at least those means they do have on their disposal. Due to free movement of capital as well as the fact that financial sector is mostly in the hands of large supranational corporations and that banks may also extend loans in foreign currencies, the room for national governments and central banks to influence economic development through monetary policy continues to shrink. On the other hand, these countries failed or were very reluctant to apply available means on the revenue side of the state budget (i.e. taxation) as well as available though limited regulatory mechanisms to prevent economy from overheating (Csaba, 2008, p. 594).

9   British economist John Maynard Keynes (1883–1946) was convinced that in the time of economic crisis (i.e. insufficient aggregate demand that is accompanied by unused workforce and free production capacities), the government should stimulate economic growth through increasing public expenditures even if it amounts to ballooning debt; however, Keynes was also aware that the state budget should be balanced in the long term as deficits produced in the time of crisis should be made up for by surpluses produced in the time of boom. In other words, Keynes and Keynesians recommend resorting to fiscal stimuli in order to help economy overcome recession and restore economic growth but

they do not recommend them when economy grows and production capacities are fully used as they would overheat economy and encourage inflation.

10   In March and April 2009, the Slovak Government spent 55 million on the 'scrap bonus' project, i.e. state subsidy designed to encourage consumers to replace old cars with new ones. According to estimates by the National Bank of Slovakia (NBS), the project's contribution to GDP growth was approximately 0.05%. "*The NBS believes that the measure has had a positive impact on the economy in terms of production, firms' profitability and employment; besides, it was a display of solidarity with other countries. The direct effect of the scrap bonus on GDP growth was low due to a high share of imported cars,*" NBS Spokeswoman Jana Kováčová told *TASR* news agency ("NBS: Šrotovné hodnotíme pozitívne, potiahlo nás o 0,05 percenta", *Sme* daily, June 26, 2009.)

11   The costs of the banking sector's restructuring comprised the following: increasing banks' fixed assets; transferring classified loans to specialized institutions; indemnifying clients of smaller banks that had gone bankrupt; paying interest on government bonds (transferred classified claims were converted into public debt). In need of consolidation was especially the so-called Big Three, namely Všeobecná úverová banka (VÚB), Slovenská sporiteľňa (SLSP) and Investičná a rozvojová banka (IRB) that was under forced administration by the NBS between December 19, 1997 and December 16, 1999. As of December 31, 1998, these three banks combined for approximately 85% of all classified loans accumulated within the country's banking sector that totalled 141.6 billion Sk. These banks' fixed assets were increased by 18.9 billion Sk in the following way: 5.7 billion for IRB, o 4.3 billion for SLSP and 8.9 billion for VÚB. As a direct result of increasing the banks' fixed assets, the government increased its stakes in all of them and became a majority owner of VÚB again. In the first stage of the restructuring scheme, classified loans totalling 74.2 billion Sk (45 billion from VÚB, 22.8 billion from SLSP and 6.5 billion from IRB) were transferred into Konsolidačná banka and Slovenská konsolidačná, a.s.; in the second stage, bad loans worth 34.2 billion Sk (12.9 billion from SLPS and 21.3 billion from VÚB) were transferred. The total volume of transferred loans was 74.2 billion Sk plus 34.2 billion Sk; after discounting adjusted entries worth 3.3 billion Sk, the bottom line was 105.1 billion Sk. The NBS imposed forced administration and subsequently revoked licences from the following banks: AG Banka (December 1999), Priemyselná banka (December 16, 1999, subsequently sold to Slovenská sporiteľňa), Slovenská kreditná banka (April 2000), Dopravná banka (August 2000) and Devín banka (September 2001). Clients if these bankrupt banks were indemnified by the Fund of Deposit Protection (FOV) since deposits by natural persons up to 30-multiple of the average monthly wage (343,000 Sk in 2001) were fully protected. Total indemnification costs reached 20 billion crowns; more than half of that amount (11 billion) was paid to clients of Devín banka. For further details, please see Jakoby – Morvay – Pažitný, 2001, p. 385; Popp, 2002, p. 101 and Reptová – Strieborný, 2000, p. 505.

12   Besides expansive fiscal policy, these reasons also included the model of privatization (i.e. clientelist allotment of enterprises to the 'domestic capital-generating layer' way below market prices), reluctance to privatize 'strategic' enterprises (the Mečiar administration passed a law in parliament and even held an invalid referendum on the subject), virtually no coordination between fiscal and monetary policies (the fixed exchange rate combined with relatively high inflation gradually leads to overvaluing the currency and even later to external imbalances; fiscal expansion forces the central bank to jack up interest rates; as a result, public investments edge out private ones and financing public debt becomes dearer) and generally bad environment for investors (particularly high tax and contribution burden as well as poor law enforceability), which hindered the inflow of foreign direct investments.

13 Misappropriation of the state enterprise's assets provoked a rather unusual reaction by its employees who wrote an open letter to the prime minister and agriculture minister, launched a petition drive and even filed a motion for criminal prosecution with the Office of District Attorney in Banská Bystrica regarding suspicion of perpetrating the criminal offence of inefficient handling of state property. The employees specified 27 particular cases of embezzlement, including disadvantageous (and unlawful) sales of timber to subjects that are known as bad payers in the long term, disadvantageous swaps of lucrative land lots for ordinary ones, useless training programs worth millions of crowns, disadvantageous leasing out of hunting grounds, disadvantageous contracts with media companies, etc. The existence of political strings within the corporation was confirmed by Peter Chrust, Development and Technical Director of Lesy SR: *"Each branch in Slovakia has been allotted to one ruling party. I don't recollect precisely but I believe seven branches are controlled by the SNS, probably eight branches are controlled by the HZDS and the rest is controlled by"* (Tódová, Monika: "Riaditeľ Lesov končí, minister zostáva", *Sme*, July 1, 2009).

14 *"State enterprises often face requirements to place their production in politically friendly regions instead of those that are economically attractive. So it happened that Italian state enterprises received an order to build production capacities in the South that was a 'stronghold' of then-ruling Christian Democrats. Companies such as Renault, Airbus Industries or Aéroports de Paris chose localities that suited politicians instead of those that would have minimized the costs"* (Shleifer – Vishny, 2000, pp. 201–202).

15 The coalition government formed after the 1998 parliamentary elections officially comprised the Slovak Democratic Coalition (SDK – 26.3% of the popular vote), the Party of Democratic Left (SDĽ – 14.7%), the Party of Hungarian Coalition (SMK – MKP – 9.1%) and the Party of Civic Understanding (SOP – 8.0%). The SDK itself was a coalition of five smaller parties (including the social democrats and the greens); similarly, SMK–MKP consisted of three original parties representing the country's ethnic Hungarians. So, the ruling coalition represented the entire democratic spectrum ranging from conservatives through Christian democrats, liberals, minority parties and left-wing parties. A direct result of this was permanent conflicts within the ruling coalition between various *ad hoc* alliances formed by these parties. In 2002, over 13% of all ballots cast for left-wing, populist or anti-reform parties were forfeited mostly because the following parties failed to qualify to parliament: PSNS (3.65%), SNS (3.32%), HZD (3.28%), SDA (1.79%) and SDĽ (1.36%).

16 Caplan defined four principal areas where views of the majority of American population are erroneous, based on myths or contradictory to basic findings of mainstream economic science: 1. Anti-market bias, i.e. a tendency to underestimate advantages of market mechanisms. Paraphrasing Schumeter, it is an "indestructible prejudice that every action aimed at creating profit must be automatically anti-social". 2. Bias against cooperation with foreigners, i.e. a tendency to underestimate advantages of cooperation with abroad. For instance, it is the myth that international trade is an equation with a zero total, i.e. the profit of one party inevitably amounts to the loss of the other, which gives birth to protectionist views. 3. Fervour to preserve jobs, i.e. a tendency to underestimate advantages of production rationalization through reducing workforce. Where voters see "destruction of available jobs", economists see growth in labour productivity, i.e. the foundation of economic growth, efficiency and competitiveness. 4. Pessimism, i.e. a tendency to exaggerate economic problems and underestimate the benefits of functioning market economy. Voters are often convinced that they earn less and live worse than before and that they will be even worse off in the future despite objective facts on improving the standard of living (Caplan, 2007, pp. 30–49).

MIROSLAV KOCÚR:

For God and Nation: Christian National Populism

On the outside, religiously defined communities[1] that dwell within civil society cannot be distinguished from other social organizations, associations or societies; on the inside, though, they are glued together by the supernatural element of shared belief in deity.

Their internal order is derived directly from the Bible or secondary religious literature by important figures of church history. Besides organizational purpose, these regulations are supposed to lead community members to moral integrity and impeccability. Based on precisely stipulated sanctions, their observance of the internal order may even be enforced to a certain degree, although this degree is rather limited nowadays. Even the greatest sanction today that in some cases may amount to excommunication is hardly comparable to coercive measures used in the time of Giordano Bruno or Master Jan Hus.

In civil society, church membership is perceived as a voluntary and free decision of its individual members; however, primary social networks of church members largely stem out of shared religious beliefs. The moral dimension of religious belief ensuing from being organized in church and its ethical implications may have unexpected consequences for church members. Government respects the internal order of religious communities and refrains from meddling in any way even with regulations whose nature may be discriminatory in terms of civil legislation.[2] They are simply considered internal regulations of religious communities that are accepted by their members based on their conviction.

The interaction between society and religious communities nears zero as both parties live their own, largely separate lives; however, ethical requirements of churches and religious communities regularly encounter with soci-

ety's lawmaking needs in certain specific areas. Requirements of churches come to the fore especially during debates on state budget; here, churches are directly concerned by government contributions to financing clergymen's salaries, church headquarters and indirectly also educational, social care and medical establishments. The country's educational, social care and health service system features a considerable proportion of institutions operated by churches that provide pre-school, primary, secondary, and university education as well as social and medical services.

According to this author's personal opinion and experience, the voice of religious communities in this area can ill be ignored. With varying intensity and success, all post-November administrations in Slovakia solicited for support of churches as such or at least their decisive and leading segments. This was manifested through their willingness to listen to the voice of church representatives in the process of drafting legislation concerning restitution of church property nationalized after 1950, indemnification of victims of political persecution and paving the way toward actual as opposed to declared religious freedom.[3]

It was these areas that most legislative changes in the field of education, health service and social care or cultural institutions focused on. Churches gradually became an important partner and their views began to be taken into account in the process of formulating relevant parties' election programs as well as administrations' government programs. Explicitly or implicitly, requirements and expectations of church headquarters played an increasingly important role on various occasions.

National Populism and Christian Churches

In the history of Slovakia, the single most relevant example of amalgamating national and religious principles in administering the state was the period of 1939–1945. This picture would be even more complete if its beginning was moved to October 6, 1938, when Slovakia proclaimed its autonomy and began to adopt very concrete measures aimed at obtaining full independence. During this period, national populism was dubbed as Christian National Socialism. Its ideological upholder was Hlinka's Slovak People's Party (HSĽS) led by ThDr. Jozef Tiso who was appointed the head of the autonomous cabinet and subsequently became president of the Slovak Republic, a satellite state of the Third Reich.

March 14, 1939, will always be connected to the name of Jozef Tiso. He was a man whose political career spanned almost quarter of a century. He was a member of the Czechoslovak Parliament and a member of the central gov-

ernment (minister of health care). For many years, Tiso was politically active within the HSĽS party where he did not hold irrelevant posts; on the contrary, he was in the centre of its actions to such an extent that he was able to shape the political reality and put his personal stamp onto it.

In 1941, the HSĽS Publishing House in Bratislava published a book by senior lecturer Štefan Polakovič called *Tisova náuka* [Tiso's Teachings]. In its six chapters symptomatically titled Nation – State – Party – Religion – Social Issue – National Socialism, the author summed up the doctrine of the president of the wartime Slovak Republic. He lets Jozef Tiso speak while he merely interconnects and edits his texts into particular chapters. The book has this to say regarding the issue of Slovak nationalism: "This nationalism loves its own but must not hate other's, this nationalism builds its own but does not destroy other's and strengthens its own without disassembling the whole."[4]

In view of the period and the context, we should perhaps let Jozef Tiso speak for himself: "A nation must take precedence over all personal relations and cravings. We must realize this truth and spread it like a seed that will take roots in every Slovak soul."[5] In the shadow of the Third Reich, Tiso's apparent ambition was to build a Christian state on national and social foundations. "We are building Slovakia of the people in compliance with guidelines of national socialism … We do so not only out of grateful affection for the Great German Empire and its magnanimous Fuhrer Adolf Hitler but out of well-understood interest in our national and state life … In line with national socialism, we do not subscribe to state totalitarianism but national totalitarianism."[6] National Socialism was supposed to become a barrier against "godless" socialism as well as against liberal-Marxist but also capitalist ideology. Therefore, this socialism would be Christian and would be based on "love for one's own, willingness to work and sacrifice for the ideal".

Unfortunately, these seemingly noble ideals began to accentuate a false fortissimo that foreshadowed a fatal finale for many Slovak citizens. The doom of this endeavour was adumbrated by efforts to reconcile the irreconcilable: "On the first glimpse it seems as if Catholicism and nationalism represented two opposite poles that can never level out or meet. And yet, nationalism finds its culmination point in Catholicism." [7]

Slovak Catholic Hierarchy and Some Concrete Causes

Over the past 20 years, the most vocal advocate of churches' demands in the Slovak Republic was the Roman Catholic Church, the most influential religious community in the country both numerically and historically. Other religious communities merely copied and – based on their own specifics –

adapted and modified their own demands to what the Roman Catholic Church had managed to accomplish. This *modus operandi* was quite logical and this author does not view it as anything that would go beyond parameters of the ordinary given the scope of societal transformation Czechoslovakia underwent after November 1989.

Public perception of social activities pursued by churches in Slovakia is largely determined by the perception of social activities pursued by the most influential player. Among Christian religious communities, that player is the Roman Catholic Church.

Instead of addressing manifestations of national-populist agenda in public life, particular church leaders in Slovakia rather focused on maintaining unity vis-ŕ-vis government in furthering their own interests. On the practical level, this attitude has shown through solidary reticence of registered churches' leaders with respect to actual problems or even scandals within other churches. When it comes to church officials' collaboration with the communist-era secret police or restitution issues, such mutual tolerance is not difficult to understand. Situations differ from one case to another and should not be measured by identical standards.

With respect to the wartime Slovak State, though, Slovak churches have had enough opportunities to adopt an unambiguous Christian position that would render impossible any effort to question or relativize what was perpetrated in Slovakia in the name of Christian National Socialism between 1939 and 1945. The Christians and their official representatives have had many chances to take a stance, especially with respect to activities by some representatives of the Catholic Church who publicly subscribed to the ideological legacy of the period of 1939–1945 or other public statements that carried a strong stamp of ethnic intolerance and fell within the line of national populism.

There have been many examples of such activities and/or statements; I chose those that leave little or no space to doubt that Christian universalism gave way to national populism. Not only did these clearly anti-Christian attitudes remain uncommented by Christian leaders but some of their protagonists could even rely on strong moral support from church officials.

Tiso and the Slovak State

The post-November society's attitude to Jozef Tiso as well as to existence and regime of the wartime Slovak State was shaped shortly after the fall of communism. As a result of its tabooing by communist historians, this controversial period was relatively uncritically idealized in early stages. Before

the general public was able to learn about objective historical truth of the 1930s and 1940s, this period began to be celebrated and HSLS representatives and Slovak government officials of the period began to be glorified. Exile historians such as František Vnuk or Milan S. Ďurica played a pivotal part in the process. In the 1990s, František Vnuk was a full professor of church history at Roman Catholic Theological Faculty in Bratislava.

Cardinal Ján Chryzostom Korec made an impression that he sympathized with the wartime Slovak State and its president, which was apparent from his views and public statements already in the early 1990s. In July 1990, he personally attended unveiling of Tiso's commemorative plaque in Bánovce nad Bebravou. Tiso's sympathizers viewed public statements by Cardinal Korec as unambiguous endorsement and moral support of their activities, this despite the Vatican's reservations with respect to Tiso's presidency that were historically documented by correspondence of Bursius, papal nuncio posted in Bratislava.

In view of Ján Chryzostom Korec's moral authority that resulted from his long-term persecution by the communist regime and his strongly anti-communist profile, the process of relativizing the regime of the wartime Slovak State began even before all facts about it could be openly presented and objectively evaluated.

The efforts by communist historiography to use President Tiso's occupational background for the purpose of anti-church propaganda gradually became counterproductive.[8] The expedient evaluation Jozef Tiso's political activity from the outset of his long political career and presenting him exclusively in the negative light has led to equally expedient endeavour to portray him as the martyr of Czech centralism or even rising communism.

In recent years, the endeavour to amalgamate national and Christian principles was led by Ján Sokol, Trnava Archbishop emeritus. Besides attending political rallies organized by Slovenská pospolitosť, a political party that has been banned in the meantime on account of its racist background, Sokol repeatedly made excusatory comments on Jozef Tiso for broadcast as well as print media.

It was Sokol's public statements that stirred public opinion the most. During the Christmas season of 2006 he spoke for TA3 news television, recollecting the times of plenty in Slovakia during World War II. Sokol attributed the fact that the Slovaks "lived on a reasonable level" to good work of President Jozef Tiso. His tactless overlooking of deportations created a furore on the part of civil society leaders. Others interpreted it as moral endorsement of national populism tendencies from the highest places.

Archbishop Sokol celebrated annual requiem masses on the anniversary of Tiso's execution that regularly turned into manifestations of sympathies with regime of the wartime Slovak State. Public resistance to Sokol's endeavour took on various forms, including a civic initiative endorsed by almost 2000 signatories who decisively refused his efforts to combine requiem masses in honour of Jozef Tiso with excusing the regime of the state he led.[9]

After the initiative held a public rally called *Nie fašizácii Slovenska* [No to Fascization of Slovakia] on September 11, 2008, national populism sentiments began to radicalize on the highest rungs of the legislative and executive power. The statements by Justice Minister Štefan Harabin and MP Vladimír Mečiar (HZDS) addressed to MP Daniel Lipšic (KDH) went not only beyond the limit of political correctness but even that of elementary human decency.

On February 10, 2007, Head of the Conference of Slovak Bishops (KBS) František Tondra made part of the informed public uneasy by an interview for the *Sme* daily. When the reporter asked him about Sokol's statements regarding his reverence for President Jozef Tiso and the so-called affluence during the war in the state led by him, Tondra responded by saying he was not happy that Sokol "let himself go on about the subject". When addressing the Tiso issue himself, Tondra said it was so complicated it was virtually impossible to take an unambiguous stance on it. "There are advocates and there are critics," he said. "There are arguments in favour of founding the Slovak State. One should distinguish between founding a state and his president. I am not a historian but everything I know tells me the Slovak State had to be established if we were to maintain independence."

The greatest outrage caused the passage in which Tondra argued that representatives of the Jewish community had visited Tiso and tried to persuade him not to give up. According to Tondra, when Tiso learned about the consequences he wanted to give up presidency but the Jews convinced him not to. Tondra also believes that a memorial was raised in Tiso's honour in 1967 in Jerusalem. In this context, Tondra used a chance to rebuff unjustified criticism aimed at the Catholic Church. "Tiso was neither authorized by the church nor was he the president on its behalf," he said. "The Vatican was against it and so were many priests in Slovakia." Due to its factual nature, the reaction by representatives of the Jewish religious community is cited in unabridged version.[10]

As far as its official position on the holocaust goes, the KBS published a statement that reflects the Vatican's official position on this historical period and the responsibility of the Catholic Church for what took place dur-

ing it. It was a KBS declaration regarding the Vatican document on the holocaust titled "We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah". Toward the end, the document features a paragraph in which the KBS offers apology to those who have been harmed by its insensitivity in the past. The paragraph reads: "In this time of penance inspired by Pope John Paul II, we, Slovak Catholic bishops associated in the Conference of Slovak Bishops ask our Jewish brothers and sisters for forgiveness and call on all Catholic believers as well as all Christians and people of good will to join us and overcome all prejudices. We sincerely believe that the act of apology to the Jewish nation in terms of 'moral and religious memory' shall be understood as the act of repentance, as the act of love for the Crucified, which is our peace."[11]

Unfortunately, practical measures and public statements by Ján Sokol, Ján Chryzostom Korec and some other representatives of the Roman Catholic Church who regularly revere Jozef Tiso in public thoroughly ignore the text of this KBS document. Moreover, some officials of the Roman Catholic Church in Slovakia repeatedly attempt to relativize and play light of the period of the wartime Slovak State. Consequently, this disparaging negatively affects the public's sensitivity to displays of ethnic intolerance or other forms of intolerance.

New Trnava Archbishop and his Reflection on Tiso's Attitudes

In June 2009, the news service of the SITA news agency[12] published an article that was subsequently reprinted by all relevant Slovak dailies. The article presented new Trnava Archbishop Róbert Bezák's views of Tiso's actions from the time of his presidency as well as his reactions to public statements presented by Ján Sokol who preceded him in office.

To Bezák, forming an independent Slovak state in 1939 was a historically logical unravelling of political development in former Czechoslovakia. But he said what followed was equally important. He pointed out the first registered Nazi transport dispatched from Slovakia in March 1942 that brought 990 Jewish women into the Auschwitz concentration camp. "That is worse. 990 people, women, are not easily lost. A question to me is whether in 1942 a person that happens to be a Catholic priest should not react – perhaps even by saying: I shall abdicate. Whenever anyone around me is wronged, I am wronged myself. It is not something that would not concern me," the new Archbishop emphasized.

Bezák also criticized statements his predecessor Ján Sokol made about experiencing affluence during the Slovak State. "I ask how a six year-old

boy is able to evaluate [the standard of living]," Bezák asked. "When somebody is born in 1933, can he really assess years 1939 through 1942? When I look back at the time I was six or seven, I cannot tell whether I was well off. To say that we were all right because we had something to eat while others had nothing and because of that we were better off is very unfortunate. As a Christian, I would not dare set such measuring criteria."

This was the first time a high official of the Catholic Church in Slovakia publicly presented such an unambiguously critical opinion regarding President Jozef Tiso's responsibility. All those who examine the issue politically, historically or as civil activists perceive the new archbishop's statement with sympathies and satisfaction.

Hungarian Bishop

In January 2009, Chairman of the Party of Hungarian Coalition (SMK–MKP) Pál Csáky made repeated public statements that ethnic Hungarian Catholics in Slovakia should have their own bishop. According to the SITA news agency that cited Csáky,[13] an elegant solution would be if one diocese was led by a bishop of Hungarian nationality who would be a member of the Conference of Slovak Bishops (KBS).[14]

According to some authors, ethnic Hungarian Catholics in Slovakia have produced significant activity aimed at solving their pastoral and spiritual needs. In the meantime, they abandoned the original demand to establish a separate diocese; instead, they repeatedly demanded the KBS to appoint a bishop that would take care of the needs of ethnic Hungarian believers. They also submitted the demand to the archbishop for Bratislava and Trnava. According to György Herdics and János Zsidó, the initiative has been supported by 50,000 petitioners whose signatures have been sent to the Pope.[15]

According to an agency report by TASR that was run by relevant print and broadcast media on January 7, 2009, the KBS believes that ethnic Hungarian believers in Slovakia are taken good care of as they have priests and bishop vicars who speak fluent Hungarian. "A chairman of as political party should not enter this territory," said KBS Spokesman Jozef Kováčik. "It is rather about scoring political points than about a true effort to tackle certain problems".[16]

On a different occasion, Kováčik commented on public demands to appoint a Hungarian bishop for ethnic Hungarian believers by saying that "such opinions should not be [presented] through media but should be conveyed directly to the bishops". According to Kováčik, Catholic believers

who live in Slovakia are part of the Catholic Church operating in Slovakia that is not divided by nationality. "In Slovakia, there is not purely Hungarian territory that would not have a single Slovak among its parishioners," he said. "Besides, the church has bishops who speak fluent Hungarian and who regularly tend to pastoral needs of believers on mixed territories."[17]

These statements by the KBS spokesman and other public figures as well as the general atmosphere in this area illustrate a rather reluctant attitude to tackling this issue in an accommodating fashion. In one of his statements, Kováčik even said that the KBS had not been informed about the need that was publicly brought up by Csáky. The public debate on the issue was also joined by President Ivan Gašparovič who said believers should not care about the language in which they turn to God. This also documents very little understanding for what believers in parishes dominated by ethnic Hungarians or on ethnically mixed territories expect from the clergy and their duties.

Celebrations of Constantine and Methodius and Concrete Double Crosses

On July 5, 2009, a public meeting was held at the Devín Castle on the occasion of a public holiday to commemorate Slavic missionaries St. Constantine and St. Methodius. According to print media reports and agency video reports, Prime Minister Robert Fico in his address spoke of the recently adopted amendment to the so-called state language act in connection with alleged Hungarian irredentism.[18] The premier argued that protection of state language must be "the principal foothold" of every Slovak administration. According to him, it is the way "to protect ourselves against dangerous irredentism that increasingly often breaths from behind the Danube".[19] The platform was decorated by stylized portraits of the saints while a number of clergymen were present in the audience.

Cardinal J. Ch. Korec who attended a similar rally in 2008 praised mutual cooperation of the highest constitutional officials in the field of encouraging national consciousness and pride. While Korec looked on, Premier Fico said in his keynote speech that national solidarity must be built as "a sturdy barrier against activities of the peculiar sort of adventurers who undermine Slovakia's spiritual integrity".[20]

But Fico's coalition partner and SNS Chairman Ján Slota has a strange way of cementing Slovakia's spiritual integrity.[21] On October 5, 2008, Slota

visited a village of Pavlovce in the district of Vranov nad Topľou to cele-
brate planting a concrete double cross, a state symbol of Slovakia. Having
admitted he was under the influence of some home-made red currant wine,
Slota gave an emotional speech to the audience of two or three hundred
and used a militant vocabulary when speaking of Slovakia's southern neigh-
bour. First, he stated that Slovakia used to be the centre of Christian
Europe. Later, he used offensive language to speak of Hungary's foreign
minister, ridiculing Hungarian history and slandering Hungary's national
cultural symbols.

Although Slota repeatedly said that SNS officials did not mean to offend
anybody by planting double crosses around Slovakia, in his short speech he
did just that several times. In this particular case, a combination of vulgar
national populism and Christian beliefs was amplified by the fact that rep-
resentatives of the church assisted in the unveiling of a commemorative
plaque and the ceremony of consecrating the cross lent a sacral dimension
to the event.

Civil rights activist Ondrej Dostál subsequently filed a motion to pros-
ecute Slota on grounds of defamation of the nation, race and conviction.
The Office of Regional Attorney in Prešov rejected the motion, reasoning
that the facts of the case did not indicate that the crime had been perpe-
trated and arguing that this kind of verbal communication was natural and
standard for Ján Slota. In its official statement, the Office of Regional
Attorney observed that Ján Slota, a politician and chairman of a political
party, was known for his virulent public speeches.

As far as this author is aware, leading representatives of the Catholic
Church have not yet publicly dissociated themselves from similar attempts
to combine militant national populism with Christian motives, symbols and
even church ceremonies of consecrating concrete double crosses.

Nationalization vs. Globalization

In order to better understand the way in which the Catholic Church inter-
acts with the outer world, it is necessary to realize the *modus operandi* of
the Catholic Church as such. From the institutional viewpoint, it has a
strongly centralized hierarchic structure. The history refers to this type of
constitutional model as an absolute monarchy. It is politically embodied by
the Vatican, a state headed by the pope who in the spirit of monarchist
rules appoints his vassals (exceptions are rare) to posts of bishops who are
in charge of lower administrative units – namely dioceses. This mentality
of a community in which rights and obligations are divided very asymmet-

rically and strongly in disfavour of regular members is subsequently reflected in its everyday existence.

Regular church members' participation in the process of choosing their leaders is close to zero; the rate of Catholic Christians' involvement in efforts to reform this institution is not essentially higher. While these efforts are materialized in certain activities, mobilization of regular members remains an exception; in a way, it ensued from an apparent tension between double standards governing church community and civil society that offers to Christians a relatively comfortable asylum from impracticable church requirements regarding their personal, family or public life. In recent years, the Vatican faced several cases of public pressure with respect to appointing new bishops or dissatisfaction with Catholic hierarchs' performance and, quite surprisingly, succumbed to it at times;[22] however, these are exceptions rather than the rule. In an environment where development of civil society does not reach the level at which tensions stemming from double standards would be as obvious, the Catholic hierarchy enjoys relatively strong authority. Articulating its statements on the one hand or taciturnity on the other is very important for society in situations that call for positions and/or actions defined by values.

Individual national administrative units of the Roman Catholic Church are only seemingly independent. The level of centralization and interconnection with the Holy See is absolute to such a degree that a mere trace of autonomous administration of any part of the Roman Catholic Church anywhere in the world that would not comply with the Vatican perspective has no chance of materialization. The church legislation does not allow for any polemic in this respect, not even theoretical. The chances of regular Catholics to influence important decisions by church establishments should therefore be perceived in this context.[23]

The liturgical reform that followed the 2nd Vatican Council was the most significant process of reflecting national specifics in practical church activities to date. In practice this amounted to authorizing the use of national languages during divine services and introducing various elements of national culture into the official ritual code. So it happened that folk dances, national chants and other folklore elements of local cultures not only became part of divine services previously practiced in Latin but they fully replaced them.

The Catholic Church christened the process by a progressive term of inculturation that was supposed to express the centre's willingness to respect national cultural specifics in practicing Catholic beliefs. In order to illustrate the distance the Vatican thus covered, it is important to realize

that the Holy See was very reserved and reluctant with respect to any efforts that appeared in various places since the 1930s but were perhaps the most articulate in German-speaking parts of the Catholic world. The strongly traditionalistic Vatican viewed any attempts to include the use of national languages in the liturgical reform as undesirable displays of progressivism. Upholders of these ideas did not yet have the courage to enter into an open polemic with the Roman Curia; instead, they remained in inner exile for long decades.

The Catholic particularism has always been manifested through dismissal and even demonization of non-Catholic Christians, Jews, Muslims and other religions. That is why the Council's position on religious freedom or ecumenical cooperation was considered such a breakthrough.

It was a certain kind of Catholic confessional ethno-centrism that was cultivated within the Catholic Church throughout centuries and took on various forms, including Christian anti-Semitism, insistence on excommunication of the Eastern Patriarch following the Eastern Schism, the negative attitude to Reformation following the Western Schism and every division of Christianity into new confessions that followed.[24]

The differentiation that showed within Christianity through founding religious orders or revivalist movements did not envisage and therefore refused emergence of new denominations that strove to reform the model of power execution. Besides encouraging non-clerical persons' participation in administrating the church, the Reformation also brought gradual emergence of autonomous non-church institutions and led to secularization of public life.

Serious cracks and division lines suddenly began to appear in the previously coherent clerical society with an unchangeable social order that was theologically justified. Emergence of new universities, gradual strengthening of the third estate as the seed of the future bourgeoisie, cultural creation in the field of painting, sculpting or literature that was sovereign and independent from the church establishment – all this needed new interpretation and justification.

Such interpretation was soon provided by Martin Luther and Philipp Melanchthon who embarked on theological justification of the Reformation movement that gradually evolved into Protestantism. Although criticism of the Vatican centralism could be traced in several authors' works even before the Reformation period, justifying ordinary believers' right to refuse a corrupt bishop and accepting this justification on such a broad scale was something historically new.

The previously homogeneous Western Christianity thus began to differentiate politically. Some authors view Protestantism as a key moment in

legitimizing the transformation of tradesmen into bourgeoisie. Individual morale and economic liberalism was given space in a society where pluralism was ceasing to be a criminal act. Unified interpretation of life reality ceased to be the prerogative of the single true theological mainstream.

Martin Luther was the first influential heretic who was not burnt at the stake; however, his argument that Christians should take interest in public affairs and demand that their congregations be governed by people who not only speak of morality but act accordingly later proved to have brisance not even the reformist himself was probably able to estimate. The right to oppose the Roman clerical monarch in a theological polemic led to founding the Augsburg confession (Confesio Augustana), which adumbrated further diversification of European Christianity that had previously appeared and acted as a homogeneous monolith.

It was not until the 2nd Vatican Council that the Roman Catholic Church officially subscribed to cooperation with other Christian societies; however, an important feature of this reconciliation attempt is the continuous denial of other Christian confessions' right to refer to themselves as churches, which was last defined by Josef Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI) as the Prefect for the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Ratzinger's sophisticated explanations are difficult to comprehend but he basically argued that only the Roman Catholic Church is a church in the true sense of this word.[25]

Religion and Politics

This brings us to the interface between religion and politics. The issue to which degree is religion connected to practical politics has been debated for several centuries. The Christian elite justified its place in the world of politics through Bible stories and their interpretations; however, the literary version of the Old Testament scriptures played a rather marginal role in the interpretation process. Until the late 19th century, no one particularly closely examined whether and to what extent is the biblical text a metaphor, a propagandistic exhortative text or a historical account.

The Maccabean wars described in parts of the Old Testament (also called secondarily canonical) provide perhaps the most ancient answer to the question of why political ambitions are inherently included in the monotheistic tradition. The pagan king forced religious brothers to do something their beliefs and convictions did not allow, which led to a rebellion. The Hanukkah holiday Judaism continues to celebrate until the present day has to do with this gesture of resistance and martyrdom of the Maccabeans.

The ambitions of traitors who were willing to collaborate with the pagans were temporarily satisfied as the Lord (i.e. the Highest One) protected his own. The Jerusalem Temple was destroyed in 70 AD and the place of Jewish cult did not exist ever since. Synagogal worship does not have a sacrificial character. Various branches of Judaism have different positions on restoring temple divine services. Numerically, the orthodox branch of Judaism is probably the determining one; however, the external observer finds it difficult to get oriented in the contemporary power ratio of world Judaism.

During his public service, Jesus also interacted with authorities of Judaist religious branches as well as with Roman forces of occupation. Only mutual cooperation between the high council and the Roman prefect rendered him unerringly out of the game and onto the cross. The story of resurrection does not compel everyone to pay serious attention anymore. It is the question of ancient Christian tradition and personal conviction; however, Paul the Apostle argued that had the Christ not risen from the dead he would not even have bothered preaching. Thus the social reality began to change against the backdrop of Jesus's story.

The Christians view Jesus's death as his sacrifice; similarly, congregations at which they celebrate divine services are supposed to commemorate this sacrifice and bring it to mind. Theologians continue to argue about certain interpretations of Masses, Congregations, the Last Supper or other forms of Eucharistic celebrations that are important to individual denominations; however, the determining and the most centralized branch of Christianity is Roman Catholicism. Its doctrinal clarity and compactness has a visible and vocal spokesman in the pope. But non-Catholic Christian denominations recently began to gain the upper hand in South America. In Africa, it differs from one country to another. One thing is for sure, though: the times when Roman Catholics and their kings along with the Pope unflinchingly ruled over the colonies are long gone.

Globalization, Universalism and Christianity

All monotheistic religions show a strong tendency to interconnect private and public lives of their followers. That is why it is very desirable to amalgamate religious and social aspects of individuals' public lives. In this respect, harmonization of social legislation and religious rules seems to be the most viable way.

This temptation haunts the Orthodox Rabbinate in Jerusalem, Christian leaders or Muslim politicians. But a modern secular society obviously has a problem with this solution.

Parliamentary democracy in its liberal version took the path of separating the legislative, executive and judicial power and their independent control. Consequently, religion became in essence a private business of individuals. It is socially binding only for members of the community of those who share identical beliefs and know each other.

Due to geographic and social mobility of the modern world, large religious communities are encountering previously unknown rate of anonymity among community members. The spirit of community where everyone knows everybody else and they support each other has become almost non-existent in large Christian communities. As a result, religion began to play a socio-cultural rather than personality-spiritual role.

While these two dimensions do not exclude one another, they have their own particular forms and ways of expression in practical social life. On the socio-cultural level, a return to common past, language, habits and culture seems very useful. This reminds one very much of efforts by Slovak Christian intellectuals including theologians to present love for the nation as a natural horizontal dimension and a practical demonstration of love for God. Similar ideas appeared in a book *Rozprava o kultúrnosti* [Treatise on Culture] by Ladislav Hanus published in 1943, i.e. during the first Slovak Republic.[26]

The personality-spiritual function of Christianity is gradually becoming the matter of individuals' private and personal attitudes. In this sense of the word, spirituality is often associated with mysticism that does not really strive for socio-cultural extensions of Christian convictions.

Christianity and the national principle, national and ethnic affiliation

In the time of an increasingly open debate on ethnic exclusiveness of smaller cultural communities, globalization becomes a true challenge. This challenge ensues not only from cultural exclusiveness but also from values embodied in cultures and related ethical standards.

The issue of nationality and ethnic affiliation is not a central biblical issue; however, the biblical context forms the common foundation and provides the key to interpretation and early understanding of ancient texts that date back to the time when the so-called Jewish-Christian civilization was born, first as a result of mutual exchange and later that of mutual confrontation.

In the Hebrew Bible and its early Greek translations as well as in the final part of biblical collection of books referred to by experts as the New Testament or the New Treaty, the notions of people and nation are very precisely defined. The more a community becomes aware of its specifics ensuing from interaction with surrounding cultures, the more obvious is the circumscription of terms such as 'people' and 'nation'. 'People' is a term that refers to a community of people that is aware of its privileged status

with respect to the highest instance (i.e. God) from which it derives its origin and its contemporary existence.

Furthermore, everyday life on the level of society and individual is organized on the foundation basis of legislation that operates from laws originating from a theophanic experience. This experience is very important for an individual and subsequently for his decision to shape the life of a community according to this experience. Theophany is materialized through a personal experience of an individual (e.g. Moses) who introduces his experience and its implications to the community he leads. This moment is further strengthened by the nature of narration that is in the Bible related to constitution of an ethnic community led by the individual in the time of its making and self-definition. Based on this individual's authority, theophany is subsequently materialized within the community that according to accounts is willing to accept this ancient tale of its origin. Besides, this ancient tale becomes the foundation of administering social institutions, trade and economic life of the community. Being chosen lends a higher meaning to existence of the people that rationally and emotionally embraces this explanation; also, it defines the community's identity.

The literary form of such accounts features mythological constructs but it is not a myth. Relevant opinions of modern experts confirm that the form of narration is determined by the period in which these texts were created. So-called etiologic intentions – i.e. explanation of causes of particular phenomena and reality – often remain unnoticed in the process of these texts' interpretation.[27] While struggling for their own identity in the biblical context, ethnic and national entities fought a campaign that offers a paradigm for the universal effort to transform the world into a global village.

At the dawn of the Christian calendar, the transition from a national approach to a national-confessional one transcended into an intra-cultural area. Supporters of the single confession (i.e. the Christians) began to differentiate based on their inner attitudes and ethical standards. Tribal, consanguineous, confessional and ritual identificators lost their original meanings.

It is good to realize these basic facts when looking at several centuries at the turn of the ages. In its essence, the Hellenic culture was a multicultural world of people and ideas. The ideological interference and literary affinity of biblical and non-biblical accounts on origins of the world, the mankind, national communities and cultures indicate the way in which the oldest yet remarkably preserved texts of the Hebrew and Greek bible interpreted references to particular ethnic or cultural entities.

Through gradual interpretation of the notions of 'people' and 'nation', these ancient texts offer basic frameworks and interpretation keys to under-

standing why the concept of a chosen nation was the key concept in self-definition of communities that did or do subscribe to supernatural origins of their existence. The so-called super-secessionist perspective of communities defined in such a way again and again opens a new path to a new definition of the chosen nation.

In line with this perspective, new communities that derive their identity from a supernatural source or corroborate it by better and/or more authentic understanding of this source come up with claims of uniqueness according to an example set by a community that defined itself as the new chosen people. Just like Christianity replaced seemingly obsolete Judaism, every new confession emerges in defiance of what has previously existed within its framework. A new confession and denomination emerges within these communities as the fruit of a new and finally correct interpretation of the authoritative (i.e. usually biblical or otherwise sacred) text.

Religious and National Identity – a Change in Paradigms

At the dawn of the Christian calendar, communities' religious and national identity went through peculiar differentiation. The Jewish religion and national or ethnic identity of the Jews was amalgamated into one whole that was difficult to separate. Today, we encounter with theological and ethical implications of early Christianity that in works of its pioneer thinkers rejected and even condemned any connection or continuity with Jewish communities. In a certain way, this radical cut and rejection of the Jewish tribe catalyzed Christianization of the Roman Empire.

The communities of people who became supporters and later followers of the new intellectual and cultural world relinquished cultural exclusiveness of the Jewish community that in key moments seemed to be a hindrance to establishing social and cultural contacts with representatives of other ethnic groups. This pertained especially to issues of individual and social ethics in the field of dietetic recipes, family traditions and importance of consanguineous bonds.

Simultaneously, though, rejecting a large and well organized Jewish community that in the first century AD lived scattered across the civilized world meant that the nascent Christianity renounced a potential ally. The efforts for reconciliation and various related signals that appeared in recent years may indicate endeavour for new reflection and reinterpretation of everything that was caused in past centuries by the Christians' feeling of superiority and exclusivity with respect to Judaism.

237

Contemporary interpretation of what is religious, national and Christian continues to be determined by reflecting biblical terms such as nation, people and community of faith. Internal relations as well as external involvement of a newly defined community of faith that in the first century AD strove for universal transcendence of its own ethnic, cultural and religious horizons continue to be an interesting challenge of seeking intellectually honest solutions to coexistence of different cultures, nations and ideological communities.

Final Observations and Proposed Solutions

Christianity as an opportunity

Societies with strong religious traditions tend to spend more time and energy examining the role of religion and religious communities in public life, either through people themselves or via elected public officials. This is closely related to organization of public life, welfare system, education system, health service and related legislation, family policy, rate of corruption, clientelism or social tolerance of social taboos.

This organization of public life directly affects priorities in the process of making up parliaments, cabinets, courts of justice, control organs and other public institutions. On the outside, these priorities are manifested through society's practical and legislative position on migration, foreigners, family and sexual morality (e.g. divorce, polygamy, monogamy, prostitution, infidelity) and bioethical issues such as abortions, euthanasia or root cell research.

Once believing persons define themselves spiritually and live according to professed principles, their way of public involvement is bound to be affected. Even so-called formal believers have an ambition to present on the outside behavioural patterns determined by the social and religious majority. Such an approach guarantees them a chance to win recognition and participate in social life on their level of social prestige and influence. In this environment it is not primarily important to be a good person as everyone has their flaws and deficiencies. In line with Machiavelli's slogan of "the end justifies used means", it is more important to make an impression of being a good person.

Believers' personal responsibility instead of ritualism

The said tendency is ubiquitous, regardless of the Christian, Muslim or Jewish environment. Sovereign individuals who interpret the rules too freely

and stand out of the mainstream must prove themselves and gain their victory in a struggle with the surroundings. They later appear either as saints or as heretics, depending on the point of view.

Everyone who honestly stands before the Lord with a serious interest to reflect on life, its meaning or direction inevitably begins to influence the public domain. In order to accomplish their goals, they either use the power of their conviction and example or they establish charity, non-governmental, political or paramilitary organizations.

Traditional structures are going through a crisis nowadays – not only within the bounds of Christianity. The crisis ensues from people's desire to transcend into spiritual values and their simultaneous rejection of churches and religious associations that strive to usurp a monopoly in this area. On the other hand, every crisis also represents an opportunity, not only for new players on the 'spiritual market' but also for established monopolies. One thing is for sure: previously known models won't suffice, perhaps except former countries of the third world.

A civil society in which the church has lost its decisive legislative influence represents a comfortable exile for such 'diluted' Christianity. In the supermarket of Christian ideas, everyone shops only for merchandise they need for the weekend party; the blend of Christian and national populism makes for a dangerously attractive merchandise at the moment.

Sociologists and religious fundamentalists alike are beginning to find out that Christians church dignitaries dream of – i.e. those who consistently abide by church standards from A to Z – are vastly outnumbered by those Christians who subscribe to Christianity during population censuses or tax assignations. Identification with a community that places too high demands on one's ethical and value standards seems a task beyond an average Christian. Still, Christianity may offer a meaningful alternative as a lifestyle. But in a civil society, its magic ritualism and uncritical adoration of authorities constitute problems that strongly inhibit open social dialogue and development toward an open society.

Example of dialogue and its unravelling

In recent years, criticism aimed at church hierarchs is sporadically voiced in the Roman Catholic circles. The most famous in this respect was probably an article by a respected Christian Democratic leader Vladimír Palko that was published by the *.týždeň* weekly in the fall of 2007.[28]

After many years of loyal silence, Palko openly chastised Cardinal Korec and his public actions that according to him were interpreted within society as moral support for national-populist positions of HZDS Chairman Vladimír

Mečiar and his policies as the prime minister. Palko decided to speak out because he perceived Cardinal Korec's actions with respect to incumbent Prime Minister Robert Fico as a recurrence of what he had viewed as problematic back in the 1990s during joint meetings of Korec and Mečiar. Palko called meetings between Cardinal Korec and Premier Fico unfortunate.

At the same time, Palko took a broader look at the performance of the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) that risked its popularity in return for consistent effort to promote Christian principles in politics and refused to kowtow to populism wrapped in a tricolour and a double cross. As an example, he cited the treaty on conscientious objection that was the immediate reason for calling early elections in 2006. According to Palko, KDH members who advocated the treaty that was once viewed so important by the Catholic Church believe not only that their endeavour was futile but that it put them in a disadvantage before the 2006 elections.

In this author's opinion, Vladimír Palko relatively precisely described Korec's position on national issues. When so-called sovereignty of Slovakia was proclaimed in 1992, Korec attended celebrations at the Bratislava Castle; his participation at celebrations of St. Constantine and Methodius at the Devín Castle in 2008 was already mentioned. Palko reproached Korec for failing to see that after 15 years, Slovakia is again ruled by communists. Palko concluded by arguing that public interpretation of facts is equally important as facts themselves and pointing out that Korec's public attitudes, his statements or silence, endorsement or opposition were watched very closely and had a strong information value.

Palko argued that the public was confused by the authority Cardinal Korec had earned by his courageous resistance to communist oppression. He evaluated Korec's admiration of Vladimír Mečiar as the founder of independent Slovakia and his praise of restored understanding among highest constitutional officials following the most recent parliamentary elections as unfortunate. Palko concluded his article by the following observation: "Slovak Christianity stands before a thorough discussion in which it will be necessary to utter even some unpleasant words peacefully. We cannot move further without it."[29]

A reaction by Cardinal Korec was extensive, self-defensive and reacted to Palko's particular arguments and assertions. Quite surprisingly, it was not free of not very pleasant personal invectives *ad hominem*. On the other hand, the Cardinal's reaction failed to explain his pandering to national social populism of Mečiar and Fico or his apparent sympathies to National Socialism of the wartime Slovak State. It seems that Korec's response put

an end to the effort to provoke a public debate on unpleasant issues, at least before the public's eyes anyway.

Confused public – partly on account of the KDH

With respect to this polemic, this author feels compelled to add that the large gap between the time when criticized developments took place and the time of criticism casts doubts over sincerity of Palko's effort to launch an open debate. At the time when leaders of Nitra and Trnava dioceses provided moral support to founder of the Slovak Republic Vladimír Mečiar and his policies, KDH leaders remained silent; consequently, few observers attach any importance or information value to Palko's belated analysis of past events.

False loyalty of Christian Democratic leaders with respect to Vladimír Mečiar was also manifested after the 1998 parliamentary elections. Back then, KDH Chairman Ján Čarnogurský dismissed some politicians' proposals to investigate apparent crimes perpetrated during the Mečiar administration's rule, arguing that founding fathers of the state deserve due deference.

In fall 2008, part of the KDH parliamentary caucus supported national populists who proposed to adopt *Lex Hlinka* and voted in favour of the law. It was hilarious to watch the rivalry between the KDH and the SNS over whose bill would finally be accepted, although the hilarity somehow fades away in the light of Černová tragedy's complexity. Similar overlooking of the connection between Christianity and national populism with respect to policies of the HSĽS during the period of 1939–1945 is more than symptomatic for KDH positions.

Generally speaking, Vladimír Palko put his finger on certain problematic issues in Slovakia's post-November development when Catholics in Slovakia were confused by some church dignitaries who preferred particular national benefits or limited ethnocentric interpretations to actions complying with general ethical values.

On the other hand, Vladimír Palko was among those politicians whose silence actually encouraged Archbishop Ján Sokol or Cardinal Ján Chryzostom Korec in their public endorsement of nationalism and overt expressions of sympathies with respect to National Socialism.

Only time can tell whether Palko's newfound courage to criticize Cardinal Korec's behaviour from 15 years ago is honest; politically, though, one may say that Palko is working a lost cause. Fooled by national populism dressed in a church habit, Roman Catholic Slovakia will always trust an archbishop or a cardinal rather than Vladimír Palko.

Conclusion

National populism offers relatively simple and mobilizing solutions without making any demands of its supporters, particularly in the time of complicated societal processes; however, national populism has its value profile as well as the actual price that must eventually be paid by its upholders, victims of their manipulation and the entire society, including Christians who fail to reject this pragmatic attitude that flies in the face of Christian values while it is still in its embryonic stage. At later stages, it evolves into a destructive social force that is difficult to manage and is even likely to receive support from a democratic system. To paraphrase Burke, it is enough if decent people don't do anything when they see the seeds of evil and injustice around them.

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Notes

1   In the context of Slovakia, I hereby refer primarily to Christian communities; based on my background, I shall be methodologically limited to my personal experience with Catholic, Protestant and Evangelistic Christianity.

2   Good examples in this respect include the status of women within churches, the position on homosexual relations, the right to hold clerical posts, etc.

3   During his meeting with representatives of churches in Slovakia, Prime Minister Robert Fico referred to state and church as the father and the mother, respectively, of his children – Slovak citizens. Source: *Sme* daily, January 25, 2008.

4   Štefan Polakovič: *Tisova náuka* [Tiso's Teachings], (Bratislava: HSĽS Publishing House, 1941, p. 27).

5   Ibid., p. 76).

6   Ibid., p. 157.

7   Ibid., p. 27.

8   František Tondra, Head of the Conference of Slovak Bishops, said it was impossible to take an unambiguous stance on the personality of Slovak President Jozef Tiso. "There are arguments for as well as against," he said. "Perhaps the greatest Tiso's 'sin' was that he was a Catholic priest." *ČTK* news agency, January 9, 2007; available at: http://spravy.pravda.sk/sk_domace.asp?r=sk_domace&c=A070109_185645_sk_domace_p12.

9   Please see http://www.aomega.sk/sk/nechceme_sa_prizerat.php.

10 In reaction to these statements, the *Sme* daily on February 12, 2007, published a commentary by Peter Salner and Jaro Franek, representatives of the Jewish religious community, titled "Tiso, socha a Jeruzalem" ['Tiso, Statue and Jerusalem'] that reads: "Recently, the Slovak public resumed a vivid public debate on the first Slovak Republic and its president Jozef Tiso. It is interesting to watch some of its participants help resurrect myths about this controversial politician. A good example of these efforts are statements by František Tondra, Head of the Conference of Slovak Bishops. [Mr. Tondra's] views regarding Jozef Tiso and the wartime Slovak State were presented in two articles the *Sme* daily published on Tuesday, February 6 (Re: "What about the Nation's Memory"), and on Saturday, February 10 ("Priest's Past Shall be Judged by the Lord"). Some of his assertions compel us to react."

"One of standard Ludak (*Ludak, pl. Ludaks:* an expression referring to active members of the Hlinka's Slovak People's Party, which was the only legitimate political party in the wartime Slovak State) myths is the assertion that "Jewish rabbis demanded that President Tiso remained in office". This nonsense was analyzed in detail and disproved beyond doubt by Professor Y. A. Jelinek in a article published in proceedings from *The Tragedy of Slovak Jews*, an international symposium held in Banská Bystrica on March 25–27, 1992 (pp. 121–124). Even more absurd is the figment (quoted by Mr. Tondra) according to which a statue was supposed to be unveiled in honour of Jozef Tiso in Jerusalem (!!). With respect to the latter assertion, we would like to express our astonishment that a person of such a high social status and title of professor before the name is able to subscribe publicly to nonsense of such calibre."

"The story about "Tiso's statue in Jerusalem" has many various mutations. The first reference to it appeared during the communist regime when the 1986 yearbook published by the Association of Anti-Fascist Warriors reprinted an article from exile Ludak press on page 134. By the late 1990s, the myth was fully resurrected in Slovakia. In reaction to it, the Jerusalem Magistrate published a statement on behalf of Ehud Olmert (then Mayor of Jerusalem and later the Israeli Prime Minister) reading that "there is no publicly displayed statue or plaque in honour of Jozef Tiso on the territory of greater Jerusalem". We are willing to produce a copy of this document."

"Head of the Conference of Slovak Bishops Tondra argues that Tiso is being criticized primarily because he was a Catholic priest. The truth is that Jozef Tiso was convicted and his sentence continues to apply on the moral as well as the legal level. He is criticized until the present day as a top official of the fascist state, as a president, politi-

cal leader and one of the most loyal collaborators of (or accomplices to) German Nazism and its leader Adolf Hitler. Bishop Tondra's statement turns the entire matter 'upside down'. Tiso is not being criticized because he was a Catholic priest; quite the contrary, it is why the Catholic Church defends him. For the same reason, the Conference of Slovak Bishops is unable to take a critical attitude to the period of Slovak fascism during which the Catholic Church enjoyed highly above-standard relations (including personal ties) with government organs."

"We are sorry that officials of an organization that exerts tremendous influence over (perhaps) millions of believers are unable to condemn fascism in concrete Slovak conditions and instead it stubbornly strives to glorify its top representative in Slovakia."

11 A declaration by the Conference of Slovak Bishops regarding the Vatican document on Holocaust called *"We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah"* from March 25, 1998; available at: http://www.kbs.sk/?cid=1118409627.

12 *SITA* news agency, June 4, 2009.

13 *SITA* news agency, January 5, 2009.

14 "The Slovak Catholic Church must begin to contemplate pastoral duties with respect to [ethnic] Hungarians in the 21st century," Csáky said. "I expect it to examine modern pastoral methods and search for the way to treat believers of other ethnic affiliation." Quoted by the *SITA* news agency, January 5, 2009.

15 Herdics, György – Zsidó, János: "Rímskokatolícka cirkev" ['The Roman Catholic Church'] in Fazekas, József – Hunčík, Péter (eds.): *Maďari na Slovensku (1984 – 2004). Súhrnná správa. Od zmeny režimu po vstup do Európskej únie* [Hungarians in Slovakia (1989–2004): A Global Report from Change of the Regime to Accession to the European Union], p. 418.

16 *TASR* news agency, January 7, 2009.

17 *Sme* daily, January 14, 2008.

18 *Sme* daily, July 6, 2009; available at: http://www.sme.sk/c/4921120/fico-na-oslavach-varoval-pred-madarskym-iredentizmom.html

19 *Sme* daily, July 6, 2009; available at: http://www.sme.sk/c/4921120/fico-na-oslavach-varoval-pred-madarskym-iredentizmom.html; http://video.sita.sk/videoservis/P-PASKA-Slovaci-sa-v-historii-nenechali-porazit-ziadnou-krizou/4911-play.html

20 *SITA* news agency, July 5, 2008.

21 *SITA* news agency, October 5, 2008; available at: http://www.webnoviny.sk/slovensko/clanok/22373/Slota-posilneny-domacim-ribezlovym-vinom-odhaloval-dvojkriz.html

22 The most widely publicized cases include that of Boston's Cardinal Bernard Law or never-materialized appointment of Archbishop of Warsaw Stanislaw Wojciech Wielgus.

23 In this context, one may refer to the issue of Hungarian bishop and chances to influence or force appointment of concrete candidates. On July 17, 2009, Slovak President Ivan Gašparovič signed an amendment to the *Law No. 270/1995 on State Language of the Slovak Republic as Amended*. The amendment caused a public furore as legislators paid little or no attention to comments presented by representatives of minorities and various civic platforms that urged them to withdraw or rework the amendment. Interestingly enough, not a single representative of Christian organizations or churches presented any relevant statement on the issue.

24 This was the so-called super-secessionist approach to Judaism in the first century A.D. when biblical Israel that failed in recognizing the Messiah was according to ordinary interpretations replaced by the New Israel, i.e. the Christian community that later evolved into church, which is a new, authentic community of believers. In the course of several centuries, this allegory became so broadly embraced within the Christian environment that

hardly anyone perceived it as allegory anymore. The processes of splitting Christianity that would follow went through similar phases as newly-defined communities rejected previous institutional forms and showed a strong tendency to portray themselves as a new community in the spirit of *New Israel* or the new and one true church. Naturally, the new community refused any connection with the preceding institution and its representatives. Good examples of this pattern include the Eastern Schism, the emergence of English Catholicism, the Western Schism and other splits of Christendom that would follow practically until the present day.

25 *Note on Expression "Sister Churches"*, a document by the Vatican Papal Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith proclaimed on June 30, 2000, and published in the Vatican-based daily *Osservatore Romano* on October 28, 2000; available at: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_pro_14071997_en.html

26 Ladislav Hanus: *Rozprava o kultúrnosti* [Treatise on Culture], (Ružomberok: 1943).

27 "Etiology" as defined by Heriban, Jozef: *Príručný lexikón biblických vied* [Handbook Lexicon of Biblical Sciences], (Rome, 1992, p. 365).

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LÁSZLÓ ÖLLÖS:
Time for Hungarian–Slovak Dialogue (Conclusion)

Looking at the results of the most recent elections to the European Parliament, an impartial observer might well conclude that mutual Hungarian-Slovak reconciliation has not been as out of reach since 1989 as it is today.[1] For three years before these elections, Hungary's political and public life had been confronted with phenomena such as harsh anti-Hungarian lashes by the Slovak National Party (SNS) Chairman Ján Slota, overall policies of the Slovak Government predetermined by his party's priorities, validation of the Beneš decrees by a resolution passed in the National Council of the Slovak Republic, the case of Hedviga Malinová, thrashing of football fans in Dunajská Streda by the police, campaign before the most recent presidential elections and generally intensified anti-Hungarian sentiments in Slovakia. Hungary's political leaders as well as the public opinion followed these developments with astonishment, mostly because the party representing ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia, namely the Party of Hungarian Coalition (SMK–MKP), had been an important part of the ruling coalition for eight years and played a key role in toppling the authoritarian administration of Vladimír Mečiar, restoring the country's democratization process, facilitating its accession to the North Atlantic Alliance (NATO) and the European Union (EU) and implementing successful structural and economic reforms.

Except minor mistakes, Hungary's political leaders reacted to intensified attacks by relatively astute manoeuvring. After a long time, the opposition and the government stopped publicly attacking each other in order to make foreign policy problems become domestic political issues. One might even say that if was not for the minor mistakes and a handful of far-right formations, Hungary might have celebrated a resounding diplomatic success in the squabble provoked by the Slovak side. But it didn't. The far-right sub-

jects have become a stable part of political life in Slovakia as well as in Hungary, and this is not likely to change too soon. Another problem awaiting solution is the Forum of Hungarian Deputies of the Carpathian Basin. Last but not least, the Hungarian side must ask itself a question of how the Slovak public perceives the fruits of its policies.

On the other hand, even the previously unseen cooperation between the government and the opposition in Hungary cannot camouflage the fact that for two decades since the social change of 1989, Hungary's political leaders along with political representatives of ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia have been unable to come up with solutions to problems of the Hungarian minority that would stand a chance to succeed. Consequently, they have been unable to raise mutual Slovak–Hungarian relations from the level of virtual cold war into a level of such peace that could be understood and embraced by the majority of both nations.

Looking back, even the referendum on double citizenship seems as the bottom of one crisis process rather than the pinnacle of one development stage. The Hungarian national thought still does not seem to have overcome this crisis. Already at the Monor negotiations, the most important streams of the Hungarian underground tried to reach a consensus over rejecting the communist regime and helping ethnic Hungarians abroad. But the Monor agreement did not last even until the first free elections.[2] From this point on, the issue of ethnic Hungarians became part of internal political and power struggle, particularly during election campaigns; in other words, it became a tool to defeat political opponents.

One of prevailing strategies of the post-Monor period was that of force. It was based on an assumption that it was possible to force neighbouring countries to granting autonomy for ethnic Hungarians living on their territories, recognizing their language as an official language and providing them with everything else ethnic minorities need to survive. Advocates of this strategy believed they did not need to take into account the public opinion in neighbouring countries because for them the principal path to success was not persuasion but (political) pressure. They argued that aggressive anti-Hungarian sentiment was the fundamental element of neighbouring nations' national consciousness and as such it could not be uprooted; therefore, one must create conditions to apply pressure in order to achieve the desired objective.

But if the Hungarians' image in neighbouring nations is truly full of anxiety and unchangeable aggressiveness, then a pressure from abroad may only be successful only if the threat it implies is greater than the imaginary threat posed by ethnic Hungarians themselves; in other words, if the exter-

nal danger exceeds the alleged danger of ethnic Hungarians disrupting the state's territorial integrity. For this pressure to be effective, it is necessary to demonstrate the actual danger of disintegration and separation of some of its territories and only then compare it to the consequences of granting full-fledged rights to ethnic Hungarians. Only in this kind of comparison does granting of full-fledged minority rights represent a lesser 'threat'.

Even in the past, this policy of force was way beyond Hungary's actual potential, let alone the facts that it would sharply contradict internal principles of the EU and that one NATO member state cannot pose a military threat to another NATO member state. Within the framework of allied systems Hungary has identified with, it is impossible to create a greater threat than the already existing anxiety about ethnic Hungarians. Therefore, pursuing solely the policy of force may bring partial – though often very important – achievements but not a fundamental turning point that would lead to equality and national freedom of ethnic Hungarians. The point is that pressure alone can never lead to reconciliation between two nations.

Advocates of the competitive strategy expected the democratization process to produce the critical change that could make neighbouring nations reconcile with their ethnic Hungarians and grant them full-fledged minority rights. They believed that if ethnic Hungarians' representatives played an active role in removing the communist dictatorship and in subsequent political and economic processes that led to establishing a liberal democratic regime, then at some point along the way majority nations could grant full-fledged minority rights to ethnic Hungarians and recognize their national equality. Meanwhile, it has become obvious that even participation in the democratization process cannot alone bring about a change in the majority nation's perception of ethnic Hungarians.

Furthermore, the case of Slovakia shows that democratization process is not necessarily linear but from time to time it sways toward authoritarianism, encouraging within public opinion anti-Hungarian sentiments full of anxiety, intolerance and distrust and thus playing into the hands of power centralization. When the democratization process advances linearly, ethnic minorities may achieve certain – even significant – progress in terms of their social status but not a fundamental turning point that would make neighbouring nations recognize the rights necessary for ethnic minorities' full-fledged development and essentially change their overall perception of the Hungarian nation. Most Slovaks' hostility and suspicion with respect to ethnic Hungarians will not easily change into friendship and trust.

An inevitable precondition to reconciliation is a change in the nation's system of values and even a change in the currently prevailing concept of

nation. This necessity is realized by only a handful of individuals who fail to spread the idea of change further.[3] Only precious moments of sincere political cooperation have produced such joint Slovak–Hungarian declarations that featured important elements of national reconciliation.[4]

Of course, there have been attempts. In early 1990s, the issue of both countries' national future was discussed at many intellectual meetings. Unfortunately, these meetings and conferences could at best abrade the edges of antagonistic notions of nation but not change them essentially because these opinion exchanges failed to spark a general public debate. Consequently, these intellectuals and their views became isolated; even if some upholders of such views by chance made it to executive positions, they were soon steamrolled by advocates of harder or softer models of Slovak–Hungarian national hostility.

While these former intellectuals showed more tolerance and made various concessions with respect to members of ethnic minorities, their presence in executive power structures did not bring about an essential change. Coalition governments in Slovakia avoided an open public debate on fundamental issues of Slovak–Hungarian relations even when they comprised ethnic Hungarians' representatives. So it happened that the issue of mutual relations was appropriated by advocates of national exclusiveness who began to harp on about Hungarians' two-facedness, their historical sins, the Trianon trauma that determines their nature and actions, the assimilation of Slovaks in Hungary and their oppression in southern Slovakia, secret attempts to change state borders and called on the Slovak nation to come together and oust ethnic Hungarians along with more tolerant Slovaks – who were traitors in their eyes – from power. The state must be defended no matter what!

It seems that those who decided to rule the country jointly with ethnic Hungarians chose a wrong strategy. First, they refused to address the issue of ethnic Hungarians and let those who prefer authoritarianism to constitutional democracy and Russian and Chinese allies – let alone Milošević and some Muslim dictators – to Euro-Atlantic integration to take advantage. Later, when these politicians were forced to nail their colours to the mast, it turned out that – except rather isolated exceptions – they also viewed Hungary and Hungarians as a source of danger. In other words, they refused to take the bull by the horns not because they would not want to but because they knew they could not live up to the task.

In 2007, most of these politicians helped pass a parliament's resolution drafted by the SNS on the unalterable status of Beneš decrees. A year later, during the parliamentary debate on Kosovo independence, most speakers

conspicuously avoided addressing one of fundamental questions of constitutional democracy: shall the state have the right to demand loyalty from citizens it strives to massacre or drive them out of their homeland? A negative answer to this question would immediately lead to the issue of Beneš decrees. The declaration adopted by the Slovak parliament implies a positive though unspoken answer to this question: yes, the state shall have the right to demand loyalty also from those of its citizens who belong to the minority and who this very state intends to exterminate or drive them out in masses.

Combining the value systems of Hitlerism and Stalinism with various opinion streams that accept the concept of constitutionalism produces very peculiar kinds of social, Christian, civic, liberal and other democrats. This phenomenon may be observed not only in Slovakia but all over the ambiguous region of Central Europe, although the Hungarians became its most recent victims.

The principal message of the present study is that an ideology formed in such a utilitarian way can never change by itself. It can only be changed as a result of an open public debate in which the general public may learn about other viable alternatives. Those who stick to their democratic values may benefit from such a debate; on the other hand, the absence of a public debate in the world of relative values puts them in a disadvantage. The public debate is likely to catalyze self-reflection and self-correction of those who view their own interest as the ultimate value and are able to turn anything – including emerging aggressive national sentiments – to their advantage. Therefore, the public debate may weaken the social credit of aggressive national fanatics.

New values may only sprout in the public consciousness if they are openly advertised in a public debate. But if the discussion fails to evolve into a full-fledged public debate and remains in the domain of the political elite or isolated groups of intellectuals, the new values will only reach the public after they pass through various ideological filters.

So, there is no change in the system of values without an open public debate on these values. This is the principal message of Enlightenment. The problem is that aggressiveness of national states partly inhibited or redirected this process.

When one public opinion poll recently established that pupils of the final grade of Slovak primary schools consider ethnic Hungarians to be the most unlikeable category of non-Slovak fellow compatriots, many beheld the nightmare of future burdened by conflicts. One can ill turn a blind eye on the fact that Slovaks tend to view ethnic Hungarians with overt hostili-

ty or at least suspiciously. The reasons for this *status quo* do not merely include historic experience but also contemporary interests and prevailing opinion streams.

Our age is dominated by several ideological streams that view conflicts between individuals or entire social groups as the foundation of society and state. Although few leaders publicly subscribe to it, one of prevailing ideological streams in modern Slovakia that in many respects continues in the footsteps of the communist regime of Gustáv Husák is a stream that strives for dialectic update and preservation of the greatest possible number of original elements of Leninism that was ideologically rooted in Marxism. Under the pressure ensuing from the change of regime that inevitably made upholders of this ideology reject it formally, their objective has become to preserve as much of it as possible for the largest possible scope of subjects; in other words, the goal is to conserve the ideological content by altering its form. Political leaders confronted with ideological problems ensuing from the public's changing moods during the process of regime transformation may dialectically respond to them by embracing certain elements of ideological streams that are close to the original content or external formal elements of the given ideological stream.

If politicians are compelled to seek a new and effective form of class struggle against internal as well as external enemies (like Leninism managed to), it may result in most peculiar combinations. The Leninist understanding of philosophy-turned-ideology views the argumentation system a tool of attaining power goals. Its principal benchmark is the outcome, i.e. victory. In the context of this understanding, other ideologies may also prove to be formally effective in a modern society. Nationalism may be successfully mixed with socialism, some elements of fascism, early as well as late variants of elitism, utilitarianism, etc. The tradition of regional small producers' hostility with respect to tycoons and the tradition of politics for the people may complement the elite's notions about inevitability of class and national struggle.

The essence of these syntheses is the conviction that the history of mankind has always been propelled by struggle as opposed to peace, freedom, justice and cooperation. Many Slovak politicians and their ideological allies may rightfully believe that they owe their individual careers to this knowledge. It was this flexible ideological formula that made them abandon the once almighty Communist Party and continue their careers in a great multitude of new parties; that was what enabled them defeat their internal party rivals; last but not least, that was what allowed them to fan the flames of inherited emotions that will secure their voter support.

One of possible outcomes of these efforts is populism, which is a hotch-potch of ideologized value systems amalgamated by utilitarian needs and driven by the overriding concept of gaining and preserving power. To the droves of voters they otherwise despise, populist politicians sell the illusion of participation in political decision-making based on emotional identification. On the first glimpse, it is some kind of hybrid conservatism as the tools used by political leaders feature a much broader scope of political traditions compared to previous periods; on the other hand, the users of these tools do not feel bound by moral principles.

The backbone of populism is expedience, i.e. political success. In an ideal condition, it has two principal actors: first, a politician-entrepreneur who views the original ideas as a tool for progress and subscribes to the individualized idea of waging a permanent campaign against everybody; second, a crowd that supports such a politician, manipulated by the bureaucratic machinery that fulfils the role of an ideologist. For old-time politicians who sought their niche in the new social order, aggressive anti-minority nationalism that was amplified in the final stages of communism seemed to be the perfect tool to undermine revolutionaries' legitimacy and reinvent their own. On their quest, they found close allies among utilitarian upholders of the perished authoritarianism and heirs of fascist traditions.

Hungary's policy of pressure that does not strive to appeal to the Slovak public is absolutely expedient for these politicians; anytime they deem it necessary, they may point out the Hungarian neighbour's despotic behaviour. As long as the majority of political leaders endorse latently or overtly hostile attitudes with respect to another nation, this *status quo* cannot be changed even by government rotations conforming to the rules of constitutional democracy. The hostile attitudes cannot be eliminated by ethnic Hungarians' government participation, both countries' Euro-Atlantic integration, abolition of custom borders or expanding regionalism.

Constitutional value systems of political communities do not develop primarily as the consequence of violence that has befallen them. If it was so, each military conflict or war would put the communities involved to a qualitatively higher level of constitutionality thanks to violence alone. Much more important to development of political communities' constitutional value systems are new ideas as well as public debates and polemics on these ideas that in the ripe historical period appeal to the critical mass of society; along the same lines, the progress is a direct result of embracing new values that spread thanks to such discussions. This conclusion applies despite the undisputable fact that horrors of injustice and violence often provide the principal impulse to the birth and promulgation of new ideas.

253

As long as the mutual Hungarian–Slovak dialogue produces results that will be viewed as tangible by the critical mass of both countries' political communities, then those who prefer national reconciliation based on mutual justice to overt or latent hostility may prevail within both countries' electorates. These voters will seek to rid the political system of the burden of ethnic anxiety; however, they must be prepared for ruthless and relentless resistance to reconciliation as those who fan the flames of fear in both nations will be fully aware that the basic pillar of their legitimacy is being undermined.

But is the time ripe for this kind of change? Is the proper historic moment upon us? Let us take a look at what has changed compared to the system of relations established in the 20th century. Most importantly, Hungary and Slovakia have become full-fledged members of NATO and the EU, which renders any attempts to change borders in a violent fashion impossible. Consequently, encouraging the feelings of threat does not support actual efforts to change national borders or prevent it for that matter. The only motive behind it is establishing or strengthening voters' irrational ties to political parties. In fact, most of these ghosts and apparitions are conjured up out of political reasons in order to gain power. On the other hand, the clash between political leaders' domestic interests and the reality also gives birth to the opposition that unmasks the attempts to encourage fears of changing borders. Nowadays, the Slovaks themselves believe that the Hungarian threat does not exist and that the notion is invoked by groups that find it expedient out of political reasons. In Slovakia's domestic politics, the 'Hungarian threat' has gradually become a power tool that lacks the actual threat and now serves a different purpose. As a result, the source of threat has become one of fundamental issues of democracy.

In the process of Slovak–Hungarian dialogue, it would be very desirable to acknowledge that the courage to concede historical wrongs and remove the disadvantaged status of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia does not threaten the state's unity in any way. Maintaining the state of ethnic inequality, obscuring past wrongs and inhuman acts and encouraging the majority's feeling of danger does not threaten state borders but the democratic system of values. Elimination of inequality is the moral right of the disadvantaged as well as the moral obligation of the privileged; however, the new constitutional value system must offer something extra also to those who were previously among the privileged. To them, relinquishing the national dominance does not imply uncertainty and danger, which is why their sacrifice is relative.[5] On the other hand, relinquishing power privileges extends the scope of their own freedom and helps them build their own

future. If they are able to replace hostility toward another nation with alliance, then they themselves will become better, freer and richer; likewise, their national life will not become more endangered but more secure.

But in order to achieve a new state of affairs, Slovakia and its Hungarian neighbour must be bound together by something more than common economic interests or common NATO and EU membership. They must develop a close and special relation inspiring a mutual conviction that our allies would not threaten us even if they had an opportunity. A national advantage ensuing from an allied relation is rightfully considered more important than a national advantage acquired at the expense of others.

The Hungarians do not have to relinquish those forms of pressure that are internationally acceptable as they may well continue to be useful and effective. What they must give up is using ambiguous terms and 'toying' with the issue of border inviolability. A Central European ear is extremely sensitive to such ambiguities, particularly if two-facedness is typical for both sides of the issue.

Is it possible at all to conduct such a discussion with the political community of neighbouring states if it contradicts interests of a significant share of their political elite? Judging from options that were available in the past, the answer must be negative because basic national communication means were traditionally in the hands of national states.[6] In the 21st century, though, this *status quo* is beginning to change: the Internet is getting out of control; many television and radio stations are not under immediate government control anymore; a certain segment of the print media is willing to provide space to such discussions.[7] In the age of international human rights conventions, national states are unable to restrict publication of books and magazines or distribution of films in neighbouring nations' languages; within the EU, it is impossible to restrict imports of such merchandise by trade barriers. Innovation and price decline have become perpetual qualities of electronic media that allow for independent mass communication. National states' power institutions can indeed be circumvented!

If citizens of Slovakia could receive information on each Slovak–Hungarian affair on an everyday basis sitting in front of their computers in the comfort of their homes; if tens and hundreds of thousands of people could read the works of Bibó, Jászi and other great thinkers of the past and – even more importantly – the works of contemporary Hungarian authors thanks to the Internet and electronic media; if droves of Slovak students and pupils were invited to Slovak–Hungarian cultural and social events (e.g. summer camps); if Hungarian authors regularly published their ideas in Slovak periodical press, then the task of anti-Hungarian ideologists would become infi-

nitely more complicated. Therefore, it is highly desirable to spread the part of Hungarian culture that deals with mutual relations between Central European nations on a regular, as opposed to occasional, basis. It is also highly desirable to distribute studies, films, documentaries and everything that may further mutual understanding – all this in Slovak language, of course!

It is generally desirable that Hungarian culture and its personalities are presented in Slovak. Hungarian intellectuals should consider publishing their works also in neighbouring nations' languages because it is at least as important as publishing in world languages. The Hungarian nation lives and will continue to live in this region. Furthermore, the basis for Hungarian argumentation in potential discussions should not be grievances and wrongs of the Hungarians but those of the neighbouring nation – in this case the Slovaks – including prejudices of the nationalized public. After all, changing these prejudices should be the principal objective of such discussions.

The Slovak–Hungarian reconciliation would be necessary even if neighbouring countries were completely free of ethnic Hungarians. Members of ethnic minorities are not the only ones in need of national reconciliation, although they suffer the most from its absence. The point is that Hungarian constitutionality is not only related to constitutionality of neighbouring countries inhabited by ethnic Hungarians but directly concerns it. Both sides tend to believe that the other side is the source of national threat, which profoundly affects people's notions of nation and state, creation of the image of enemy, their concepts of preferred political systems and human rights of both the Hungarians and neighbouring nations.

Instead of hostility stemming from the feeling of threat, neighbouring states co-inhabited by ethnic Hungarians should embrace a long-term strategy of friendship with the Hungarians and alliance with Hungary. In order to launch a public debate on such a strategy, it must first be formulated.

The attempts to conjure up the apparition of Hungarian threat are not bound to encounter meaningful resistance until a new national doctrine is born. Without such a doctrine, even politicians with a moderate position on the so-called Hungarian issue can do nothing but pursue a more reasonable and more tactical minority policy that is accepted abroad and does not hamper the country's Euro-Atlantic integration but simultaneously preserves existing national inequality. So, although these politicians oppose harsh and aggressive anti-Hungarian sentiments,[8] they actually contribute to undermining ethnic minorities and even eliminating them in the long term.[9] Before their political supporters, they dissociate themselves from the radicals in terms of tactics but not in terms of the essence. While this political constellation does not prevent ethnic Hungarian parties from participating

in government, it is not likely to bring about national reconciliation because only tactical solutions available are those that in the given moment suit political interests of all those involved.[10] This kind of political situation usually produces arguments in favour of pursuing a 'more cunning' minority policy or furthering minority interests in a 'more cunning' way. Neither of the two approaches is likely to change the essence of mutual relations between the majority and the minority.

Still, it would be a grave mistake to underestimate the potential influence of ethnic Hungarians' successful government participation on the overall system of values. Even though government participation is unable to change fundamental principles of minority policy by itself, it may substantially reduce negative feelings of the general public with respect to ethnic Hungarians. Successful members of the cabinet are free to develop important power positions and win recognition of the population group whose problems they are supposed to deal with. Government participation offers ethnic Hungarian politicians communication possibilities they could not hope for in the opposition, especially as members of the party that is widely viewed as an organization of the national enemy and therefore remains isolated even within the opposition. New communication channels provide ethnic Hungarian leaders with an opportunity to inform about problems of ethnic Hungarians the general public did not know about or its knowledge has been filtered by the national state. Effective communication could make the general public accept the situation in which ethnic Hungarians participate in tackling not only their specific problems but national problems as well. Yet, this acceptance does not imply perception of government participation as something ethnic Hungarians would be automatically entitled to.

In a word, government participation of ethnic Hungarians may constitute an important step toward national reconciliation as long as this administration is perceived positively; however, it fails to generate long-term solutions to most national problems of ethnic Hungarians unless there is an overall change in the nation's image. Government participation itself is unable to change the image of ethnic Hungarians in the eyes of the majority. That is why aggressive anti-Hungarian sentiments become part of official government policies as soon as ethnic Hungarians are ousted from government.

So far, government ambitions of ethnic Hungarian political parties in Slovakia lacked a well-conceived plan to change the way the majority perceives ethnic Hungarians. While individual political leaders did show some effort, their isolated attempts never grew into joint, deliberate endeavour. Discussions on this issue were usually triggered by specific legislative initiatives or executive measures concerning ethnic Hungarians, i.e. when they

focused on concrete goals or interests of ethnic Hungarians, but much less frequently when they focused on more general problems such as power abuse and arrogance of politicians who based their authority and legitimacy largely on anti-Hungarian sentiments.[11]

Sticking to pragmatism, parties representing ethnic Hungarians focused rather on filling posts within public administration organs, strengthening minority cultural institutions and achieving their economic goals while avoiding debates their leaders viewed as ideological and futile. But there is an essential difference between ideological debates and discussions on the value system. While the former primarily serve the purpose of attaining power goals of politics, the latter may also be directed against power goals. In no case must such a dialogue become a political tool; on the contrary, it should create space for examining fundamental cohesion principles of society or a political community even when it contradicts power interests or even those of the majority.[12]

That is why politicians embedded in the value system of power are never able to participate in these discussions in a constructive way. A dialogue with them quickly turns ideological because they use it to strengthen their own power positions and undermine those of their opponents. Perhaps that is why the opinion confrontation with the majority's political representatives seemed ideological and – after several verbal squabbles that also featured some power elements – futile to ethnic Hungarian leaders who were after swift success and rapid results.

But it is these discussions that give birth to new ideas. Since the Age of Enlightenment, the luckier half of Europe is well aware that just like politicians have the power to thwart or hinder the birth of works that generate fundamental ideas of the new age, they are equally equipped to create favourable conditions for the birth of these ideas and make sure that they are conveyed to their principal addressees, i.e. members of the political community. Modern political communities may speak of a true change in the system of values if the change concerns not only intellectuals and the ruling political elite but also a critical majority of community members. In an ideal case, the political community of a given country freely comprises citizens of different nationality.[13]

Based on historical experience of the 19th and 20th century, we are compelled to make one rather obvious observation. At the turn of the 21st century, reaching a constitutional consensus rests with citizens who make up the state. This process must not be interfered by alien military force and cannot be thwarted by nationalists from neighbouring states. It is solely up to these citizens whether they reach it or not; at this point in history, they

cannot make any excuses or blame anybody else. Consequently, it is solely up to people who make up the Hungarian nation whether they strive to reconcile with their neighbours at the beginning of the 21st century; along the same lines, it is up to the Slovaks whether they decide to establish national reconciliation with the Hungarians. Many players would like to intervene with this decision-making; however, in our period they cannot prevent information on their efforts from reaching both countries' citizens.

Both countries' leading political representatives would certainly view such a process with suspicion and would probably try to thwart it. In compliance with their own system of values, some of them would perceive it purely ideologically and would understand it as a propagandistic attack on their own authority just because they themselves maintain influence through propaganda that is a combination of aggressive ideologies. In other words, the project's failure would benefit or at least suit many. Nevertheless, much is to be achieved. For one, most ordinary people would like to support national reconciliation and they will if they are given an opportunity. For two, government is not the only channel to appeal to the population of a democratic European state; if there is a will, there are many other ways to convey a message to inhabitants of a neighbouring country.

Hungary's political community including politicians and various interest groups with different value systems may reach a consensus regarding this issue by, for instance, extracting the reconciliation issue from the category of domestic political issues and making it a nationwide objective. Quite frankly, any other strategy would hardly seem viable. It is difficult to imagine a neighbouring country reaching a constitutional consensus over its ethnic Hungarians if Hungary itself is unable to reach such a consensus. In no country do changes in the value system happen overnight. It is obvious that tangible results may only be achieved through relentless endeavour that spans a number of electoral terms. Hopefully, Hungary's political community along with its leaders may just agree to embark on the said task.

The constitutional consensus over the issue of ethnic Hungarians would not only benefit Hungarian minorities in neighbouring countries as it would essentially affect also the national identity of Hungarians living in Hungary. An issue that may not significantly affect everyday existence of average Hungarian citizens but nevertheless forms an important part of their concept of the nation's future would simply be lifted from the frontline of domestic political battles and elevated among values and objectives that are subscribed to and often publicly presented by political parties as well as government leaders. This would amount to renaissance of the constitutional consensus regarding one of principal issues of the Hungarian nation's future.

Of course, one cannot rule out that the *status quo* will linger on and that Hungary along with ethnic Hungarians in neighbouring countries will remain unable to force these countries to guarantee conditions for their ethnic Hungarians' equal development and continue to do very little to change neighbouring nations' systems of values. In other words, the Hungarian Government will continue to provide the inevitable aid and cultural support, pursue diplomatic efforts to prevent most serious wrongs, strengthen cross-border ties and lobby for implementation and/or perfection of international human rights standards, knowing that even a combination of all these efforts is insufficient to preserve ethnic Hungarians' national identity in the long term.

On the other hand, Hungary and ethnic Hungarians could attempt to accomplish something completely new: in their respective countries, they could try to trigger the kind of public debate whose absence prevents the change in the system of values without which mutual relations between the Hungarians and their neighbours will never improve.

In order to achieve that, it is inevitable to reject especially the national culture of total moral relativism – which was dubbed Balkan or Eastern but has recently been emulated also in the Western world,[14] feeding back its traditional eastern source – that views application of all available means as nationally justifiable. Political leaders must abandon the conviction that the pivotal element of the national interest is expansion at the expense of others and that the overriding principle of the national interest, i.e. dominance, stands above all other values. As any other value that has been formulated as an antithesis to universal human values, this value includes an inherent conflict of various formulations and, of course, their formulators.

In this particular case, it is the mutual conflict between supreme values of the Romanians, the Slovaks, the Serbs, the Ukrainians, and of course the Hungarians. This conflict is further complicated by conflicts of differently formulated national values and their authors within particular national communities. Without universal moral principles and without a consensus based on their universal acceptance, force will remain the only method of settling disputes. It is force that will have to arbitrate conflicts between Hungary and its neighbours; not only that, the institution of force will also be applied to settle disputes between differently formulated national interests – or better yet – between interests proclaimed national in particular states by some parties without other parties' approval.

We have to ask ourselves some vital questions: What might be the share of majority nations in neighbouring countries that are prepared to embrace national reconciliation? What population groups or demographic categories

are prepared to embrace it? What are the chances of extending their ranks in the time of increasingly closer economic ties, cross-border cooperation, creation of trans-border regions and other bonds? Who are the principal opponents of national reconciliation? Will mutual competition between states not cause their ranks to increase?

The rate of liking or disliking of neighbouring nations is quite individual. Equally individual is the rate to which certain individuals encourage and expediently abuse aggressive national sentiments, let alone their methods. It is important to define this rate in both sub-communities because it largely determines the space for future activities of proponents as well as opponents of national reconciliation. Also, all these factors should be examined separately for each country because they obviously differ from one country to another.

The Hungarians should also be examined from identical viewpoints. They must answer a legitimate question: Is it truly possible to create an atmosphere of national reconciliation with neighbours who are suspicious as it is when symbols of Hungarian national revanchism regularly appear during rallies and scuffles on the streets of Budapest, at events organized by paramilitary organizations and even at football matches in neighbouring countries? It will certainly not be easy as public manifestation of revanchist symbolism plays into the hands of reconciliation's opponents who do not wish to eliminate national aggressiveness. The apparition of threat amplified by the media puts advocates of reconciliation into a difficult position.

Equally counterproductive is the equivocal rhetoric used by Hungarian and ethnic Hungarian politicians regarding stability of borders in the region. They believe they can get away with ambiguous statements on border stability during talks with western politicians if they interpret particular statements in a desirable way. They view equivocalness as an effective tool to mount pressure on neighbouring countries and win sympathies of domestic radicals at the same time. In fact, this equivocalness has grave consequences as it suits those political leaders in neighbouring countries that also play the card of national threat and are free to use the ambiguities to their own advantage by attaching them any meaning they please. Even worse, these politicians go even further and strive to attribute hidden meaning also to unambiguous statements by Hungarian officials. Last but not least, western political leaders learned a great deal about the politics of ambiguity and double communication in the Yugoslavian war; they are well aware that authors of ambiguous statements resort to interpreting their own words as the situation requires.

Still, a fruitful discussion with neighbouring states' citizens may not necessarily be doomed if only Hungary reached the mentioned constitu-

tional consensus. The moral sinew of a joint decision should be able to pre-vail over advocates of aggressiveness. On the other hand, the absence of the consensus will certainly thwart any chances of reconciliation. If any segment of Hungary's political community continues to exploit the issue of ethnic Hungarians in domestic power squabbles, use ambiguous rhetoric regarding the issue of border stability, revive hostile sentiments, and remain passive regarding the reconciliation issue while limiting itself to verbal skir-mishes with leading political groupings, then chances of national reconcil-iation are very slim.

An even worse alternative is the situation in which one segment of Hungary's political community behaves in a described way, i.e. fuels ten-sions in neighbourly relations and plays the minority card in the struggle for power, while the other segment expends all its energy on neutralizing the damages caused. The result is a fragile equilibrium in which two antag-onistic segments accuse each other of pointless and futile nationalism on the one hand and national insensitivity or even capitulation on the other.

The image individual nations form about themselves and other nations as well as basic principles of building a state are affected by many factors. In successor states to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the image of Hungarians has been certainly affected by Hungary's neighbourly and national policies with respect to its neighbours, activities of ethnic Hungarians living on their territories, actual as well as imaginary expecta-tions, efforts and decisions of foreign subjects (especially superpowers) and of course these states' own actual and imaginary interests.

But the factor that affects Hungary's image the most is the concept of nation preferred by neighbouring states' political communities and their rul-ing political elites as well as their respective systems of political values. That is why the policy that advertises good neighbourly relations between the Hungarians on the one hand and Slovaks, Romanians, Serbs or Ukrainians on the other may in certain concrete cases help ethnic Hungarians coexisting with them. Unfortunately, it is not enough to change neighbouring countries' official doctrines with respect to the Hungarians; such a change requires a change in the system of values with respect to ethnic Hungarians living in these countries. So far, Hungary's political endeavour has been targeted primarily on the ruling political elite in these countries, which has not produced desirable results.

If we do not consider liberal democracy to be a chess board for the pleasure of power elites but rather a system created and maintained by the political community,[15] then a legitimate question is whether there is some new way of appealing to the political community despite the fact that a

majority of the political elite focuses on clogging already known ways. The answer to this question should probably be positive, for if such a way had not existed, the profound changes of our political culture that also took place against the will of the powerful would have been rendered impossible. The repressive means of the absolutism were unable to halt the Enlightenment, just like even more developed repressive means of the communist dictatorship were unable to prevent the change of the regime.

A number of western European states abandoned their national plans aimed at eliminating their ethnic minorities long ago and introduced multicultural autonomy models or consociation mechanisms. Such a change in priorities could be interpreted as a purely utilitarian decision since each change is brought about by concrete political interests; however, similar interests existed also in the past but did not affect the political elite's position until the national majority's system of values with respect to ethnic minorities changed.

In this particular case, the path seems to be even bumpier and often impassable because after 1989 the entire Central European region embraced purely utilitarian models of political decision-making that view any scrupulosity (not only with respect to nation) as unnecessary and inexpedient. An essential element of these models is populism that does not hesitate to use any assertions and arguments as long as they seem expedient from the viewpoint of gaining or preserving power. The deeply rooted national animosity in this region has a prominent place in politicians' communication methods and power calculations. In our time, the essence of anti-Hungarian sentiment is not a rational reaction to actual threat; instead, the sentiment itself has become an effective political tool that lives its own life even in the absence of actual threat.

In order to increase this tool's effectiveness, politicians seek to justify it in the eyes of the public by creating an illusion of threat that does not exist in reality. That is why it is necessary for the sake of national reconciliation to create consistent opposition to arguments in favour of eliminating ethnic Hungarians as well as to power interests related to political expediency of preserving the anti-Hungarian sentiment.

It seems to be an impossible task, mostly because the national state controls education system and is supported by an army of intellectuals who view elimination of ethnic Hungarians as a legitimate national goal. A significant share of these intellectuals was socialized as part of clerical intelligentsia during the communist regime, which is why ideology and propaganda is not strange to their system of values.

But there have been several crucial changes since 1918 when Czechoslovakia was founded. Most importantly, state borders became invi-

olable. It was crystal clear immediately after the change of regime in 1989 that state borders in Central Europe cannot be altered; besides, most states in the region have in the meantime become full-fledged members of the EU and NATO that guarantee their member states' borders.[16]

Another dissimilarity compared to the interwar period is that the new-born intelligentsia views the anti-Hungarian sentiment as a burden to democracy. Following the initial stage of the social change, political power was seized by politicians who strive to undermine or even eliminate liberal democracy. The anti-Hungarian ideology and the vision of a homogeneous state rid of ethnic Hungarians plays the pivotal role in justifying their social legitimacy. Consequently, the anti-Hungarian campaign has become a tool of curtailing freedom of the majority nation and manipulating its members, including those who associate their country's political future with liberal democracy and are prepared to act upon it.

Although the weight of this population group varies from one country to another, it can be traced in each country of the region. Their inhabitants' sensitivity to the Hungarian issue varies similarly. Naturally, it is the greatest in Slovakia and Romania, the two countries inhabited by the largest populations of ethnic Hungarians, the two countries that gained the largest territory after the split of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the two countries to which Hungarian assimilation policy of 19th century posed the greatest national threat and therefore continues to represent a painful part of their national history.

The situation of those who perceive the anti-Hungarian sentiment as a harmful historical legacy is complicated by two political attitudes: first, it is Hungarian and ethnic Hungarian political leaders' proclivity for using ambiguous terms and statements with respect to the issue of border stability; second, it is a specific kind of Hungarian populism that is interpreted by neighbouring countries as unpredictability and therefore a potential national threat.

Tackling the situation of ethnic Hungarians, as opposed to ignoring it, may become the means of reconciliation between the Hungarians and neighbouring nations. They are the key to establishing true peace between states as well as between nations,[17] something that cannot be achieved by international treaties and agreements between certain groups of political leaders. The reconciliation must strike roots in individuals' value systems. It is likely to be a long journey, which is why the sooner we make the first steps the better. Technological progress of the early 21st century has provided us with the means of communication; all we need now is endurance and patience to establish and maintain a dialogue.

Notes

1   The present study was originally intended for the Hungarian public but the author sincerely hopes that it might be of use for other readers as well.

2   In 1985, representatives of the most important streams of Hungarian anti-communist movement met in Monor to harmonize their positions on relevant social issues. For further information, please see: *A monori tanácskozás 1985. június 14. – 16.* [Monor Negotiations of June 14–16, 1985] (Budapest: 1956-os Intézet, 2005).

3   The clearest and most unambiguous position has been formulated by Miroslav Kusý who openly argued that the Slovak government ought to grant all minority rights to ethnic Hungarians. For further information, please see: Miroslav Kusý: *Čo s našimi Maďarmi?* [What about Our Hungarians?], (Bratislava: Kalligram, 1998).

4   An example of such a document was the *Joint Declaration of the Public against Violence and the Hungarian Independent Initiative*.

5   According to John Rawls, rights and freedoms must not be curtailed in the name of greater prosperity or for the sake of positions that may be filled thanks to curtailment. Also, Rawls points out that extending the rights and freedoms of some does not necessarily lead to curtailing the rights and freedoms of others; on the contrary, it may actually lead to extending their rights and freedoms as well. For further information, please see John Rawls: *Teorie spravedlivosti* [Theory of Justice] (Praha: Victoria Publishing, 1995, pp. 48–50 and 149–153).

6   In this context, nationalism is viewed either as a mobilization ideology (Elie Kedouri) or as a tool of the political elite (Karl W. Deutsch). It is undoubtedly a modern communication method (Benedict Anderson) as national states of those nations that have acquired independent statehood give their respective political elites – including intellectuals who view national culture as an ideological weapon – a dominant position in the field of nationalist propaganda through controlling most media as well as the essential share of cultural institutions and educational establishments.

7   In Slovakia, such an independent discussion took place with respect to parliament passing the resolution on unalterable nature of the Beneš decrees or the law on merits of Andrej Hlinka.

8   Such arguments could be traced in the rhetoric of political parties that formed governments with ethnic Hungarian parties in Slovakia as well as in Romania.

9   While choosing one's national identity is free, changing it is a process full of privation and tribulation. For further information, please see Miri Song: *Choosing Ethnic Identity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003, pp. 40–41).

10   Between 1998 and 2006, parties representing ethnic Hungarians aimed to reduce disadvantages accumulated by previous administrations they were not part of while their partners cared primarily about accelerating the country's Euro-Atlantic integration and economic reforms and eliminating autocratic tendencies from politics.

11   Oppression of ethnic minorities does not stop at oppressing ethnic minorities. Eliminating national freedom of the oppressed also curbs national freedom of the oppressors, even though it puts them into a dominant position. This thesis was formulated by applying John Locke's famous thesis on protection of freedom in general to the area of protecting individuals' national freedom. According to Locke, individuals are entitled to resist the government power that threatens their freedom as long as the outcome of their resistance does not go beyond restoring the rule of law and does not become the source of new oppression.

12   Thwarting such a discussion from the position of power may lead to dictatorship of either a narrow elite or the majority.

13 Jennifer Jackson Preece considers the principle of equality between minorities and the political community to be the most pressing problem of the minority issue. The main problem according to her is that the majority simply does not view ethnic minorities' members as equal citizens and does not acknowledge their specifics. For further information, please see Jennifer Jackson Preece: *Minority Rights – Between Diversity and Community* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005, pp. 9–13).

14 We hereby refer particularly to understanding of the new world order by the neo-conservative Bush administration that did not hesitate to wage wars of aggression.

15 For further information, please see Giovanni Sartori: *Teória demokracie* [Theory of Democracy], (Bratislava: Archa, 1993, pp. 158–174).

16 Hungary was among first countries to recognize independent Slovakia in 1993.

17 According to David Miller, it is possible to achieve coexistence and even harmony of different national and other group identities. In order to accomplish that, introduction of special rights and institutions is necessary. For further information, please see David Miller: *On Nationality*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995, p. 153).

ANNEX

KÁLMÁN PETŐCZ:

Most Frequent Stereotypes Concerning Slovak–Hungarian Relations Used in National Populist Rhetoric

Stereotype 1: Above-standard rights

One of the most frequent stereotypes is the argument that Slovakia goes beyond average in terms of the standard of guaranteed minority rights and that it could serve an example to many other European countries in the field of minority rights. This view is frequently reiterated not only by politicians of the incumbent ruling coalition of SMER-SD – SNS – ĽS-HZDS and kindred intellectuals but also by representatives of centre-right opposition parties such as SDKÚ or KDH and even influential independent commentators and public officials who otherwise find the value system of Ján Slota quite repulsive.

Accepting the thesis on 'above-standard' minority rights must inevitably lead to a conclusion that any attempt to question the existing standard of minority rights' implementation in Slovakia may be qualified as deliberate escalation of tension and act of malice. That is only one step shy of qualifying statements or actions by ethnic Hungarian politicians as 'provocation' or even attack on sovereignty and 'national and state interests' of the Slovak Republic. Since minority rights in Slovakia according to this argumentation comply with European standards and even go beyond them in many respects, members of national minorities should be satisfied with the *status quo*. The problem is that according to national populists' overall concept of power execution, binding interpretation of the *status quo* is in the competence of government (i.e. authorities) or political representation of the majority. On the other hand, views and interests of national minority and its political and intellectual elite are second-rate, if not for anything else

then because representatives of the minority must inevitably be biased in perception of their own status.

But can national minorities living in Slovakia actually rely on above-standard minority rights? This question is of actual practical importance because without its matter-of-fact and thorough answering the entire Slovak–Hungarian dialogue is reduced to purely ideological and populist argument. If ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia have everything and even something more compared to minority members in other comparably developed countries, then each criticism, every 'complaint' and every proposal by SMK–MKP representatives or any other ethnic Hungarian politician will amount to a mere populist gesture.

What can be considered an objective criterion for the standard of minority rights? First of all, the very thesis about standards and 'above-standards' is misleading because there are no standards in the sense this term is used in Slovakia. There are certain (general) international norms whose implementation may differ significantly from one country to another. International norms in the field of minority rights that are binding for the Slovak Republic include especially the following:

- *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (Article 27);
- *The Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities*.

The list of legally binding international agreements that feature provisions on protection of minority rights also includes the *Treaty on Good Neighbourly Relations and Friendly Cooperation between the Slovak Republic and the Hungarian Republic* signed in 1995.

A document that indirectly concerns the rights of national minorities is the *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination*, which in Article 1 provides for adoption of specific measures aimed at equalizing social chances of members of racial and ethnic groups in a given country.

The so-called *soft law* instruments in the field of protection of national minorities include political declarations and recommendations of international organizations, particularly the United Nations' *Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious or Language Minorities* of 1992 as well as recommendations by the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities on the rights of national minorities in the field of language (Oslo Recommendations), education (The Hague

Recommendations) and participation in decision-making (Lund Recommendations).

A specific document in this respect is the *European Charter on Regional or Minority Languages* adopted by the Council of Europe in 1992. While it does not guarantee the rights of national minorities' individual members, it creates conditions for protection of minority languages and thus *de facto* indirectly contributes to protection of individual rights of persons who belong to national minorities.

One could make a conclusion that the Slovak Constitution and legal system of the Slovak Republic in general complies with international norms in the field of minority right protection. One could also make a conclusion that basic principles of these norms have been reflected in legal rules valid in the Slovak Republic.

Speaking of standards, however, one must realize that it is not merely about harmonization of laws and legal rules in general but primarily about practical implementation of government's minority policy as well as availability, enforceability and quality of concrete human or minority rights. A generalizing statement about above-standard rights has no actual informative value unless it pertains to implementation of a concrete right in a concrete situation.

The point is that certain rights (e.g. the right to education) may be regulated on a higher level while other rights (e.g. language rights or participation rights) are regulated on a lower level than in comparable countries. A comparison of standards in the field of using bilingual names in public places reveals that Slovakia lags not only behind Slovenia but even Romania or Serbia, let alone Finland or Southern Tyrol. In Slovakia, marking the name of a village in a minority language is possible – and legal – in only one case: if the share of ethnic minority members on the municipality's total population is at least 20%. Even then, the name in that minority's language is featured on a smaller sign and in a different colour combination, in order to show that is not an official name but a mere 'denomination'. While signs on the buildings of some public bodies and institutions (e.g. town halls or local councils) may be bilingual, the name of the municipality on the official sign must be featured in Slovak. In most other countries, the signs marking the beginning and the end of municipalities are featured in both languages on the same sign and in the same type. Bilingual signs are not on some but on all public buildings; marking the signs in minority languages is not merely an option but an obligation of applicable organs or institutions.

A sign on the building of a bank in Zenta, Serbia:

Now let us compare it to a sign on the building of one health insurer in Komárno:

A traffic sign in Transylvania, Romania. The names of towns are featured both in Romanian and Hungarian, in the same type and on the same sign.

Now let us compare it to traffic signs that may normally be found in southern Slovakia.[1] As we see, the names are solely in Slovak:

As far as minority education for ethnic Hungarians goes, it is fair to draw a conclusion that minority standards in Slovakia are higher than those in Hungary. Ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia can use a broad network of primary schools, a relatively broad network of secondary schools and even one university (founded in 2004). But even here one must avoid far-reaching

comparisons and conclusions. If we take a look at the network of schools for ethnic Ruthenians and Ukrainians whose total number in Slovakia is roughly comparable to that of ethnic Slovaks in Hungary, we would find out that their situation is not essentially different. Most Ruthenian and Ukrainian schools in Slovakia are also regular Slovak schools where Ruthenian or Ukrainian language is taught merely as a subject.

A comparison of participative and self-governance minority mechanisms indicates that their system is much better elaborated in Hungary where national minorities have self-governments and even a minority ombudsman; in Slovakia, introduction of such institutions is not being even theoretically considered. Also, national minorities in Slovakia are not guaranteed quotas for parliamentary representation on the national level, which is the case in Slovenia, Poland, Romania, Macedonia, even in Kosovo and theoretically also in Hungary (we will return to this issue later on). In Slovakia, using a minority language in official contact is allowed only if members of a given national minority make up at least 20% of the municipality's population, which cannot be viewed above-standard either; in Finland, for instance, this limit is 6% while some other countries do not even have such a limit in place.

It is very important to distinguish consistently between the status of 'traditional' minorities (i.e. a community differing in its language from the major group that also formed an integral part of the given state's population at the time of its emergence) and the status of new minorities, i.e. recent immigrants, economic migrants, asylum seekers, etc. Mixing these two types of minorities together is a typical obfuscation trick often used by national populists. It is only acceptable to compare the status of two traditional minorities or the status of two new minorities (i.e. migrants). That is why frequently presented arguments about the status of minorities in America are completely misleading. Slovaks, Hungarians, Poles, etc. in the United States are migrants (immigrants) who arrive there with a clear notion that they are simply expected to give up part of their national identity. Yet, if we took a look at some southern U.S. states inhabited by large Hispanic communities, we would see that Spanish language is virtually equal to English. So, even in America the thesis of the 'state' language's priority is not valid completely; after all, no such language has ever been enacted there.

Besides, even within the category of 'traditional' national minorities one should compare only comparable phenomena and entities. We have already brushed upon Scandinavian examples, so let us present another. The status

276

of ethnic Swedes in Finland is comparable to that of ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia in many respects: both minorities inhabit a relatively homogeneous territory; their language is diametrically different from that of the majority; their relative size is also comparable (ethnic Swedes make up 6–7% of Finland's population while ethnic Hungarians make up approximately 10% of Slovakia's); there are even certain historical parallels (Finland was part of the Swedish Kingdom for a long time). A comparison of these two communities' respective statuses shows that ethnic Swedes in Finland are much better off than ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia. For instance, Swedish is the second official language not only on the territory inhabited by ethnic Swedes but on Finland's entire territory, i.e. ethnic Swedes learn Finnish just like Finns learn Swedish. Besides, ethnic Swedes enjoy full cultural autonomy and it is an unwritten rule that a party representing them always forms part of the ruling coalition.

Stereotype 2: Hungarian threat

According to advocates of the 'Hungarian threat' theory, Slovakia constantly faces potential danger from behind its southern border. They argue the Hungarian state and its 'fifth colony' in Slovakia (i.e. political representatives of ethnic Hungarians) never truly gave up the ultimate goal, which is separation of southern territories from Slovakia and their subsequent annexation to Hungary. Hungarian politicians more or less successfully camouflage that objective. That is why they demand autonomy, which is merely a stepping stone leading to separation; also, they insist on nullification of Beneš decrees, which is their way of questioning the results of World War II.

These postulates are the tools of permanent 'mobilization' of the Slovak public as they force individual citizens to keep their vigilance with respect to imaginary external danger. In the ensuing atmosphere, government encounters much weaker public resistance to its attempts to restrict fundamental civic rights and political freedoms because it can always refer to the external threat that may justify restrictions of freedom. In such atmosphere, it is much easier to enact unnatural territorial organization of public administration that may be justified by efforts to reduce the risk of 'autonomy'. Also, it is much easier to adopt ill-conceived, half-finished and ideologically burdened content reform of education system that includes introduction of 'proper' textbooks in order to prevent schools from teaching ethnic Hungarian pupils from 'improper' textbooks. Last but not least, although this is a truly extreme example, it is possible to call on halting construc-

tion of bridges over borderline rivers that are inevitable to facilitate further economic growth of border areas and strengthen friendly ties between their inhabitants because these bridges might serve as the starting point of enemy troops' offensive against Slovakia.

At the same time, these arguments serve as tools of paralyzing the political opposition through creating an atmosphere in which virtually no relevant political force dares assume a non-ideological position on any issue concerning ethnic Hungarians in order to avoid being ostracized by the others. As a result, most political players' views on Slovak–Hungarian disputes slowly drift to the 'centre'. Consequently, almost every quarrel that is initiated by Slovak national populists and provokes any kind of reaction from ethnic Hungarians is interpreted by centrist mainstream of the country's political elite and journalistic community as a clash of 'two nationalisms'. On the other hand, arguments initiated by ethnic Hungarians are 'obvious' without further consideration (i.e. ethnic Hungarians are responsible). Such a shift toward the 'centre' inevitably opens a broad manoeuvring space for hardcore national populists on both sides of the Danube River.

Any organizations, institutions or groups of individuals in Slovakia or abroad that either openly side with ethnic Hungarians or dare criticize government due to different reasons immediately become suspicious as well. The following three reactions by Prime Minister Robert Fico and his political allies provide typical examples of this pattern.

After the socialist faction of the European Parliament decided on July 5, 2006, to initiate the procedure leading to suspension of SMER-SD associated membership in the Party of European Socialists on grounds of its government alliance with the nationalist SNS, Fico immediately pointed a finger at "supranational corporations and monopolies that are afraid of losing their profits in Slovakia" as well as on Hungarian MEPs who were allegedly unable to get over the fact that SMK–MKP was no longer in government.

In August 2008 when the Open Society Foundation published the findings of a survey that revealed negative views of 14–15 year-old primary school pupils on ethnic Hungarians and their use of Hungarian language, government officials labelled the survey as manipulated and serving the interests of foreign customers.

In the same month when a non-governmental organization called Fair-play Alliance criticized SMER-SD for having concluded non-standard advantageous tenancy for its headquarters in Bratislava, the party's reaction did not focus on responding to the essence of criticism and clarifying the contract's background but pointing out that Fair-play Alliance was financed

by George Soros, American entrepreneur and philanthropist of Jewish–Hungarian descent. If impartial observers considered the reaction's context, including the prime minister's effort to pronounce Soros's name so that it sounded as Hungarian as possible (something like Szőrös, which does not correspond to the truth), they would have difficulties resisting the feeling that the criticized subject tried to defend itself by pointing the finger at all 'enemies' of Slovakia, i.e. Hungarians, Americans (?), Jews (?) and non-governmental organizations siding with the Hungarians.

The truth is that the entire concept of autonomy as well as the word 'autonomy' itself is excessively demonized in Slovakia along with politicians who utter the word even in the most informal conversation. An equally demonized issue is that of 'abolishing' Beneš decrees. Slovak national populists strive to create an impression as if ethnic Hungarian politicians (i.e. SMK–MKP leaders) questioned Beneš decrees as such by using the following assertion: 'They want to question the results of World War II, which is a clear attack on sovereignty of the Slovak state.'

More than one hundred decrees issued in the course of World War II by exile Czechoslovak President Edvard Beneš served primarily the purpose of ensuring legal continuity of the Czechoslovak Republic between 1938 and 1945. No one has ever questioned Beneš decrees as such. SMK–MKP leaders are merely concerned about a dozen or so of those decrees that led to several years of discrimination and stigmatization of ethnic Hungarian citizens based on the principle of collective guilt. The issue is that more sensitive for ethnic Hungarians who live in a state that *de facto* continues to view them as traitors and war criminals. Although Slovak authorities admit themselves that Beneš decrees are legally 'consumed' (i.e. they cannot constitute new legal relations and cannot become the source of new decisions by executive and judicial organs), they continue to remain an integral part of Slovakia's legal system.

So, the state's relation to one quite sizeable category of its citizens remains unresolved, especially after the National Council of the Slovak Republic in September 2007 passed a resolution by which it repeatedly subscribed to Beneš decrees. Another interesting question that remains unanswered is whether government has the moral right to expect unconditional loyalty of the group of its own citizens from which it refuses to lift the symbolic stigma of collective guilt. A paradoxical and bizarrely comical aspect of the entire issue is the fact that passing the resolution on Beneš decrees was initiated by the Slovak National Party, a party that openly subscribes to the legacy of the wartime Slovak State from the period of 1939–1944. Legally speaking, it is quite impossible to subscribe to the

wartime Slovak State on the one hand and to Beneš decrees on the other, since the latter were primarily the tool of ensuring legal continuity of the Czechoslovak Republic and as such they denied the very existence of the wartime Slovak State.

Regarding acceptability of speaking of the autonomy issue, let us quote from a letter addressed by Max van der Stoel, former OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, to Slovakia's Foreign Affairs Minister Juraj Schenk on August 13, 1996:

"I would recommend that the legislation which your Government is now preparing on the protection of the state will be formulated in such a way that it does not make propaganda for such autonomy [territorial autonomy] a punishable act. In this respect, I refer to Article 10 of the *European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms* to which Slovakia has acceded. Article 10, Paragraph 1 of that Convention states that everyone has the right of freedom of expression, a right which includes freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers. Paragraph 2 of Article 10 makes it clear that some restrictions of this basic right are allowed, e.g. in the interest of national security, but only if pre-scribed by law and if necessary in a democratic society. Generally speaking, it seems to me difficult to maintain that making use of the right of freedom of expression in order to promote the concept of territorial autonomy would constitute a threat to the security of the State. Even more so, because the OSCE Copenhagen Document on the Human Dimension, while emphasizing territorial integrity (Paragraph 37), does mention territorial autonomy as a possible option (Paragraph 35) and, therefore, while not entailing a commit-ment to introduce territorial autonomy, clearly takes the view that territorial autonomy and territorial integrity are not incompatible."

Stereotype 3: Collaboration

Another thesis that is particularly frequently applied by SNS representatives is accusing their political opponents of 'collaboration'. The primary target of this rather simple-minded accusation is the camp of Slovak opposition parties that committed the capital treachery of 'collaborating' with SMK–MKP for eight years in a coalition government.

This ideological construct portrays SMK–MKP as the 'fifth colony', as the representative of alien interests (i.e. those of Hungarian government or Hungarian irredentists, etc.) in Slovakia. Ever since Hitler seized power in Germany, the term of 'collaboration' has an unambiguous content in

Slovakia as well as in the entire Europe; it means cooperation and con-spiracy with an alien hostile (i.e. fascist or Nazi) power. Consequently, whoever collaborates on the domestic level with representatives of the alien power (i.e. SMK–MKP) are collaborationists themselves. This literally per-fidious argument targets particularly SDKÚ and KDH voters and sympa-thizers who are likely to understand the meaning of the sophisticated term of 'collaboration', as opposed to most SNS voters. The argument is rela-tively effective as most representatives of opposition parties either refuse to react to the said accusation or are unable to dismiss it convincingly, thus encouraging their voters' impression that there could be something to this accusation of 'collaboration' after all.

Stereotype 4: Loyalty

The opinion that SMK–MKP leaders (and ethnic Hungarians in general) constantly escalate their demands and simultaneously refuse loyalty to the Slovak Republic is also relatively common. In the case of SMK–MKP rep-resentatives, disloyalty is allegedly manifested by their permanent defama-tion and denigration of Slovakia in Budapest and Brussels. Ordinary citi-zens of Hungarian origin allegedly demonstrate their disloyalty through poor command of the 'state language' and the general lack of interest in learning it.

As we have pointed out in Stereotype 1, national populists believe that the rights of ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia are high above the standard nor-mal in other countries. So, if SMK–MKP proposes any further demands, it goes beyond the European standard and beyond parameters of the accept-able for the Slovak Republic. These further demands cause either discrim-ination against the 'constituent nation' (i.e. the Slovaks) on its own territo-ry or alienation of ethnic Hungarians from the Slovak Republic, ultimately encouraging their disloyalty and harming their own best interests through limiting their chances to win recognition on the entire territory of the Slovak Republic.

On the other hand, if SMK–MKP presents these demands before its for-eign partners (or conveys its ideas to them), it betrays the loyalty principle because it 'sneaks' and 'fouls its own nest' instead of trying to tackle the problem at home. As far as ordinary ethnic Hungarians go, ordinary Slovaks believe they are negatively influenced by 'extremist' policies of SMK–MKP and certain political circles in Hungary whose leaders allegedly discourage them from creating a loyal relationship to Slovakia and improving their command of Slovak language. By insisting that names of towns, villages,

rivers, lowlands and mountain ridges in textbooks for ethnic Hungarian pupils continue to be in Hungarian, ethnic Hungarians allegedly try to create an impression in their children as if they still lived in the Great Hungarian Kingdom.

The 'escalating demands' thesis is based on the already described assumption that there is no problem left to tackle in the field of minority rights, particularly the Hungarian minority's rights, since these rights exceed usual standards. Here, though, Slovakia's ruling elite and virtually entire political elite runs into a fundamental logical discrepancy with their predecessors' political and ideological line they constantly refer to. The point is that after Budapest in 1848–1849 refused to listen to Ľudovít Štúr and his group of national revivalists, they decided to turn to Vienna; after Andrej Hlinka declared in 1918 that "the thousand-year-old marriage with the Hungarians has failed", the Slovaks turned to Prague.

At this point, a legitimate question is: Why did part of Slovakia's elite decide to turn with their demands to Vienna in 1948–49 and to Prague in 1918? Why did not they show 'loyalty to their own state'? Well, because their own state refused to grant them the space for true dialogue and create legal and institutional prerequisites to the Slovaks' effective participation in decision-making on matters related to their culture, language and education, i.e. matters that are indispensable to expressing, preserving and developing their national identity.

This fundamental problem – i.e. the unresolved issue of the status of ethnic Hungarians (and other traditional ethnic and cultural communities) and their effective participation in decision-making on matters that existentially concern them – lies at the heart of all Slovak–Hungarian tensions. But it is quite impossible to spark off a public debate on this issue because any attempt to do so is *a priori* rejected with a reference to the allegedly above-standard minority rights in Slovakia or an argument that the Slovak Republic refuses to recognize 'collective rights'.

Another important dimension of Slovak politicians' perception of SMK–MKP representatives' activities abroad is the assertion that SMK–MKP politicians 'attack the Slovak Republic and Slovak statehood'. In fact, what they do – if they do so at all – is present critical evaluation of the incumbent administration's measures. Interchanging government with the incumbent political power is a typical feature of national populism (and Bolshevik ideology, for that matter) and represents a return to the period of 1993–1998 or even before 1989 in some aspects. Again, a logical paradox is that before 2006 there was hardly a more agile and uncompromising critic of the incumbent administration's policies abroad than Robert Fico. His

hosts abroad as well as his foreign guests in Slovakia were regularly subjected to listening to his harsh criticism of Slovakia (that is, if we accept his own logic that criticizing the incumbent administration equals attacking the state as such). The same applies to leaders of opposition parties who after the 2006 parliamentary elections considered requesting EU organs to monitor the Slovak Republic on grounds of the country's alleged anti-democratic development. But as soon as the status of national minorities is at stake, all Slovak politicians suddenly seem to agree that it is a domestic issue that should not be tackled abroad.

A similar consensus among Slovak political players (but also most media commentators and political analysts) prevailed in initial stages of the case of battered student Hedviga Malinová. Before the 2006 parliamentary elections, one of principal theses presented by Robert Fico was that 'Slovakia was not ruled by law' because interests of the political establishment penetrated the economy, the judiciary and all other spheres of society. The new opposition embraced the same rhetoric after the elections, only with an opposite sign. Unfortunately, this rhetoric somehow did not apply to the case of Hedviga Malinová; here, any 'interference' by SMK–MKP leaders or expression of anxiety on the part of Hungarian government officials was dismissed with an argument that 'Slovakia is a country ruled by law that has independent courts of law and law enforcement organs whose investigation and conclusions should be trusted'. Only after some investigative journalists unearthed serious evidence questioning case investigators' independence did opposition leaders along with media commentators and political analysts slowly begin to change their position on the case.

Stereotype 5: Geographic names must be in state language

Since the dispute over geographic names in textbooks for schools with Hungarian as the language of instruction has several dimensions, we will discuss this issue in greater detail.

A. Once again, it is easy to detect the already described tactics of pointing out 'above-standard' or 'excessive' demands presented by ethnic Hungarians as Slovak government officials obviously strive to put the entire matter in exactly the opposite light than it actually is. First of all, few Slovak citizens are aware that in the mentioned textbooks the geographic names were previously indicated in Hungarian while Slovak equivalents were featured in parentheses; likewise, few Slovak citizens are aware that the standard practice in all 'civilized' European countries is to use established traditional geographic names, provided that they exist, of course; that

is also the case of textbooks for ethnic Slovaks in Hungary. In this atmosphere of ignorance, it is easy to create an impression that it is ethnic Hungarians who 'again' demand some new 'privileges'. In fact, it is exactly the other way round, as the education minister introduced a change contrary to an established practice through a bureaucratic decision while ethnic Hungarian pedagogues and parents are merely trying to defend or preserve the existing *status quo*.

B. The current dispute conspicuously resembles a similar dispute from the period of 1994–1998. Back then, the Ministry of Education led by an SNS appointee also 'fabricated' an artificial problem by forbidding issuance of bilingual report cards, pleading compliance with State Language Act. The issue of bilingual report cards as well as the issue of geographic names is completely marginal in the context of minority education or education in general. The executive power's intentional aggravation of this artificial problem can only serve two purposes: first, it diverts political opponents' attention from actual problems that plague not only schools for ethnic Hungarians but education system in general; second, it absorbs the public that subsequently pays less attention to other, much more important problems.

C. A logical question then arises: why do ethnic Hungarians, their political representatives as well as professional and non-governmental organizations care so much about such 'marginal' issues? Firstly, it must be said that they merely defend the rights guaranteed to them by the Slovak Constitution and Slovakia's international commitments. Secondly, politicians must also take into account their voters who expect them to take an emphatic and unambiguous position and stand up for their rights, which is nothing unnatural; on the contrary, protecting their voters' interests is the principal purpose and task of all political parties. Last but not least, Hungarian names of many towns, villages, rivers and mountains in Slovakia, the Carpathian Basin, in Europe and in the world are traditional names that form an integral part of codified Hungarian lexis. The reason why Slovaks call Austria's capital Wien *Viedeň* or the famous town in the Adriatic lagoon Venezia *Benátky* is the same reason why Hungarians call Bratislava *Pozsony* and Nové Zámky *Érsekújvár*. After all, official documents of the Slovak Government also use Slovak language to refer to geographic names on Hungary's territory. When reading the cabinet's document on providing financial aid to ethnic Slovaks in Hungary, an uninformed observer would never learn that the official name of the village of *Mlynky* is Pilisszentkereszt.

D. Throughout the entire dispute, the incumbent administration in general and the SNS in particular incorrectly and demagogically used the argument about compliance with the State Language Act. The proclaimed pur-

pose of the order issued by the education minister was to encourage ethnic Hungarian pupils to learn state language. But teaching Slovak language (or any other language, for that matter) is primarily a pedagogical, method-ological and didactical issue.[2] The country's education system obviously has great reserves in the field of teaching languages – not only Slovak but for-eign languages as well. Since politicians pay next to no attention to this issue, the reader would certainly agree that studying Slovak (or any other) language is primarily the matter of motivation. But what motivation to learning Slovak can ethnic Hungarian pupils have in the atmosphere of anti-Hungarian sentiments? Or, even more importantly, what motivation can have their parents and teachers to making the pupils learn?

E. The very argument that makes attaining sufficient command of the so-called state language almost the overriding priority of minority education is completely wrong. Here, Slovak government officials make another signifi-cant logic somersault. Their argument is a carbon copy of the philosophy of schooling acts initiated in 1907 by Count Albert Apponyi, Hungarian Minister of Culture and Education, which were always extensively criticized by mem-bers of the Slovak political elite. According to this philosophy, all children in the Hungarian Kingdom were obliged to achieve good (Premier Fico uses the word "perfect" in his appeals to the members of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia) command of the state language by the time they finished the fourth grade because it was in the best interest of the state as well as in the best interest of the pupils' future opportunities.

F. Thorough application of the constitutional principle granting ethnic Hungarians (and members of other national minorities) the right to express, preserve and develop their ethnic identity is unthinkable without allowing them to cultivate primarily their own native language. Only a small per-centage of people have the gift of perfect bilingualism. So, if government makes citizens' perfect command of other than their native language its pri-ority, it in fact questions its true commitment to preserving fundamental rights of national minorities.

Implications for democracy and human rights

The tendency to qualify any reference to autonomy, any criticism of Beneš decrees, any attempt to unfurl the Hungarian flag or other Hungarian sym-bols in Slovakia or use traditional Hungarian names to refer to geographic entities on Slovakia's territory as anti-state or at least illegal activity proves that a significant part of Slovakia's political elite lacks a clear concept of the freedom of thought, the freedom of speech and the freedom of expres-

sion. This may be illustrated by an arrogant lash by Premier Fico who recently called a journalist an "idiot" just because he asked him an unpleasant question.

Any restriction of the freedom to promulgate political opinions or the freedom of expression (be it by legislative means or through permanent ostracizing and intimidation) constitutes a grave encroachment on people's natural freedoms to which government may resort only under critical circumstances and situations. Any impartial observer must admit that Slovakia is not in any crisis that would justify legal restrictions of the freedom of speech. Therefore, what we are witnessing here is in fact curtailing democracy and fundamental freedoms in the name of government power, which clearly shows signs of an authoritarian regime. The greatest problem is that delicateness of the issue of Slovak–Hungarian relations makes curtailing the freedom of expressionh with respect to 'Hungarian' displays more acceptable and even embraceable by the public opinion. In the end, any attack on any fundamental principle of liberal democracy negatively affects functioning of the system as a whole. From this perspective – especially if we realize that even the president of Slovakia (who is a lawyer himself) is riding this wave – the situation is very disturbing to say the least.

In this context, let us again quote from the already mentioned letter by Max van der Stoel, former OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities:

"It goes without saying that citizens belonging to national minorities, just like the other citizens of Slovakia, have the duty to obey the laws of the country and are only allowed to try to change existing legislation by legal means. On the other hand, I would expect that your Government will agree that it would be undesirable to amend the penal code in such a way that articles in the press and statements before electronic media which are perceived to show disloyalty towards the State will be made a punishable act. Given that it is virtually impossible to define where criticism ends and where disloyalty begins, the danger would be great that new formulations of the law would go beyond the restrictions on the freedom of expression permitted under article 10 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms."

Stereotype 6: Reciprocity

When evaluating Slovak–Hungarian relations, politicians as well as journalists often call for implementing the principle of reciprocity. Sometimes, this view is presented in such a form that ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia should enjoy minority rights only up to the extent that is guaranteed for

ethnic Slovaks in Hungary. Even if we admit that the philosophy of reciprocity is fair (which we do not), we should compare the actual situation in the field of minority rights in Slovakia and in Hungary before jumping to any conclusions.

Perhaps the most frequent misunderstanding is the assertion that national minorities in Slovakia are represented in parliament while national minorities in Hungary are not. But does this assertion correspond to reality? It must be clearly said that not if phrased like that. It is true that the Party of Hungarian Coalition, which between 1998 and 2006 regularly received votes from approximately 80% to 90% of all ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia, is represented in the National Council of the Slovak Republic; however, it is not the result of some specific legislative privilege (e.g. special minority law) but of the plain fact that the quorum for parliamentary representation is 5% of the popular vote and that ethnic Hungarian voters make up more than 5% of all eligible voters in Slovakia. So, parliamentary representation of SMK–MKP is the result of freely exercising 'regular' civil and political rights and freedoms (i.e. the freedom of association, the right to vote and be elected) as well as of the fact that Slovakia's legal system exercises the principle of non-discrimination. Discrimination would be if SMK–MKP or parties representing the country's Roma were outlawed on the ethnic basis.[3]

The fact that ethnic Hungarians are the only national minority represented in the National Council of the Slovak Republic shows that Slovakia's legislation does not automatically guarantee parliamentary representation of national minorities. In Slovakia, the issue of guaranteeing minority representation by law has never been seriously discussed or even considered, as no legislative initiative in this sense has ever been proposed.

From the formal viewpoint, the situation is completely opposite in Hungary whose Minority Act of 1993 envisaged parliamentary representation for all 13 officially recognized national minorities. So far, though, Hungary has not been able to pass procedural regulations that would stipulate legislative and technical rules of exercising minority mandates. There are two reasons for this state of affairs. One is political, as most relevant parties fear that minority deputies could tilt the scales in disputes between the government and the opposition (and chances are they would side with the former purely for gain). The other – equally important – reason is legal as minority candidates would need incomparably fewer votes than candidates from 'regular' parties' tickets to clinch parliamentary seats, which provokes protests from legal purists. That, however, should not constitute an obstacle to enforcing the said provision of Minority Act, especially once it has already been passed.

Whenever Slovak politicians and/or constitution officials argue that the standard of minority rights in Slovakia is higher than average, they are referring particularly to the rights of ethnic Hungarians. But we just demonstrated that the practical situation in the field of parliamentary representation of national minorities is virtually identical in Slovakia and Hungary as national minorities are not represented in either country's parliament. Representation of SMK–MKP in the National Council of the Slovak Republic is the result of a coincidence of circumstances as opposed to implementation of explicitly guaranteed specific minority rights.

Are there any countries that guarantee to their national minorities representation in the legislative assembly despite already described legislative and technical problems? There are relatively many such countries around the world as well as in Europe. Among new EU member states, that number includes Slovenia, Romania and Poland. For instance, Slovenia's constitution views both the Italian and the Hungarian minority as constituent elements that are guaranteed parliamentary representation regardless of the number of ballots they receive. The country has a special registry of minority voters who have in their disposal two ballots one of which must be cast for minority candidates of their choice.

In Romania, the situation is even more liberal on the first glimpse. The right to be represented in the national parliament's lower house is guaranteed even to minorities whose total number is lower than the number of votes necessary to clinch one mandate. These minorities are truly double-privileged. On the other hand, this practice causes problems because the promise of clinching parliamentary seats generates still new minorities some of whom are not even considered autochthonous on Romania's territory.

The recently adopted constitution of Kosovo also guarantees parliamentary representation to all six officially recognized national minorities. The Serbian minority is further privileged by a mechanism that guarantees parties representing ethnic Serbs additional 10 seats in the 120-member assembly on top of the seats acquired in regular political competition (i.e. like SMK–MKP in Slovakia).[4]

A question arises whether it would not be most logical to compare the situation of ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia to that of ethnic Slovaks in Hungary.

There is hardly a more logical argument – or so it seems on the first glimpse.

However, it is important to realize that these two national minorities do not typologically belong to the same category: Slovak language enclaves in Hungary's Lowland were formed over centuries as part of internal migration

processes within the Hungarian Kingdom, whereas the Hungarian minority emerged on the territory of Czechoslovakia (i.e. Slovakia) by the means of a political decision. This fundamental difference naturally affects the degree of ethnic identity, internal organization, settlement structure as well as (emotional) relation of ethnic communities and their members to the state.[5] Generally speaking, minority enclaves formed as part of internal migration are more susceptible to assimilation in the long term. The degree of their members' self-identification with the majority culture gradually increases through the acculturation process and growing number of mixed marriages; ultimately, they leave their natural ethnic habitat in search of jobs in large towns and the life in Diaspora catalyzes the process of altering their ethnic identity.

A good example is the situation of Slovaks living in the Czech Republic. While expert estimates put their total number between 300,000 and 400,000, only 192,000 of them claimed Slovak origin in the most recent population census. Organization of Slovaks in the Czech Republic is not overly sophisticated, as they do not demand any special minority rights and their ethnic life takes place virtually on the level of societies. Under these circumstances, it is highly probable that they will be fully assimilated within several decades, although the history of Slovaks in the Czech Republic reaches only two to three generations back as opposed to six to eight generations, which is the case of ethnic Slovaks inhabiting Hungary's Lowlands.[6] Despite that, the situation of Slovaks in the Czech Republic does not seem to attract almost any attention among Slovakia's political leaders or civil society subjects.

In the Slovak environment, sharing an opinion that Slovak inhabitants of the Hungarian Kingdom were harshly oppressed and did not have any rights has become almost part of 'good education'. But does this assertion correspond to historical reality?

Following the Austro–Hungarian settlement of 1867, it became the principal goal of Hungary's minority policy to create the so-called Hungarian (political) nation (*Natio Hungarica* or *magyar politikai nemzet*). This goal would be attained through greater emphasis on teaching the state language in minority schools and using it in official contact (the concept of state language was introduced by the Minority Act of 1868). In the field of education, this showed through the fact that while there were 1,716 primary schools in 1880 that used Slovak as the language of instruction (i.e. the entire curriculum was taught in Slovak), their number dropped to 365 by 1913. Most of them were transformed into bilingual (i.e. Hungarian–Slovak) schools whose total number increased from 597 in 1880 to 1,224 in 1900.[7] The year 1880 is important also because it was the law of 1879 that stip-

ulated the obligation of teaching Hungarian language and literature as a subject in all minority schools. After 1907, applicable authorities' pressure on pupils' obtaining good command of the state language intensified also in Slovak primary schools. One of the principal goals of Apponyi's laws was to make foreign-language children obtain good command of the state language by the time of completing the fourth grade of primary schools. (By the way, this goal did not differ essentially from the principal goal of contemporary Slovakia's policy in the field of minority education.) Bilingual schools, especially those located in language borderline towns, were gradually changed into Hungarian. Purely Slovak schools survived only in homogeneous rural communities in northern Hungary (i.e. contemporary Slovakia) but they did exist nevertheless.

It is difficult to imagine further development of an ethnic community without intelligentsia that has been educated in the given language. In order to educate this intelligentsia, a sufficiently developed system of secondary (or higher) education is inevitable. The first three Slovak secondary grammar schools established between 1862 and 1869 were closed down due to political reasons in 1875. One should also note that the total number of secondary schools in this period was substantially lower than today.

Another measure that may be viewed as insensitive by modern standards was passing a law in 1898 which stipulated that all municipalities on Hungarian territory must have official names in state language (this countered previously applied practice). As a result, Hungarian names were 'assigned' even to villages that had never had traditional Hungarian names or any direct connection to the Hungarian nation or culture.

Once again, one should note that the practice in modern Slovakia did not essentially differ from that applied by the Hungarian Kingdom. In 1948, the government administratively assigned Slovak names even to municipalities that never before had Slovak names. Particularly insensitive was a decision to name some of these municipalities after important members of the Slovak National Revival Movement and other historical figures who did not have any connection to them, for instance Štúrovo, Hurbanovo, Kolárovo (lawmakers even enacted a grammatical error here, since the well-known writer and public figure Ján Kollár was written with double 'l'), Sládkovičovo, Gabčíkovo, Hamuljakovo, Matúškovo or Tešedíkovo. Even today, it is against the law to post signs featuring these municipalities' Hungarian names although ethnic Hungarians make up much more than law-stipulated 20% of their total population.

Still, it is only fair to draw a conclusion that Slovak inhabitants of the Hungarian Kingdom were unable to lead full-fledged ethnic life after 1867

and especially after 1898 as the central government rejected legitimate political requirements formulated by the narrow group of Slovak intelligentsia. For Slovaks, it was much easier to attain full-fledged civil and/or political recognition if they gave up their national identity.

However, one should bear in mind that it could be misleading to transpose modern-world concepts of minority rights mechanically into a different historical period and international law context. In the modern European understanding (thanks largely to the Holocaust and brutal cases of ethnic cleansing that took place in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s), the term of 'harsh ethnic oppression' evokes genocide or ethnocide, which does not correspond to the historical truth in the case of Hungarian minority policies, however flawed they may have been according to modern standards and whatever excesses they may have produced (most of which are described in great detail in available Slovak letters).

Besides, if we study the rhetoric and administrative practices of the Hungarian Kingdom's political and clerical circles following the Austro–Hungarian settlement, it is difficult to resist a feeling that they conspicuously resemble arguments used by some politicians and public officials in modern-day Slovakia. Like then like today, they vehemently emphasized the need to further the use of state language in schools and in official contact, the importance of good command of the state language for citizens of minority origin in order to 'win recognition in economic and social life all around the country', the need to encourage social cohesion in order to facilitate further economic growth, the need to establish the state language as the common means of communication for all citizens, etc.

One could object that a comparison of national minorities' situation in both countries since the split of the Austro-Hungarian Empire clearly reveals a telling difference: while ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia thrive, ethnic Slovaks in Hungary have become almost assimilated…

The rebuttal of this assertion should perhaps be divided into several parts.

1. For ethnic Slovaks living in post-Trianon Hungary, the emergence of the Czechoslovak Republic and the system of peace agreements paradoxically represented a negative turning point. While the system guaranteed international legal protection of minorities living in successor states, it did not feature truly effective mechanisms and sanctions. The Czechoslovak Government did not take any special initiative with respect to ethnic Slovaks in Hungary either; it used a multitude of mechanisms to support Slovak and Czech enclaves in Romania and Yugoslavia but not in Hungary.

The Slovak community in post-Trianon Hungary (165,000 persons according to official statistics; between 200,000 and 250,000 persons

according to estimates) was thus left at the mercy of Horthy's regime and its minority policies. Following the inevitable acceptance of the Treaty of Trianon, which it viewed unjust, the regime did not show any interest in development of 'residual' ethnic communities on Hungary's territory. Slovak primary schools in language enclaves around Békéscsaba, Budapest and elsewhere were not abolished but most of them were transformed into schools of type 'C', i.e. Hungarian schools where Slovak language was taught as a subject. Hungary had approximately 50 such schools in the 1930s. Secondary schools for minorities were not required by the peace agreements and government showed no interest in maintaining them.

This model was generally applied to all national minorities that made up only some 4% of Hungary's total population in the post-Trianon period. The only exception was ethnic Germans whose number exceeded 500,000, or about 5% of the total population. Mostly in hopes of Germany's support for Hungary's ambitions regarding border revision, government education policy with respect to ethnic Germans gradually grew more accommodating in the 1930s, which showed through establishing more schools of type 'B' (i.e. fully bilingual educational establishments), including secondary schools.

The situation partially changed following the First Vienna Award by which Hungary acquired territories with sizeable shares of non-Hungarian population. The Slovak community inhabiting Czechoslovakia's territory annexed by Hungary in 1938 was served by 118 primary schools – including 73 where Slovak was the language of instruction, 38 bilingual schools and seven schools where Slovak language was taught as a subject. Also, these Slovaks could attend seven junior secondary schools, two secondary grammar schools and two secondary vocational schools.

2. The event that perceptibly affected Hungary's Slovak community after World War II was repatriation of population between Czechoslovakia and Hungary. Czechoslovak authorities assumed that the number of Slovaks living in Hungary and the number of Hungarians living in Czechoslovakia was roughly similar – some 500,000 persons. But although members of the special repatriation commission were free to advertise the measure among ethnic Slovak residents of Hungarian villages for several months in 1946, only some 73,000 ethnic Slovaks from Hungary eventually reported for transfer. Yet, their departure significantly undermined the Slovak enclave's compactness in Hungary's Lowlands. In the words of already quoted Anna Divičanová: "The partial repatriation was inevitably followed by irreversible disintegration and loosening of relatively closed ethnic communities with almost 200 years of traditions, i.e. the very factor that allowed ethnic Slovaks in Hungary preserve their language, habits and culture." While the

Slovak community in Hungary never fully recovered from the (voluntary) departure of this sizeable group, a similar wound caused by forced repatriation of approximately 90,000 ethnic Hungarians from Slovakia healed slowly but surely. It was due to greater compactness and homogeneity of the Hungarian enclave in southern Slovakia, its better organization, greater identity awareness supported by closeness of the 'kin state' and abolition of certain implications of Beneš decrees (e.g. denial of all civil and political rights) by Czechoslovak authorities after 1948.

3. Most Slovaks seem psychologically unable to accept the argument that comparing the status of ethnic Slovaks in Hungary to the status of non-Hungarian minority communities in Slovakia would be methodologically a more correct approach than comparing it to the situation of the Hungarian minority. Still, we believe that this argument is worth considering, not only due to the already mentioned fact that non-Hungarian national minorities are guaranteed parliamentary representation neither in Slovakia nor in Hungary but also due to a number of other reasons.

Slovak politicians as well as journalists relatively often quote a statement by Hungary's former ombudsman for national minorities Jenő Kaltenbach in July 2009 who said that the assimilation process of Hungary's national minorities in the second half of the 20th century was practically irreversible; little do they realize that a similar phenomenon took place in Slovakia as well. For instance, the country's Jewish and German community came on the verge of extinction, partly due to external circumstances (e.g. the Holocaust or evacuation of Germans based on the Potsdam Agreement) and partly due to activities of both countries' ruling elites (e.g. anti-Semitic laws in Slovakia and in Hungary or spontaneous expulsion of Germans based on Beneš decrees after World War II).

But even if we take a look at other national minorities, there is no essential difference in terms of the pace of their assimilation in both countries. Before World War II, over 95,000 Ruthenians and Ukrainians lived on the territory that is now Slovakia; by 2001, their number dropped to 35,000, i.e. barely over one third of the number recorded some 60 years before. The same goes for the Polish minority; the total number of ethnic Poles in Slovakia declined from 7,023 in 1930 to 2,602 in 2001, i.e. to approximately one third. Besides, one should note that Ruthenians and Ukrainians always inhabited a relatively compact territory in the northeast pocket of Slovakia, much unlike ethnic Slovaks in Hungary who – except two relatively compact enclaves around Békéscsaba and in the Pilis Hills – lived scattered across northern and southeast Hungary.

There were only two relevant national minorities, namely Germans and Slovaks, living in post-Trianon Hungary. According to the population census of 1920 they made up 6.9% and 1.8% of Hungary's total population, respectively. In the case of Slovaks, that represented 142,000 persons. Other national minorities included Croats, Romanians and Serbians, none of whom individually made up more than 0.5% of the total population. The Jews were not considered an ethnic but a religious community.

By the first post-war population census of 1949, the number of ethnic Slovaks in Hungary (i.e. persons who considered Slovak to be their mother tongue) dropped to 75,000. The decline to about one half in less than three decades may be attributed to three basic factors: minority policy of Horthy's Hungary, wartime losses and especially repatriation of population in 1946– 1947 that was proposed (and enforced) by the Czechoslovak Government. As we have said, over 73,000 ethnic Slovaks left Hungary for Slovakia. Although some of them may have left out of expediency – in search of greener pastures – there is little doubt that most of them were nationally conscious Slovaks. Their departure dealt the Slovak community in Hungary a serious blow from which it has never fully recovered. The Slovak enclave's undermined compactness played into the hands of the Hungarian government, which used the objective situation to adopt negative measures (e.g. abolishing Slovak minority schools). During the subsequent era of industrialization and collectivization, a large number of ethnic Slovaks moved into larger towns where their mingling with the majority Hungarian environment was unavoidable. The share of ethnic Slovaks declined under 50% in traditional settlements and under 20% in most other municipalities, which is the critical limit for irreversible assimilation unless government fails or refuses to adopt massive active measures aimed at reversing the assimilation process.

True, the Hungarian government did not introduce such fundamental measures until after the fall of communism. In 1993 Hungarian parliament passed Minority Act that granted national minorities the right to elect minority self-governance organs on the local, regional and national level, guaranteed disbursement of relatively generous state budget subsidies, introduced the post of minority ombudsman, and established the Office for National minorities that reports directly to the prime minister's office, etc. Adoption of this law contributed to slowing down the trend of irreversible assimilation. The total number of Hungarian citizens who claim Slovak origin increased from 10,459 in 1990 to 17,693 in 2001. On the other hand, the most recent population census also revealed a negative trend as the total number of persons declaring Slovak as their mother tongue slightly declined

from 12,745 in 1990 to 11,817 in 2001. For the first time in history, the number of ethnic Slovaks claiming Slovak origin in post-Trianon Hungary exceeded the number of ethnic Slovaks who consider Slovak to be their mother tongue.

It remains to be seen whether the total number of ethnic Slovaks in Hungary represents the critical mass that is still capable of extensive reproduction. It seems a mere illusion as long as the issue of minority education remains unresolved; however, the system of minority education can only work if there is a sufficient number of capable pedagogues with good command of Slovak language. Without the Slovak government's active involvement in this area, the Slovak community in Hungary is obviously doomed to extinction because the Hungarian government under current circumstances is simply unable to produce enough Slovak teachers of acceptable quality even if it was driven by the best interests.

In Slovakia, basic trends seem to be sustained, as the number of ethnic Hungarians who consider Hungarian to be their mother tongue continues to be higher than the number of those who claim Hungarian ethnicity (ethnic nationality); regardless of the identity criterion, the total number of ethnic Hungarians permanently declines. The number of ethnic Hungarians who claim Hungarian ethnic nationality declined from 567,000 in 1991 to 520,000 in 2001. According to sociologists' estimates, the next population census scheduled for 2011 will reveal that the total number of ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia has meanwhile declined significantly under the psychological limit of 500,000. The number of ethnic Hungarians who consider Hungarian to be their mother tongue is likely to remain above that limit, although it will probably decline by almost 100,000 compared to 1991 when 608,000 ethnic Hungarians claimed affinity to Hungarian as their mother tongue.

A more detailed look at the census figures reveals that the greatest decline in the share of ethnic Hungarians was recorded in municipalities where that share hovers just above or just below 20%. Here, the share of ethnic Hungarians between two most recent population censuses declined by 15%, which was almost double as fast as on the nationwide level. In Levice, Lučenec, Veľký Krtíš, Šaľa and Senec, ethnic Hungarians' share of these towns' total population declined by more than 20%. It is exactly the same phenomenon that was experienced by ethnic Slovaks in Hungary: as soon as their share on the local level dropped under the critical limit of 20–25%, their assimilation accelerated significantly. A similar trend may be observed in Slovakia, not only in the case of ethnic Hungarians but all other national minorities whose number is below the critical mass. It turns out

that Slovakia is equally unable to adopt effective measures aimed at halting the irreversible assimilation process. The assimilation process is relatively slow only in regions where ethnic Hungarians make up a relatively homogeneous and compact entity, i.e. especially on Žitný ostrov (Csallóköz), an alluvial island formed by the Danube River, and the strip between Komárno and Štúrovo.

Stereotype 7: Ethnic party is obsolete

The last stereotypical argument we would like to discuss is the opinion that political parties based on ethnic foundation are obsolete in modern Europe; therefore, advocates of this view argue, SMK–MKP as an ethnic party is an unnatural element on Slovakia's political landscape.

This argument is incorrect in its entirety.

First of all, it is a completely normal phenomenon that national minorities in Europe are organized in – and represented by – their own political parties. The most commonly known examples of such parties that are also represented in their respective countries' national parliaments include the Swedish People's Party (Svenska Folkpartiet) in Finland, the South Tyrolean People's Party (Südtiroler Volkspartei) that represents ethnic Germans in Italy and the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (Dviženie za prava i svobody) that represents ethnic Turks in Bulgaria. Of course, there are many other such parties all around Europe.

Secondly, a party that champions minority rights may not necessarily be an ethnic party in the literal sense of that word. After all, it is very difficult to define what an ethnic party is as there are no objective criteria. In the European Union, there is not a single party representing national minorities whose statutes would include a provision on ethnic exclusivity, and SMK–MKP is no exception in this respect. In other words, membership in these parties is open to all citizens. If any party's statutes spelled out a provision on ethnic exclusivity, it would amount to discrimination, let alone the fact that such clause would be virtually unenforceable in practice as affiliation to national or ethnic groups is a matter of free choice.

Thirdly, even if we did agree that SMK–MKP was an 'ethnic' party in the sense that it defends primarily the interests of its principal target group (i.e. ethnic Hungarians living in Slovakia) and that its candidates' lists feature almost exclusively persons of Hungarian origin, we would also have to add that this practice is nothing unusual in Slovakia's political reality as nationwide political parties representing the majority apply exactly the same approach. As it was poignantly observed by Miroslav Kusý, not a single

nationwide 'Slovak' party running in the 2006 elections mentioned tackling the issue of national minorities in its election program and none of them placed persons of Hungarian or other non-Slovak origin on its candidates' list.[8] In this sense, all nationwide Slovak parties are based on the ethnic principle; SMK–MKP is also a nationwide party as its program focuses on all spheres of governance and social development.

Fourthly, there is nothing unnatural about the fact that the principal target group of SMK–MKP consists of voters of Hungarian origin, persons with Hungarian ethnic identity or Hungarian cultural and language ties. This category of voters is an equally integral constituent of the Slovakian society as any other category of voters. The prejudice that ethnic Hungarian voters are a less legitimate target group than Roman Catholics (or Christians in general), workers, communists, Slovaks or pensioners ensues from misunderstanding of the essence of the civic principle. If we accepted efforts to edge out SMK–MKP to the political spectrum's margin on grounds that its name includes the word 'Hungarian' and therefore it does not appeal to all citizens of Slovakia, we would have to reproach other parties for the same reasons: the Christian Democratic Movement for appealing solely to Christians, the Association of Slovak Workers for representing exclusively workers, the Communist Party of Slovakia for turning only to communists, the Slovak National Party for caring merely about Slovaks, etc. The sole fact that a given party focuses primarily on this or that target group does not *prima facie* define it or disqualify in terms of sharing fundamental democratic values.

Last but not least, ethnic parties exist in all European countries that are ethnically structured, including Belgium, Spain, Ireland or Romania. The situation in Czechoslovakia after the Velvet Revolution in November 1989 evolved according to the same pattern. In Slovakia, the process of social changes immediately led to emergence of specific (ethnic-national) political formations, namely the Public against Violence and the Christian Democratic Movement: no real federally organised ("Czecho-Slovak") political party or movement was established after 1989. But that was only natural in that stage of democratic development.

In order to overcome formal ethnic cleavages in party politics, the country apparently needs to stay on the path toward democracy for much longer. Perhaps the only multiethnic European country where individual language communities are not represented by respective ethnic parties is Switzerland, which is a state that has existed for over 700 years, last 150 of which there was a relatively democratic regime in place. The issue of language rights or the status of individual language communities was resolved a long time

ago, which is why social demand for ethnic cleavages within the party system is simply non-existent.

NOTES

1   In the case of Štúrovo, for instance, posting a sign featuring the name of the municipality in Hungarian is not even an option because the valid law forbids using bilingual names of municipalities that were in 1948 renamed after Slovak national revivalists. The same goes for parts of municipalities (Nová Stráž is part of the town of Komárno).

2   For ethnic Hungarian pupils, Slovak language is simply the second, different language, even though we may for any reasons refrain from using the term of 'foreign language', which members of Slovakia's political elite do not like to hear in this context.

3   There has been only one case of an EU member state banning a political party based on ethnic criteria when Bulgaria outlawed a party representing ethnic Turks. Bulgarian authorities were subsequently forced to revise the decision because it contradicted the European Human Rights Convention. After all, proving a concrete party's 'ethnic' basis is extremely problematic as there are no objective criteria. For instance, SMK–MKP statutes do not explicitly limit party membership to citizens of Hungarian origin. True, almost 100% of its members are ethnic Hungarians but the same may be said vice versa about 'Slovak' parties, especially their candidates' lists.

4   Please see the Constitution of Kosovo, Article 59.

5   Please see Divičanová, Anna: "Situácia Slovákov v Maďarsku v 20. storočí a dnes" ['Situation of Slovaks in Hungary in the 20th Century and Today'] in Petőcz, Kálmán (ed.) *Slováci v Maďarsku. Zborník z medzinárodnej konferencie* [Slovaks in Hungary: Proceedings from an International Conference], (Šamorín: Fórum inštitút, 2007).

6   The Slovak colonization of territories of contemporary Hungary, Serbia and Romania was part of the process of resettling areas depopulated in the aftermath of occupation of Hungary's central part by the Ottoman Empire. Its beginnings may be placed to the mid-18th century.

7   All data on schools in the Hungarian Kingdom or the Republic of Hungary are taken from: Glatz, Ferenc (ed.), *Magyarok a Kárpát-medencében*, Budapest, Pallas 1989.

8   Kusý, Miroslav: "Politika voči menšinám" ['Minority Policy'] in Mesežnikov, Grigorij – Kollár, Miroslav: *Voľby 2006. Analýza programov politických strán a hnutí* [Elections 2006: Analysis of Programs of Political Parties and Movements], (Bratislava: Inštitút pre verejné otázky, 2006, pp. 103–119).

MARIE VRABCOVÁ:

The Case of Hedviga Malinová (Malina Hedvig) – Chronology, Implications and Lessons

In August 2006, a female ethnic Hungarian student was attacked and battered in Nitra. Three years later, the identity of assailants and their motives remain unclear. The victim has been scandalized as a liar and was charged on grounds of having given false evidence. As investigation of the case dragged on, it turned out that the police made one mistake after another while political leaders repeatedly obscured the facts of the case. Since perpetrators have never been brought to justice, the case continues to whip up strong feelings and has become a perfect vehicle to inflame mutual Slovak–Hungarian disputes. Many facts suggest that this indeed may have been the true motive of those who conceived and staged the entire case.

The assault

On August 25, 2006, at around 7:30 a.m. two young men dressed in black with shaved heads attacked Hedviga Malinová, a young woman of Horné Mýto (Felsővámos), in a park nearby the Hungarian Department of the University of Constantine the Philosopher in Nitra.[1] Malinová was on her way to take a degree examination from the Hungarian language. According to her testimony, she remembered only that she was just speaking Hungarian, either via a cellular phone or giving directions to tourists, when two men yelled at her: "Speak Slovak in Slovakia". After she did not react, they repeated the call after which they pulled her head back by the hair and ordered her to hand over her earrings and take off her stockings and jacket. Then the attackers demanded that she handed over her wallet that contained identity papers and began to thrash and kick her, eventually knock-

ing her unconscious. On the back side of her white blouse, they wrote in ballpoint: "Hungarians behind the Danube! Free SK of parasites!" When Malinová regained consciousness, she was unable to recollect what had happened to her. In shock, she dragged herself to the building of the university's Hungarian department where teachers noticed her wounds, strong agitation and the writing on her blouse. They called an ambulance immediately.

The battered girl was first treated at the traumatological department of the Nitra hospital where they established contusions and bruises on knee hollow and stomach cavity wall that testified to punches; her cheeks were swollen, her lips were ripped and she had suffered a concussion. Neurologist established a posttraumatic shock that may cause a partial loss of memory. On that day, hospital director Viktor Žák told the media that the girl had been clearly beaten and although she had not been seriously injured, she had suffered a very heavy trauma and would probably need a psychologist's assistance to be able to overcome the experience.

Based on her parents' request, Malinová was transferred to a hospital in Dunajská Streda still on August 25, 2009. Here, they diagnosed her again and established practically identical wounds: concussion, bruises on her left face, nose and jaw and contusions on thighs and stomach cavity wall. The doctor that examined her wrote to the medical report that the contusions had been undoubtedly caused by hand and fist blows. After 10 p.m., the student was visited in hospital by three investigators from Nitra who subjected her to questioning contrary to service regulations and despite she was still sedated, a point that was made clear to them by the doctor on duty. The investigators did not inform the victim of her legal rights, did not read the transcript to her and even left out one important sentence from the computer transcript of her testimony. According to the transcript's manuscript, Malinová uttered the following sentence: "As to whether I was on the phone with somebody or met somebody in person before the incident, I rather believe I was talking to somebody I met." This sentence is missing from the computer transcript of Malinová's testimony.[2]

Political bickering

Since physical injuries did not hamper her mobility, Hedviga Malinová asked to be released from hospital care on the next day. Based on her description of assailants from the previous day, the police produced and released identikits of assailants already on August 25 but did not announce whether any matching suspects had been found; the prosecutor did not issue

any arrest warrants. It did not turn out until later that the police apprehended and interrogated two young extremists whose appearance perfectly matched the identikits the next day after the assault but released both suspects because they reportedly had "bulletproof alibi".

Immediately after the attack, the case investigators questioned Malinová's university teachers but not her classmates who also saw her immediately after the incident. Later, some of the teachers recollected that the investigators were much more interested in why they had informed the media and why they had taken her pictures rather than in Malinová's health condition. They did not ask the teacher who had travelled with Malinová from Dunajská Streda to Nitra on the morning before the incident about her condition that morning, whether she was nervous before the examination or what were her study results.

Meanwhile, the case provoked first exchanges of heavy verbal artillery among politicians. Parliament passed a resolution condemning displays of extremism and intolerance by the votes of all assembly members except SDKÚ deputies; on August 30, civic activists organized a protest march against extremism in Nitra.[3] Hungarian Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány called on his Slovak counterpart Robert Fico to dissociate himself from anti-Hungarian statements and punish perpetrators of the assault on Hedviga Malinová. Fico's reply was that Slovakia did not need Hungary's patronizing on the importance of combating extremism.

The increasingly frequent anti-Hungarian incidents that took place on Slovakia's entire territory in summer 2006 were particularly unpleasant for the recently inaugurated Fico administration because at this point it was pulling all the stops trying to stave off strong international criticism for including the nationalist Slovak National Party (SNS) into the ruling coalition; the dominant ruling party of Premier Fico (SMER-SD) was even threatened to be expelled from the Party of European Socialists (PES). From this viewpoint, the assault on Malinová took place at the worst possible time, provided its timing had not been intentional.

Six-hour interrogation

In the afternoon hours of August 25, 2006, the police in Nitra launched criminal investigation of unknown perpetrators of the assault on Hedviga Malinová; however, their investigation was marked by conspicuous reluctance: the investigators did not inspect the crime scene until four hours after the incident; they did not properly search the surroundings of the crime scene; they did not secure the location of found objects; they did not draw

the crime scene's sketch map; last but not least, they did not even carry out a re-enactment of the incident in order to establish how long would it take the girl to cover the distance from the bus station to a birch grove by the university.

During the first questioning in the Nitra hospital, Malinová stated that her identity papers and her credit card had been stolen with the purse; on the same day, somebody posted these personal effects in an envelope to her domicile in Horné Mýto. Malinová informed the police as soon as she received the delivery; on August 30, 2006, two investigators visited her in Horné Mýto to collect the said envelope without filling out the takeover form at the spot. It was later inserted into the investigation file along with a note that Malinová handed over the envelope in person to case investigator Peter Horák in Nitra; however, Malinová was not in Nitra on that day, which means that she must have signed the form later, probably on September 9, 2006, when she was brought to the Nitra police station. On that Saturday morning, police captains Moško and Müllner travelled to pick up Malinová, stopping first in Horné Mýto and then in Dunajská Streda where she stayed at her friend's place. They told her that they had apprehended the suspected assailants and asked her to travel with them to Nitra in order to identify them. In the end, the visit turned out to be anything but identification.

When she arrived at the Nitra police station, Malinová was subjected to a six-hour interrogation during which the police tried to make her confess that she had made up the entire incident. They did not let her call her family or her lawyer and made a video recording of the entire interrogation despite her protests. Malinová did not budge and maintained until the end that the attack had indeed taken place. On September 12, 2006, three days after she was released, Prime Minister Robert Fico and Interior Minister Robert Kaliňák appeared on a press conference at which they announced that the police had terminated investigation of the matter with a conclusion that no assault had taken place and everything was a mere fabrication by a student who was anxious about her examination.[4]

Evidence of Minister Kaliňák

During the press conference, Interior Minister Robert Kaliňák presented several alleged evidence that according to his interpretation corroborated that Hedviga Malinová had lied. First he presented the victim's blouse, claiming that the garment in which she had allegedly lied in wet grass was completely clean except blood stains. Then he presented the envelope in which Malinová had received her identity papers and said that according to

graphologists, the address on the envelope as well as the inscription on the blouse was identical with Malinová's handwriting. Finally, he presented the results of DNA testing and said that the saliva found on the envelope's sealing strip as well as on the stamp's reverse side belonged to the victim. Malinová explained that the stamp had fallen off so she licked its reverse side and re-stuck it. Kaliňák countered by saying that the postal stamp "matched the stamp to one hundred-thousandth millimetre" and that the only explanation was that the victim had posted the envelope herself.

Kaliňák continued that although Malinová's credit card had allegedly been stolen, she did not do anything to put a stop on it. He also pointed out that no phone call had been made from her cellular phone at the time of the incident; later it turned out that the police checked not only the phone calls made from Malinová's cellular phone but also those made by teachers of the Hungarian department. Premier Fico who appeared at the same press conference said he was sad over how much energy his administration had had to expend in vain over lies of one student, adding that Slovakia had been undeservedly criticized before the investigation was concluded.

After the spectacular press conference, Gábor Gál, a lawyer and MP for SMK–MKP at the time, took over Malinová's legal representation; he began by publishing photographs taken shortly after the incident and calling a press conference for September 13. At the press conference, Malinová described in detail the events of August 25, 2006. Then she spoke of investigators trying to pressure her during the interrogation on September 9, 2006.[5] She reiterated she did not remember whether she had spoken to somebody over the phone or in person before the attack and that she licked and re-stuck the fallen-off stamp because the police had requested that the envelope be handed over intact. Malinová emphasized she was willing to undertake a polygraph test, which she had already requested during the September 9 police interrogation, to prove that she was telling nothing but the truth and did not make anything up.

Interior Minister Robert Kaliňák and Slovak Police Force President Ján Packa reacted by holding another press conference at which they cited from the case file. Packa emphasized that involved in investigating the case were 250 members of the force who had checked on 620 persons, adding that if the incident had indeed taken place its perpetrators could not have possibly slipped out of the justice's hands. At the same time, Slovak politicians began to criticize SMK–MKP, arguing that one of its deputies accepted Malinová's legal representation in order to score political points off a police matter; on September 14, Gál eventually resigned as Malinová's legal counsel.[6]

Apartment of Malinová's friend jumbled up

On September 15, 2006, a Piešťany lawyer Roman Kvasnica took over as Hedviga Malinová's legal representative. Three days later, he filed a complaint with the Office of District Attorney in Nitra on behalf of his client, protesting against the police decision to abandon investigation of the case.[7] On 120 pages, Kvasnica presented 30 arguments supporting his conviction that the police had contravened the law by abandoning the investigation.

On October 18, 2006, the Office of District Attorney rejected the complaint, reasoning that its review of the case file did not reveal any new facts indicating that case investigators had violated the law, deliberately or purposefully portrayed the victim as a faker or acted in a biased fashion or in compliance with orders from above. On the same day, Attorney General Dobroslav Trnka declared that Malinová had deceived law enforcement organs and now had to take responsibility for it.[8]

On October 24, 2006, the Office of District Attorney in Nitra received a motion to prosecute Malinová on grounds of instigating ethnic intolerance, giving false evidence and attempting to deceive state organs; the motion was filed by Peter Korček with a domicile in Bratislava.[9]

On November 10, 2006, the Office of District Attorney delegated Korček's motion to the District Headquarters of the Slovak Police Force that immediately launched criminal investigation of the matter.

On the night from November 20 to 21, 2006, unknown perpetrators jumbled up the apartment of Peter Žák in Horné Mýto, which he shared with Malinová. They broke the door open, pulled drawers out, opened Žák's car that was parked in the yard and left the keys in front of the entrance door. On the same day, Malinová en route to school noticed that a woman sitting next to her on the bus was flipping through photographs from their jumbled up apartment. The girl immediately called her friend, only to find out that her cellular phone did not work until late afternoon although the battery was not empty. Malinová's legal counsel reacted by filing a motion for criminal prosecution at the police in Dunajská Streda that launched criminal investigation of the matter on December 18, 2006. The public did not learn about this peculiar incident until several months later; according to Roman Kvasnica, the incident was supposed to frighten and compromise his client even further.

On December 15, 2006, Kvasnica filed a complaint to the Constitutional Court that contained over a hundred pages.[10] In the complaint, Kvasnica argued that his client's human rights had been violated because of inhuman treatment on the part of the police, because she had been prevented from

exercising her right to judicial protection and defend herself against state organs. He demanded the Constitutional Court to nullify the decision to abandon investigation as well as the decision of the Office of District Attorney that sanctioned the case investigator's decision and to facilitate the case's further investigation.

Motion for criminal prosecution

In February 2007, a new investigator was assigned to the case of false evidence given by Hedviga Malinová. On February 6, he first questioned seven classmates of Malinová who had seen her immediately after the attack.[11] Six months after the incident took place, the case investigator asked witnesses about minute details such as who was where in the university's hallway when Malinová arrived that morning, where exactly they saw the stains on her blouse and what size the stains were; one witness was even asked by the investigator to write on his back so as to see whether stains would remain on his shirt.

On May 14, 2007, the police charged Malinová of having given false evidence and perjury.[12] Exactly one week later, Roman Kvasnica on behalf of his client lodged a complaint with the Office of District Attorney in Nitra against the case investigator's decision and demanded it to cancel the said decision and abandon criminal prosecution of Malinová.

Despite repeated requests by Roman Kvasnica and despite its legal obligation to do so, the police refused to produce the blouse Malinová wore during the attack – the one that was so victoriously presented by the interior minister during the infamous press conference – the envelope in which she received her identity papers or the video footage of her interrogation of September 9, 2006.

Meanwhile, on May 17, 2007, Chairman of Hungarian Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee Zsolt Németh called the lawsuit against Malinová staged and urged Slovakia's law enforcement organs to act without prejudice. Prime Minister Robert Fico reacted by labelling Németh's statement an outrageous interference with Slovakia's internal affairs.

On May 24, 2007, the District Headquarters of the Slovak Police Force in Nitra subpoenaed Malinová to testify as the accused; claiming that she was unaware of charges against her and that she considered Nitra members of the police force to be biased, the girl refused to testify. During this questioning it turned out that Juraj Kubla, a man from Šaľa who had also filed a motion for Malinová's criminal prosecution on grounds of deceiving authorities, could not be questioned anymore because he had committed sui-

cide on May 4, 2007, i.e. on the day he was subpoenaed to questioning.[13] The other man, Peter Korček, was not questioned at all; at least the official interrogation transcript makes no reference to it.

Korček Had worked for Lexa's SIS

On May 24, 2007, the Constitutional Court rejected the complaint filed by Hedviga Malinová regarding her objection to violating her right to protection against inhuman and humiliating treatment on grounds that the complainant had not used all remedial means and other legal means effectively available within Slovakia's judicial system before she turned to this institution. In reaction to the decision, Malinová on June 13, 2007, filed a motion with the Office of Regional Attorney in Nitra, demanding it to examine lawfulness of the conduct and decisions by law enforcement organs in the matter of the attack on her person.

The next day it turned out that Peter Korček who filed a formally perfect motion for Malinová's criminal prosecution had served with the Slovak Intelligence Service (SIS) during the infamous stint of Ivan Lexa and at the time of filing the motion he worked as an assistant of Peter Gabura, an MP for KDH.[14] At this point, the list of Gabura's assistants also included Igor Cibula, a former secret service agent, and Zuzana Trnková, wife of Attorney General Dobroslav Trnka. According to all persons involved, these circumstances had nothing to do with the fact that it was Trnka who insisted that Malinová had to take criminal responsibility for her actions. At first, Gabura told the media he did not know about the entire affair and that he would fire Korček; later, he argued that assistants of MPs also had civil rights and therefore they cannot be reproached for filing a motion for criminal prosecution against anybody.

On May 31, 2007, SNS Chairman Ján Slota declared that the alleged attack on Malinová "was an artificial, staged provocation" by which someone "wanted to create an impression that Slovak citizens who speak Hungarian are persecuted in Slovakia".

Jozef Hašto, a psychiatrist who examined Malinová after the attack publicly spoke out on June 1, 2007.[15] In a media interview, Hašto spoke of the trauma Malinová was exposed to and how she managed to overcome it. He emphasized that Malinová was a strong, open and trustworthy person and that based on several multi-hour conversations, he as a psychiatrist was convinced that she had spoken the truth.

On June 5, 2007, Kvasnica officially objected to prejudice of all Nitra investigators, policemen and makers of interrogation transcripts. The law

delegates to law enforcement and judicial organs the power to decide on their prejudice; all those involved declared they did not feel prejudiced. Subsequently, Kvasnica turned to the head of the investigation department at the District Headquarters of the Slovak Police Force in Nitra with a complaint, warning the case investigators that if Malinová was brought to court for giving false evidence they would be asked to testify as witnesses before the court and their lies would be exposed.

A witness speaks out

On June 13, 2007, Hedviga Malinová requested the Office of Attorney General to examine whether the Nitra police and the Office of District Attorney in Nitra acted in compliance with the law by abandoning investigation of the attack on September 11, 2006, and turning down a complaint that protested the decision on October 18, 2006, respectively.

On June 19, 2007, Zdeno Kamenický of Nitra told several media representatives that he knew the identity of one of two suspected assailants.[16] Kamenický maintained friendly relations with the family of Róbert Benci who closely resembled one of two persons on original police identikits and overtly sympathized with extremists. Kamenický learned that Benci might have been involved in the attack from Benci's uncle; while having a beer in a pub, Benci's uncle and Kamenický saw police identikits on the TV and immediately recognized Benci. "This Hungarian [whore] was the last thing he needed," Kamenický recollected Benci's uncle as saying. Later, Benci's uncle was not even sure whether his nephew slept home on the day of the assault or had been partying with his friends at the summer house.

As we have already said, the police checked on Benci's alibi on the day of the attack when investigators met him in front of his home and asked him regarding his whereabouts that morning. Based on Kamenický's testimony, Benci got under a cloud again and was summoned by the police in Nitra but according to his mother, the police merely reassured him that everything was all right.

At first, the police was reluctant to summon Kamenický as a witness because investigators concluded that both young men resembling sketches on identikits – i.e. Róbert Benci, too – had "bulletproof alibi". On June 20, 2007, Kamenický decided to go to the police voluntarily and give his testimony; case investigators questioned him but not as a witness, most probably in order to avoid Kvasnica's presence. According to the law, the victim's legal representative is entitled to be present at all interrogations related to the case. During the interrogation, Kamenický repeated what he had

told the media; however, his testimony has not affected the false evidence lawsuit against Malinová in any way whatsoever.

Prosecution offers a deal

On July 2, 2007, Attorney General Dobroslav Trnka turned down Malinová's complaint objecting to prejudice of the Office of District Attorney in Nitra as unjustified and decided that investigation of the case would remain with the Nitra police.

On July 20, 2007, the Fair Play Alliance civic association launched a petition drive demanding proper investigation of the attack on Hedviga Malinová.

Three days later, Police Force President Ján Packa admitted in a media interview that Malinová might have been battered by someone but added that "the incident did not happen the way she describes it".[17] Also, Packa resolutely refused that the police had made a mistake by abandoning investigation of the case.

Speaking for the media on July 31, 2007, Spokesman of the Office of Regional Attorney in Nitra Jaroslav Maček hinted that the prosecutor would abandon criminal action against Hedviga Malinová in the case of false evidence if the victim admitted that she had lied.[18] He proposed either conditional abandonment of criminal prosecution or an extrajudicial settlement with the prosecutor. Malinová's legal counsel Roman Kvasnica refused both of these 'options', saying that the only acceptable proposal was abandonment of criminal prosecution of his client and proper investigation of the attack.

On August 1, 2007, the public learned that the Office of Attorney General had appointed Róbert Vlachovský as the people's representative in the case of false evidence against Malinová; in 1996, Vlachovský in the post of Bratislava regional attorney ordered a release of two SIS agents who were suspected of participating in the infamous abduction of Michal Kováč, Jr., and took the case away from investigator Peter Vačok. Vlachovský had already made two decisions in the case of Malinová: first, he decided that the case investigator had been right not to hand over the videotapes of the September 9 interrogation of Malinová to her legal counsel; second, he signed the decision by which the Office of Attorney General turned down the complaint objecting to Nitra prosecutors' prejudice.

On August 8, 2007, the Office of District Attorney in Nitra turned down the complaint against launching criminal prosecution of Malinová on grounds of false evidence filed on May 21, 2007, as unjustified. District Attorney Igor Seneši explained legislative standards that formed the basis

for the police's conduct and concluded that everything was all right according to the prosecution.[19] He brushed aside the lingering doubts regarding Malinová's interrogation on September 9, 2006, by saying that the case of alleged attack on Malinová had been lawfully closed and there was no evidence that the police had violated Malinová's rights during investigation.

Motions for criminal prosecution of Fico, Kaliňák and Packa

One year after the incident, despite repeated requests by Hedviga Malinová's legal counsel Roman Kvasnica, the case investigator continued to refuse to hand over the blouse the victim had worn at the time of the attack, the envelope in which the victim had received her identity papers or the transcript of her interrogation from September 9, 2006. The police and the prosecution presented a great variety of excuses: they labelled the blouse and the envelope as important evidence; they said that the videotapes of the interrogation had been made solely for service purposes; finally, they refused to hand over the transcript because Kvasnica allegedly had not produced an authorization from his client. After Kvasnica disproved the arguments, the prosecutor did not go to much detail and simply refused to hand over the transcript due to "particularly grave reasons".

On August 10, 2007, the Office of Regional Attorney in Nitra postponed its decision on Malinová's complaint in which she demanded it to examine lawfulness of conduct and decisions of law enforcement organs regarding the attack on her person. Until the present day, the Office of District Attorney has not decided on this complaint as well as another complaint in which Kvasnica argued that the prosecution had deceived the public regarding the authorization from his client.

On August 21, 2007, former director of the Bureau for Combating Corruption Jozef Šátek filed a motion for criminal prosecution of the prime minister, interior minister and police president on grounds of malpractice.[20] He also filed a motion for criminal prosecution of the case investigator with the Office of Military Prosecution on grounds of unlawful procurement of evidence in order to corroborate the theory that the victim had made up the incident. In his motion, Šátek criticized police negligence when sealing off the crime scene, unlawful interrogation of Malinová and pointed out that law enforcement organs repeatedly referred to Malinová's handwriting and saliva samples although Malinová was never asked to produce them, which indicates that the samples must have been obtained unlawfully. Šátek charged that medical reports by doctors who examined the victim after the attack differed from that by the forensic surgeon and that the case investi-

gator was obliged to request an independent expert's opinion. Šátek also accused Kaliňák and Packa of inspecting the case file without proper authorization and subsequently publishing the gathered information on a press conference while only the accused, their legal representatives and some precisely circumscribed public officials are entitled to do so. Last but not least, Premier Robert Fico according to Šátek went beyond his constitutional powers and usurped the powers of law enforcement organs by informing the public about their findings based on unlawfully obtained evidence.

Police and prosecution made a mistake

In reaction to the motion for criminal prosecution filed by Jozef Šátek, Premier Robert Fico declared on August 22, 2007, that the alleged attack on Hedviga Malinová was supposed to topple his administration.[21]

In August 2007, Roman Kvasnica addressed several motions to the false evidence case investigator against his client in which he proposed that further witnesses be questioned, including Premier Robert Fico, Vice-Premier Dušan Čaplovič and original case investigator Peter Horák. Elaborating on his motions, Kvasnica wrote that Fico should be questioned because his public statements indicate that he knows the identity of those who organized the attack; Čaplovič should be questioned as a witness based on his media interview in which he said that Malinová "may have been battered but not because she was Hungarian" and compared the entire case to setting off World War II by German provocateurs dressed as Polish officers. In the same interview, Čaplovič also said that he knew a doctor who examined Malinová after the attack and could swear that she had not suffered any injuries.

On August 31, 2007, Attorney General Dobroslav Trnka again requested the case file of the attack on Malinová to inspect whether the police and the prosecution thoroughly observed the letter of the law. Two weeks later, Trnka declared that both the police and the prosecution had made mistakes while investigating the case of Hedviga Malinová.[22]

In order to remedy the mistakes, Trnka set up a special investigative team comprising five policemen and prosecutors on September 24, 2007. According to experts, such a mixed investigative team has no legal footing since the principal task of the prosecution is to supervise the police's performance and evaluate complaints filed against its decisions. In spite of the criticism, the special investigative team launched its activities at the end of September. In his reaction, Kvasnica declared he did not believe in the

team's impartiality and pointed out absurdity of the situation in which his client was supposed to prove her innocence in the case against her while she did not even know the charges against her.

The case file yields its secrets

On September 27, 2007, Roman Kvasnica was finally allowed to inspect the case file at the Office of Attorney General and was promised that he would also be allowed to inspect the videotapes made during his client's interrogation on September 9, 2006.

Three days later, an investigator with the Bureau for Combating Corruption notified the Office of Attorney General that he had rejected the motion for criminal prosecution of the prime minister and interior minister filed by Jozef Šátek.

On October 3, 2007, Kvasnica received a copy of the false evidence case file.[23] The 640-page file lacked a letter from Peter Korček who had filed a motion for criminal prosecution of Hedviga Malinová on grounds of giving false evidence; also, the file contained no trace of questioning the former intelligence service agent who had allegedly formulated the motion. Not only did the case file reveal that there was no saliva sample on the sealing strip of the envelope in which Malinová had received her identity papers but also that the saliva sample had never been analyzed. The police only analyzed DNA traces on the envelope that may well have come from physical contact (i.e. touch of the hand) and compared them to the victim's DNA sample. As far as the anti-Hungarian inscription on the victim's blouse (which along with the address on the envelope matched the victim's handwriting according to the interior minister) goes, the case file revealed that an expert with the Institute of Criminal Expertise of the Slovak Police Force had testified in September 2006 that the sample was not fit for examination because the text was too short and was written in capital letters in compliance with the schooling standard.

According to testimonies given by the doctor who first treated Malinová at the Nitra hospital's traumatological department as well as the staff of the ambulance that transported her from the university to the hospital, the victim had a swollen face, a ripped lip, a rapid pulse, high blood pressure and multiple bruises on her legs. Since the victim was in shock, the ambulance doctor administered to her a large dose of sedative (10 mg of Diazepam); although both doctors on duty advised the investigators of the victim's state, they ignored their opinion and questioned her at the Nitra hospital at noon as well as at the Dunajská Streda hospital in the evening.

The part of the case file that deals with Malinová's stolen credit card is particularly contradictory. Based on information provided by Malinová's bank, the interior minister during the infamous press conference of September 12, 2006, claimed that the student's credit card had not been stopped, which according to him proved that its holder knew very well that it had not been stolen. In fact, Malinová's mother put a stop on the card on August 25, 2006, and re-activated it again on August 31, 2006. On that day, the investigators requested Slovenská sporiteľňa for written information regarding the matter; somebody wrote on the request that the card had not been stopped. Apparently, no one ever examined whether the card had been stopped in the week before August 31, 2006, since the police never received the bank's official response.

Questioning at the Office of Attorney General

On October 8, 2007, the Office of Attorney General began to conduct interrogations regarding the case of Hedviga Malinová. The first witnesses to be questioned were Denisa Pustajová and Marián Modrovič, employees of the Nitra-based private detective agency Nádej who testified that they had seen the victim in the birch grove en route to work in the morning of August 25, 2006. Both witnesses spoke to the media and subsequently reported to the case investigator after the police had abandoned investigation of the attack. Both witnesses said they noticed a barefoot girl walking along the road after half past seven but their testimonies differed in details. One of them saw Malinová on the right-hand side and the other on the left-hand side of the road. Pustajová who was also on foot said she saw her colleague driving by and even waved to him; Modrovič, though, was certain that he did not see anybody in the grove except the victim. Both witnesses testified that they found it suspicious that the girl walked slowly and calmly whereas a victim of a brutal attack would certainly run. According to the entry and departure log kept by the detective agency, both witnesses arrived to work at 7.30 a.m.; Pustajová explained that because of her boss the doorman was used to record earlier arrival times since she was always late.

Pustajová and Modrovič also testified that two weeks before their interrogation – i.e. after the Office of Attorney General had taken over the case – they were visited in their office by Ladislav Gužík, the false evidence case investigator. He asked them to write down the facts and inform him immediately if any strangers came around asking about Hedviga Malinová. According to both witnesses, the case investigator also mentioned that he was under great pressure.[24]

Malinová was also summoned to questioning at the Office of Attorney General but she refused to testify, arguing that she was not aware of charges against her. Her mother, father and boyfriend refused to testify too, citing the same reasons.

On October 19, 2007, the Office of Attorney General questioned Zdeno Kamenický who again confirmed that Róbert Benci's uncle had told him that Benci was one of the two assailants. Commenting on Kamenický's testimony, Roman Kvasnica told the media that some youngsters with shaved heads tried to intimidate Kamenický in September 2007 in Nitra, threatening to hurt him if he does not let Róbert be. The police patrol that was called to the incident refused to protocol it; instead, Kamenický and assailants were asked to shake hands.

Investigation in the birch grove

On October 19, 2007, a gang of skinheads attacked a group of university students who smoked in front of Old Theatre in Nitra with chains and clubs. The head of the Regional Police Force Headquarters in Nitra initially tried to deny the very fact that the incident had happened; the police began to investigate the entire affair after it had leaked to the press and a number of victims publicly protested. On October 28, 2007, the police apprehended several assailants including Róbert Benci, one of suspected perpetrators of the attack on Hedviga Malinová.[25] Then 17 year-old delinquent was charged with hooliganism but the prosecutor released him the next day on grounds of his minor age. In the meantime it turned out that Benci had become a habitual offender; in 2005, he battered a boy on the Nitra central bus station and a year later he faced criminal prosecution for wearing racist symbols.

Benci together with his mother and grandmother was questioned at the Office of Attorney General on October 21, 2007; his uncle was questioned two weeks later. According to Roman Kvasnica, the witnesses were unable to refute the testimony by Zdeno Kamenický according to which Benci had been involved in the attack on Malinová. It also turned out that these witnesses had not been questioned by the police regarding the Malinová case. Benci recollected that the police had contacted him sometime after the attack and asked him regarding his whereabouts on the street, in front of their house.[26] He told the investigators that he had slept at home and since this information was confirmed by his mother, they left. They searched him out again after Zdeno Kamenický had told the media that Benci was one of the assailants. Again, the investigators asked Benci, his mother and his

grandmother several questions in the doorway; then they left and returned with a revised transcript for them to sign. The police never took Benci's fingerprints, DNA sample or a handwriting specimen; they did not even ask this jobless truant about his means of subsistence or the bums he rubbed shoulders with.

On November 15, 2007, a group of investigators of the Malinová case from the special task force walked and ran the route from the Nitra bus station to the university's Hungarian department in order to establish the time it took the victim to cover the distance.[27] In the experiment that according to the Code of Criminal Procedures serves to verify testimonies given by witnesses and the accused as well as new facts established during investigation, a policewoman in mufti stood in for Malinová. The bus from Dunajská Streda the victim took that morning arrived at the Nitra bus station at around 7.10; the time established by the experiment was just enough for someone to cover the distance without stopping. It remains unclear whether Malinová actually took the examined route on the morning of August 25, 2006, because Malinová refused to testify before the special task force. Since the attorney general refused to disclose the motives behind the experiment, the can only be assumed what they aimed to prove: if two witnesses saw Malinová around half past seven in the birch grove, she could not possibly have been attacked before due to time constraints.

Hedviga Malinová vs. the Slovak Republic

On November 22, 2007, Hedviga Malinová turned to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg to object to Slovak law enforcement organs' inhuman and humiliating treatment of her person.[28] In her motion she did not demand any financial indemnification; all she wants is for the court to rule that her human and civil rights have been trampled on in Slovakia because law enforcement organs failed to investigate the circumstances of the attack on her.

A week later, the Office of Attorney General notified Roman Kvasnica that the videotapes of his client's interrogation had been referred to the Research Institute of Forensic Optics for analysis. The Office of Attorney General explained that investigators had used two cameras to make two separate recordings but both of them were of very poor quality, which is why they needed to be restored before they could be shown to the defence.[29]

On December 4, 2007, investigators from the special task force carried out further two experiments in the birch grove. This time, the Office of Attorney General aimed to establish how long it took the victim to cover

the distance from the crime scene to the university's Hungarian department. Again, a policewoman in mufti stood in for Malinová; like before, her lawyer was not informed about the experiment's conclusions.

The next day, Róbert Benci was again questioned at the Office of Attorney General. The investigators were particularly interested in Benci's sympathies with extremist groupings but Benci denied any. Benci was also asked to provide a handwriting specimen to be compared to the inscription on Malinová's blouse. On the same day, the special task force also summoned Marcel Grzyb who resembled the assailant from the other identikit but Grzyb did not show up.

On December 11, 2007, investigators from the special task force questioned for eight and a half hours Peter Horák, the investigator who led the 17-day investigation of the attack on Malinová.[30] Horák questioned Malinová three times: twice on the day of the attack in Nitra and Dunajská Streda hospitals and on September 9 when he tried to make her confess that she had lied. According to Kvasnica, each of the three interrogations was unlawful: the former two because the victim was heavily sedated; furthermore, the one in Nitra was also illegal because it was carried out before investigation of the case was officially launched; the latter because Malinová was taken to the Nitra police under a false pretext, because she was under duress and because the interrogation was attended by persons not identified in the transcript.

Doctored videotape

When Roman Kvasnica received videotapes from the September 9 interrogation, he was surprised to find out that it was only a torso of the recording. Although the interior minister cited a nearly six-hour recording to prove that Hedviga Malinová had lied through her teeth, the recording shown to Kvasnica had a running time of only three hours and 20 minutes. Later, the Office of Attorney General disclosed an additional recording with a running time of about one hour. Kvasnica's main intention was to compare the recording to the interrogation's official transcript and confront case investigators regarding potential differences but the incomplete recording rendered that ambition impossible.

Kvasnica concluded that the videotape had been edited because it did not correspond to the official interrogation transcript. The recording was free of any displays of duress the witness was reportedly subjected to; for instance, it did not reveal interrogators' threats that Malinová would be detained if she refused to confess that she had made the whole thing up.

On the other hand, the questions asked by Malinová clearly indicate what the interrogators used to intimidate her as she repeatedly asked them what would happen to her and whether they really intended to detain her. Contrary to provisions of the Code of Criminal Procedures, Peter Horák who conducted the questioning did not allow Malinová to describe what had happened in her own words; instead, he tried to put certain sentences in her mouth. Later, he explained that he did so in order to make her "stick to the storyline". Malinová repeatedly tried to explain how her saliva could have appeared on the envelope but she was not allowed to finish; also, she repeatedly emphasized that she did not remember whether she had made a telephone call but the interrogators did not seem to pay much attention.

The videotapes show that Horák asked questions one by another but they were not featured in the transcript; as a result, the transcript makes it seem that the witness recounted everything herself and got entangled in her own lies although the video clearly reveals that she was almost hushed at times. Toward the end, the investigator asked her the compulsory question of whether she wanted to add anything before he would ask her additional and specifying questions. Again, Malinová wanted to speak of the saliva sample that was found on the envelope but Horák interrupted her by saying "Later" and continued to ask her further questions to which Malinová responded by words such as maybe, perhaps, I don't know, I don't remember or no.

Pressure during interrogation

The video clearly shows that other persons who attended the interrogation – and who were contrary to the law not identified in the transcript – also asked questions of the witness although this competence rests solely with the case investigator. When questioned at the Office of Attorney General, they explained that these were merely "additional questions that were supposed to help the case investigator regarding certain details where they had acted as operatives". The transcript included neither their questions nor Malinová's responses to them. According to recording clerk Klaudia Čaládiová, it was because she did not write down questions and answers but rather summarizations of particular sections of the interrogation that were dictated to her by the case investigator.

All testimonies by policemen who appeared before the Office of Attorney General in December 2007 differed over how many of them had been present at the interrogation of Malinová on September 9, 2006. A comparison of their testimonies showed that besides Horák who conducted the interrogation and Čaládiová who made the transcript there were also

several operative officers in the room; besides, director of the Regional Investigation Bureau of the Slovak Police Force in Nitra along with other police officers monitored the interrogation from the adjacent room. Horák left the room at one point; then he returned and made a gesture to switch off the cameras. Later, he explained that technicians had told him about some technical complications; Kvasnica, for his part, believes that this was the point at which Horák decided to pressure the witness.

The transcript does not feature any details on how long were the breaks due to cassette exchanges or the technical malfunction; also, it fails to explain why Malinová had to remain at the police station for two more hours after the questioning that according to the transcript ended at noon. Horák *ex post* explained that he initially wanted to take Malinová to the crime scene but after he came to a conclusion that she had lied, he considered it pointless. It also turned out that the videotapes from the interrogation that were kept from Malinová's legal counsel for over a year had been guarded by Ladislav Gužík, the false evidence case investigator.

Investigators who break the law

The series of interrogations at the Office of Attorney General revealed that case investigators had repeatedly violated valid regulations while investigating the case. For instance, the forensic surgeon did not have a sufficient command of even basic terminology; employees of the Institute of Criminal Expertise of the Slovak Police Force did not have referential handwriting specimens and biological material samples.

Even worse, case investigators seem to have violated the law. Case investigator Peter Horák was unable to explain satisfactorily why he did not send the victim's blouse to a biological analysis; the garment was only subjected to chemical analysis but case investigators seem to have ignored even this analysis as they did not examine the origin of oil stains on the blouse. Also, Horák was unable to explain why he did not ask Malinová for a handwriting specimen and why he was so sure that the application for passport and student's record book that were compared to handwriting on the blouse had been filled out by Malinová herself years before. During investigation it turned out that on August 30, 2006, Horák had requested a printout of telephone calls placed by Malinová's university teachers on August 20–29, 2006, arguing that he aimed to find the assailant. Horák refused to answer the question by Malinová's legal counsel whether he assumed that the teachers might have been involved in the attack. Horák explained the fact

that the crime scene in the birch grove had not been properly searched with metal detectors and police dogs by saying that the investigators had been distracted by rain and television crews.

Of all forensic experts questioned in the case, most violations of valid regulations were made by Šimon Kónya, a forensic doctor who examined Malinová on September 4, 2006. Although it was ten days after the attack, Kónya confined himself to counting bruises on the girl's body; he did not find any traces of blows on her face or her thighs and since he did not establish concussion he concluded that the victim had not suffered any injuries. He only spotted a small scar on her lip but thought that the girl had bitten herself. He paid no attention to the fact that due to high density of capillary vessels, bruises on the face heal more rapidly than on other body parts; he ruled out the possibility of concussion and that the victim might have been affected by a posttraumatic shock. Kónya could not explain why Malinová did not remember every detail of the incident and all he wrote into his report was that it was merely "the victim's subjective testimony". When questioned before the Office of Attorney General, Kónya said he had not examined Malinová neurologically or psychologically and had not consulted her condition with a neurologist because he did not deem it necessary.[31]

Shooting at a target named Hedviga

On January 21, 2008, the YouTube portal released video footage that depicted unidentified men in black T-shirts with the "Police" sign shooting from machine guns on a figurine marked as Hedviga.[32] The footage was taken at the shooting range in Zemné and released via the Internet by a former student of the police academy in Pezinok. Among shooters who shouted the name "Hedviga" was also one member of the Railroad Police from Nové Zámky who remained in active service even after this incident; on the other hand, the policeman who made and released the footage was discharged from police ranks.

On February 1, 2008, the special task force of the Office of Attorney General questioned Peter Korček, a former SIS agent who had filed a motion for criminal prosecution of Hedviga Malinová. According to his testimony, Korček was "irritated" that Malinová had lashed out against Slovak law enforcement organs and accused the SIS of organizing the attack, which is why he considered his civic duty to file the motion for her criminal prosecution.[33] During the interrogation, Malinová's legal counsel Kvasnica wanted to ask him who he had worked with as an assistant of MP Peter Gabura but the prosecutor did not allow the question.

Marcel Grzyb, the witness who resembled the person from the other identikit, failed again to show up for questioning; this time, he did not even receive the subpoena. The investigation team carried on by questioning the forensic experts who had analyzed handwriting on the blouse and biological samples. The neurologist from the Nitra hospital who had treated Malinová immediately after the attack on August 25, 2006, repeated that based on expert findings, x-ray pictures and CT scans he had diagnosed Malinová with a concussion and signs of acute stress. Former hospital director Viktor Žák who spoke to the victim in person shortly after she was brought to the hospital also repeated his expert and personal view that Malinová had been battered.

The doctors and nurses from Nitra and Dunajská Streda who came in contact with Malinová all testified along the same lines. The doctor who treated Malinová in the ambulance that transported her from the university to the hospital said that Malinová shivered on the entire body; she said her blood pressure was 150/80, her pulse was 150 and her pupils were dilated, which usually indicates either stress or fear. Confronted with virtually unanimous views of his colleagues, forensic doctor Šimon Kónya stuck to his opinion, saying that while he did not contest his colleagues' conclusions, their diagnoses did not correspond to objective findings.

Marriage, merits, maternity

On February 14, 2008, Hedviga Malinová entered into matrimony with Peter Žák.

On March 7, 2008, the special task force finally got to question Marcel Grzyb. Upon arrival to the Office of Attorney General, Grzyb called the reporters waiting in front of the building hyenas and even attacked two of them.[34] Grzyb did not hide his sympathies with extremist movements and admitted that he knew Róbert Benci by sight. He denied any connection to the attack on Malinová, saying that he was in Vienna at the time of the incident. He also said he had been summoned to the police shortly afterwards where investigators made a copy of his job attendance record. Even before the interior minister branded Malinová a liar, Grzyb told one private TV station that the student had made up the whole attack. When Roman Kvasnica asked him to corroborate this statement, Grzyb answered that the victim's photographs published after the attack showed her face was not swollen and only "her cheek was somehow bloated".

On May 19, 2008, Malinová passed the state examination at the University of Constantine the Philosopher in Nitra, majoring with merits in Hungarian and German language.

On June 24, 2008, Malinová gave birth to a baby girl by the name of Emma Rozina.

At the end of June 2008, Attorney General Dobroslav Trnka announced that the special investigation team would conclude its investigation of the case and publish is findings by the end of August. In July 2008, the special task force carried out one last experiment; they wrote on the backs of figurants in order to establish whether a pen leaves marks on skin. One of the figurants was standing up while the other was lying on the stomach; after one or two hours, the writing marks disappeared from both of their backs. In 2006, forensic experts from the Institute of Criminal Expertise of the Slovak Police Force observed that the marks were clearly visible on skin even after six hours, which according to them justified a conclusion that the inscription on the blouse could not have been written while the victim was wearing it. The prosecutor rejected a proposal by Kvasnica to do the same experiment with his own ballpoint pen.

On July 3, 2008, SNS Chairman Ján Slota declared that the alleged attack on Hedviga Malinová had been organized by the Hungarian secret service and that the victim had never been on the crime scene. While Kvasnica commented that the case file made no reference to another country's intelligence service, he proposed that all reports by the Slovak Intelligence Service to Slovakia's constitutional officials regarding the case should be included in the case file.

How do you spell Danube in Hungarian?

In summer 2008, the Institute of Criminal Expertise of the Slovak Police Force again performed forensic tests on the blouse Hedviga Malinová was wearing at the time of the attack as well as on the envelope in which she received her identity papers back. Having examined the blouse, forensic experts concluded that the front piece of the garment had been ripped and sheared by manicure scissors. As far as the inscription on the garment's back side goes, the experts concluded that the random contact of the pen and the garment was without a trace, which means that the inscription was most probably made on a hard surface as opposed to a body. Another test was supposed to confirm or disprove whether the envelope in which the victim had received her identity papers contained traces of DNA and saliva and, if so, whether they matched those of the victim. When the interior minister publicly branded the victim a liar, he claimed that the envelope's sealing strip contained her saliva, which according to him proved that she had posted the envelope herself. As it turned out, the police had not even

performed such a test back then as forensic experts established that the envelope's sealing strip did not contain any saliva at all. The only saliva matching that of Malinová was found on the reverse side of the postal stamp; however, Malinová never denied that she had licked and re-stuck the fallen-off stamp.

The experts were unable to conclude who had written the inscription on Malinová's blouse and her address on the envelope. They compared them to handwriting specimens provided by Marcel Grzyb and Róbert Benci, two suspected assailants from police identikits; however, their conclusion was that "it was impossible to confirm or to rule out" the match with either suspect's handwriting, mostly because the perpetrators wrote on a soft cloth in capital letters and also because the investigators who had secured the blouse failed to secure referential material as well. According to the graphologist's testimony, they were only interested in whether there was 'I' or 'J' at the end of the sentence "Maďari za Dunaj" ['Hungarians behind the Danube'] because if it was an 'I' it would indicate that the text had been written by a person of Hungarian nationality; in fact, Danube in Hungarian is spelled Duna. Later the investigators took the envelope along with Malinová's student's record book and her passport application to the Institute of Criminal Expertise of the Slovak Police Force. A comparison of the address on the envelope and the inscription on the blouse showed that they had been written by the same person. While handwriting in the student's record book and the passport application showed some similarity to handwriting on the envelope and on the blouse, according to forensic experts' opinion it is quite normal in the case of capital letters; therefore, it was impossible to establish the match unambiguously.[35]

From the beginning, Malinová's legal counsel Roman Kvasnica questioned trustworthiness of the forensic experts and demanded that the evidence be examined by independent experts. According to him, an institution that reports to the Slovak Police Force cannot be considered impartial, particularly when its experts are not listed on the official list of experts and are not legally responsible for their potential mistakes.

Another abusive video clip

On September 8, 2008, the YouTube server released another abusive video clip aimed against Hedviga Malinová that had been posted from a certain American server. The song titled Tupá piča [Stupid Cunt] was most probably recorded by a neo-Nazi band and teems with vulgarisms on the girl's address. The song's 'lyrics' say that no one will ever believe Malinová in

Slovakia and that she should flee the country because she has been bribed by the people that ought to be killed and that she has made innocent boys suffer.[36] When the band sings about killing people, the video shows the photographs of SMK–MKP leaders Pál Csáky, Béla Bugár, Miklós Duray and Gábor Gál as well as Malinová's legal counsel Kvasnica. The video clip also features archive photographs of Malinová as well as the interior minister and the head of the Slovak Police Force. When the band sings about punishing innocent boys, the video shows the photograph of Marcel Grzyb, one of two suspected assailants from police identikits. SMK–MKP Chairman Pál Csáky reacted to the abusive video clip by filing a motion for criminal prosecution of an unknown perpetrator. On September 11, 2008, the prosecutor instructed the Regional Headquarters of the Slovak Police Force to launch investigation on grounds of dangerous intimidation; the investigation is still underway.

On September 12, 2008, Attorney General Dobroslav Trnka announced that the special investigation team of the Office of Attorney General had concluded its examination of the case of Hedviga Malinová and that it was only awaiting forensic doctors' expert opinions.[37] Trnka also announced there would be no more testimonies, interrogations and experiments as the task force had gathered enough evidence to conclude the case by the end of 2009. The Office of Attorney General did not respond in any way to repeated demands in which Roman Kvasnica proposed to question the employees of the private detective agency, politicians who had commented on the case and the original case investigator. Kvasnica pointed out he was entitled to inspect the case file and demand further procedural acts and that the investigation could not be officially terminated until the Office of Attorney General complied with his demands.

On September 24, 2008, Róbert Benci concluded an agreement with the prosecutor regarding the case of hooliganism in front of Old Theatre in Nitra. Along with three other gang members, Benci was charged with hooliganism; as a minor, he is facing conditional imprisonment ranging from three to eighteen months.

Settlement or polygraph test?

At the beginning of October 2008, the Office of Attorney General proposed that Hedviga Malinová be subjected to a polygraph test, adding that if she was not willing to take the test she should appear before the special investigation team in person and explain her reasons; otherwise she would be fined 50,000 Sk (1660).[38] Her legal counsel Roman Kvasnica responded to

the proposal by a letter to the attorney general posted on October 20, 2008, in which he argued that since a polygraph test was not acknowledged as evidence by the Code of Criminal Procedures, his client would not violate any law by refusing the test or failing to appear before the special investigation team. In the letter, Kvasnica again called on the Office of Attorney General to disclose the charges against Malinová and specify when she had lied and what about.

On this occasion, Kvasnica announced that his client had already taken a polygraph test in November 2006 in a country where forgery of polygraph test results was punishable by law, adding that Malinová's version of the story was evaluated as truthful by the test. Kvasnica also emphasized that Malinová was willing to take a polygraph test in the presence of the attorney general but only abroad. The Office of Attorney General did not react in any way to the proposal.

Kvasnica also informed that he had been approached by people close to the Office of Attorney General who offered that if his client confessed to not telling the truth at least in some aspects of the case, her criminal prosecution would be abandoned. Kvasnica added that he had turned down the offer and refused any such haggling.

On October 30, 2008, an employee of the Nitra branch of Slovenská sporiteľňa testified before the special investigation team, disproving the assertion by the interior minister that the credit card stolen from Malinová had not been stopped. The employee recollected telling the investigators who came asking for information on August 31, 2006, that the credit card had been stopped on August 25, 2006, and re-activated again on August 31, 2006.[39]

Proposals to question further witnesses

On December 5, 2008, Roman Kvasnica proposed to the Office of Attorney General that further witnesses be questioned as part of the process of gathering criminal evidence.[40] He requested repeated interrogation of the original case investigator Peter Horák who was supposed to explain why the transcript of Hedviga Malinová's interrogation of September 9, 2006, did not match the video footage of the interrogation.

Kvasnica also proposed to question Erik Tomáš, the Interior Ministry Spokesman who had uttered the following sentence in an interview for one daily paper in October 2006: "Six days after the attack, the headquarters of Slovenská sporiteľňa confirmed that the [credit] card had not been stopped." Kvasnica argued he would like to find out where Tomáš got the informa-

tion from, who had authorized him to inspect the case file, and whether it was he who provided photographs of Malinová from the case file to the press.

The list of witnesses to be questioned that was proposed by Kvasnica also included MP Peter Gabura and his three assistants, namely Peter Korček who had filed a motion to criminal prosecution of Malinová on grounds of false evidence, Igor Cibula and Zuzana Trnková, wife of the attorney general. The next on the list were the psychiatrists who treated Malinová after the attack – László Sárközy of Dunajská Streda and Jozef Hašto of Trenčín.

Malinová's legal counsel also viewed important to question Ladislav Gužík, the false evidence case investigator who was supposed to explain why the motion for criminal prosecution filed by Peter Korček was not included in the case file, whether Korček had been questioned at all and if so, why the transcript from this interrogation was also missing from the case file.

Last but not least, Kvasnica proposed to question two cabinet members, namely Prime Minister Robert Fico and Deputy Prime Minister Dušan Čaplovič. In August 2006, Fico told the media that the alleged attack on Malinová was supposed to topple his administration; this statement clearly indicates that Fico not only had first-hand information on the attack on Malinová but also information on who had organized the attack and about the course of investigation. The last on the list was Čaplovič who in an interview for one weekly magazine in 2007 said that Malinová "may have been battered but not because she was Hungarian". The Office of Attorney General did not react in any way to proposals made by Kvasnica.

PRONOUNCEd iNNOCENT

On December 4, 2008, Attorney General Dobroslav Trnka announced that Marcel Grzyb had successfully passed the polygraph test earlier in the month; four days later, he announced that Róbert Benci had successfully passed the polygraph test as well.[41] Trnka refused to elaborate on when and where both polygraph tests had been performed. The Office of Attorney General did not even inform the legal counsel of Hedviga Malinová although he was legally entitled to attend the tests; according to Trnka, Kvasnica was not summoned because polygraph test results are not acknowledged as evidence before courts of justice in Slovakia anyway.

On December 8, 2008, the court accepted the agreement between Róbert Benci and the prosecutor regarding the case of hooliganism in front of Old

Theatre in Nitra, issuing a suspended sentence of three-month imprisonment for a probation period of 18 months.[42]

On December 29, 2008, Martin Bútora refused to accept a decoration awarded by the Slovak Atlantic Commission he was supposed to receive together with Interior Minister Róbert Kaliňák. In an official statement, Bútora explained it was his protest against the political style currently pursued in Slovakia that "divides people, increases tensions within society, spreads the virus of nationalism, sets different social groups against one another and portrays upholders of different opinions as enemies of the state." He cited the case of Hedviga Malinová as an example of this political style.

On January 29, 2009, Roman Kvasnica informed the Office of Attorney General that contrary to the law, the Office of Regional Attorney in Nitra had been unable for 23 months to decide on his client's motion of June 13, 2007, in which she demanded it to inspect the case investigator's decision to abandon investigation of the case of attack on her as well as the prosecution's resolution that sanctioned the said decision. Kvasnica reiterated the same demand on February 12, March 26, and May 18, 2009, always to no avail.

Also, Kvasnica repeatedly proposed to question further witnesses and demanded that the prosecution's special investigation team included into the case file documents regarding criminal action against Róbert Benci, one of two suspected assailants, before district courts in Nitra and Prievidza. Benci faces legal action on grounds of promoting the skinhead movement in Prievidza and on grounds of a brawl with extremist motives in Nitra; however, he was not indicted in either case because of his minor age.

Awaiting forensic doctors' expert opinions

On January 30, 2009, Attorney General Dobroslav Trnka informed that the expert's opinion of doctors commissioned in summer 2008 would be completed by the end of March and that investigation of the case of Hedviga Malinová would thus be concluded.

On March 26, 2009, the case of Malinová was supposed to be the main topic of Pod lampou, a discussion broadcast of TV Joj. Moderator Štefan Hríb had invited Hedviga Malinová, her parents, her legal counsel Roman Kvasnica, psychiatrist Jozef Hašto, Interior Minister Robert Kaliňák and Attorney General Dobroslav Trnka. Kaliňák and Trnka excused themselves in the last moment, arguing that the investigation had not yet been concluded. Subsequently, the management of TV Joj decided to cancel the broadcast with this topic.

On May 9, 2009, Róbert Benci again manifested himself by throwing a flare on the playground during a first division football match between Nitra and Trnava. Although he was still on probation, the police qualified his act as a transgression as opposed to hooliganism,[43] which would inevitably result in Benci's serving the suspended sentence of three-month imprisonment for the incident before Old Theatre in Nitra.

On July 15, 2009, Dean of Comenius University's Medical Faculty Peter Labaš informed the media in Nitra that the final expert's opinion prepared jointly by university experts was taking so long to issue because experts' views differed. He did not rule out a possibility that he would be the only one to sign the expert's opinion. According to Labaš, former director of the Nitra hospital Viktor Žák who passed away in the meantime tried to sway the doctors to a conclusion that Malinová had been battered by the assailants.[44] Not a single hospital doctor testifying before the special investigation team mentioned anything about Žák attempting to influence their conclusions; none of these doctors has been questioned ever since. The doctors testified that Labaš had visited them all but only to speak about the diagnosis. In reaction to the new development, Attorney General Dobroslav Trnka said that other doctors refused to sign the expert's opinion because they were under pressure from the media that wanted them to confirm the attack on Malinová. Trnka again promised that the special team's investigation would be concluded within a short period of time.

Peculiar polygraph test results

On July 16, 2009, the Office of Attorney General in a letter addressed to Roman Kvasnica refused to question the witnesses he had requested, i.e. Premier Robert Fico, Vice-Premier Dušan Čaplovič, psychiatrists Jozef Hašto and László Sárközy and MP Peter Gabura; also, the Office of Attorney General considered it unnecessary to question again Zdeno Kamenický, Róbert Benci and his family and employees of the private detective agency from Nitra; finally, the Office of Attorney General refused to issue the transcript of the testimony in which investigator Ladislav Gužík admitted that he was under great pressure.

At the end of July 2009, i.e. almost eight months belatedly, Kvasnica received polygraph test protocols of Marcel Grzyb and Róbert Benci. As it turned out, their results were not nearly as unambiguous as the attorney general had presented in December 2008; Benci had to be tested again after his first test had been pronounced "unsuccessful" while Grzyb had to be tested by another methodology before the test confirmed that he had told the truth.[45]

The case prosecutor summoned both suspected assailants in person and set the date of testing on November 12, 2008. Marcel Grzyb was summoned to the Institute of Criminal Expertise of the Slovak Police Force in Pezinok; Róbert Benci was summoned to the Office of Attorney General in Bratislava from where he was presumably taken to the test in Pezinok under the patronage of the case prosecutor himself.

Benci told the expert supervising the polygraph test that he suffered from toothache and had taken two painkiller pills (Ibalgin) the night before but was tested nevertheless. Based on his physiological reactions, the experts were unable to conclude unambiguously whether he was telling the truth and decided to repeat the test. Grzyb took his polygraph test on the same day and in the same time as both tests began exactly at 9.03 a.m.; Grzyb's test took three hours and ten minutes, Benci's test took two hours and forty minutes. According to official protocols, two out of three experts supervising the polygraph tests were present at both tests; how they managed that remains a mystery.

Polygraph questions ŕ la carte?

Initially, Marcel Grzyb was asked three questions but the experts were unable to conclude unambiguously from his answers whether he was telling the truth and opted for another methodology. Based on his negative answers to two questions regarding the attack, they concluded that the suspect had told the truth.

Benci took the repeated polygraph test on December 1, 2008. This time, he complained about the lack of sleep; according to the protocol, he had slept less than four hours the night before. His negative answer to the first question of whether he attacked Hedviga Malinová in August 2006 was evaluated as truthful by the supervising experts. Subsequently, Benci requested a permission to call his friend that was supposed to take him home. Since he did not answer the phone, Benci began to worry that he would not make it home because he did not have any money. His answers to the next two questions were not convincing and the supervising experts were unable to conclude unambiguously whether he was telling the truth. They attributed it to his sleepiness (Benci reportedly fell asleep several times during the test) and anxiety over how would he get home. Again, they decided it was impossible to make an unambiguous conclusion whether Benci had answered the relevant questions truthfully.[46]

Despite that, the Office of Attorney General interpreted polygraph test results as the proof of tested persons' truthfulness. For instance, Attorney General Dobroslav Trnka said it was beyond any doubt that the two suspects had not attacked Malinová.

According to experts in the field of criminology, the chosen methodology of asking questions as well as changing that methodology in the course of the test cannot be considered standard. If two or more persons are investigated over the same matter or if it is necessary to repeat the test, the referential methodology must remain the same throughout testing and the questions must be formulated absolutely unambiguously. In this particular case, it remains unclear on what basis the experts elaborated the questions for the polygraph test as they never received the case file from the Office of Attorney General. Last but not least, the very question regarding the attack on Malinová is doubtful because the assailants did not know the name of the victim at the time of the attack, which means they could testify in all honesty that they did not attack Malinová. According to Roman Kvasnica, it cannot be ruled out that someone prepared the suspects for the test in advance in order to manipulate the public since polygraph test results are not acknowledged as evidence before courts of justice in Slovakia anyway.

Forensic doctors accused of bias

On August 10, 2009, Dean of Comenius University's Medical Faculty Peter Labaš addressed a letter to Hedviga Malinová in which he asked for a permission to publish her medical records. Malinová refused and filed a complaint objecting to prejudice of Labaš and other doctors who had participated in elaborating the expert's opinion.[47] Her legal counsel Roman Kvasnica filed another complaint with the Office of Attorney General in which he pointed out that Labaš was a politically active and partial person because he had taken part in election campaign of incumbent President Ivan Gašparovič who repeatedly criticized Malinová in the media. Labaš may have even violated the law by publicly evaluating available evidence in the media before investigation was officially terminated and even portrayed himself as someone whose opinion was decisive for investigators' conclusions.

According to Kvasnica, Labaš also violated the law by failing to summon doctors from Nitra to give official testimony; instead, Labaš questioned them privately thus compelling them to divulge medical secrets. Kvasnica argued that Labaš had no right to ask Malinová to authorize him to publish her medical records, reasoning that according to the law, a forensic

expert is not entitled to provide information on facts from medical records, not even to persons for whom the expert's opinion is intended for; the only exception is the data that form part of the expert's opinion. Kvasnica also criticized Labaš for asking the doctors questions from the domain of neurology although he himself was listed as a surgeon on the list of experts. Along with Labaš, Kvasnica accused all doctors who had participated in elaborating the expert's opinion of prejudice, arguing that all of them were subordinated to Labaš.

Investigators with dysfunctional memory

On August 24–25, 2009, the special investigation team again (for the third time) questioned Peter Horák, investigator of the original case of attack on Hedviga Malinová, and his two subordinates. Malinová's legal counsel Roman Kvasnica wanted to ask Horák who had conducted his client's interrogation on September 9, 2006, why the official transcript from this interrogation did not match the video recording made at the same interrogation. Horák explained the differences by saying that he summed up the facts stated by Malinová and dictated it to the recording clerk. When Kvasnica pointed out that the transcript features sentences Malinová never uttered according to the video recording, Horák replied that Malinová should not have signed the transcript if she had objections.

The questioning of two other investigators, namely captains Moško and Müllner, did not bring much result either. It was them who on August 30, 2006, took over from Malinová the envelope in which she had received her identity papers back; also, it was them who brought Malinová to Nitra on September 9, 2006, under the false pretext of identifying suspected perpetrators. Before the special investigation team, both policemen maintained that they did not remember anything anymore; they were unable to explain why they had not protocolled the envelope's handover or why they had not told Malinová that they were taking her to interrogation.[48]

Korček turns coat

On August 26, 2009, Peter Korček wrote a letter to Prime Minister Robert Fico, asking him to use his authority to make the Office of Attorney General abandon criminal prosecution of Hedviga Malinová on grounds of false evidence. The former SIS agent who in October 2006 filed the motion to prosecute Malinová because he was "irritated" that she had "lashed out against Slovak [law enforcement] organs" appealed to the Slovak nation's

clemency for a change. In the letter, he wrote that while he was fully aware of his personal responsibility for the case's development and his feelings regarding the matter had not changed, he believed that the dragging investigation had traumatized society for far too long and the time had come for forgiveness.[49]

In reaction to Korček's letter, the Office of Attorney General wrote that the letter did not and could not affect criminal prosecution of Malinová in any way, because the office had not received only Korček's motion but dozens of similar motions. In fall 2006, law enforcement organs announced launching criminal prosecution of Malinová based on a motion filed by a Bratislava resident. That there were in fact two citizens to file motions for Malinová's criminal prosecution did not turn out until May 2007 when one of them committed suicide; no one has ever mentioned any other person to file a similar motion.

When commenting on the change in Korček's position, Malinová's legal counsel Roman Kvasnica said it was hardly a coincidence that the person who had filed the motion suddenly appealed to clemency. According to him, Korček got scared because it turned out in the meantime that he was colleagues with the attorney general's wife and perhaps he suddenly realized that the motion he signed was abused for dirty political games.

Injuries of earlier origin

On September 4, 2009, Kvasnica received a medical expert's opinion on the condition of Hedviga Malinová after the attack elaborated by Dean of Comenius University's Medical Faculty Peter Labaš. According to the document, the wounds and contusions on the victim's lips and thighs originated earlier than August 25, 2006; as far as other injuries are concerned, the 30-page document did not establish any. In remains unclear who co-authored the report's particular chapters because the document does not feature a single direct quote from a source other than Labaš.

The special investigation team expected the report to answer ten questions regarding the condition of Malinová after the attack, the origin of her wounds, the time of their healing and the effects of drugs administered to her at the time. Labaš answered only about half of the questions on just a few lines. In his report, the author quoted from testimonies of doctors who had treated and/or examined Malinová, alas incorrectly; some quotes were pulled out of the context while others led him to conclusions that could not be corroborated by facts from interrogation transcripts.

Labaš did not deem it necessary to request expert's opinions from László Sárközy and Jozef Hašto, psychiatrists who treated Malinová after the attack, since he paid virtually no attention to the victim's mental condition and the trauma she had been through. Based on his assessment of "examined documentation" (that was not specified) and photographs, his own observations and "consultations with experts", Labaš came to a conclusion that Hedviga Malinová had not been battered.

According to the document, Malinová had bitten her own lip because if she had sustained a blow to the lip, the swelling would have grown and not diminished in the following days. The laceration on her lip and the contusions on her thighs originated before August 25, 2006; the report also concluded that Malinová did not suffer a concussion and therefore any memory loss. At the bottom, next to the stamp of Comenius University's Medical Faculty, the report stated the names of twelve collaborators but only one signature – that of Labaš. He explained this by saying that it was a collective effort and that he had consulted his colleagues anytime he deemed it necessary.[50]

Cited experts object

Most doctors identified as the report's co-authors were totally reluctant to speak for the media regarding the issues Peter Labaš had consulted with them; however, their reactions indicate that they were asked rather general questions by Labaš, they did not know that they would be identified as the report's co-authors and they did not sign or even read the final report.[51]

On September 9, 2009, two of the phantom co-authors, namely psychiatrist Viera Kořínková and dental surgeon Peter Stanko, publicly dissociated themselves from the Labaš report. Kořínková stated she was not aware that her name appeared on the list of experts, adding that she had turned down an offer to cooperate on the matter back in summer 2008. According to her, Labaš never consulted her regarding Malinová's condition; all he did was ask her to describe to him the mechanism of Diazepam's effects with special reference to patient's reasonableness. Kořínková provided Labaš with a general characteristic but stressed that in order to assess a concrete case she would need an opinion of psychiatrists treating the patient and a number of specific information. Since Kořínková considered incorrect that the report had identified her as one of the co-authors without her knowledge and consent, she visited Labaš in person and demanded that her name be withdrawn from the list; Labaš refused to comply.

Peter Stanko, dental surgeon and the university's senior lecturer, object-ed to the report's passage in which Labaš concluded that the laceration on Malinová's lip could not have been caused by a blow. As he recollected, Labaš had asked him to describe the general mechanism of lip laceration and that his opinion was that the lower lip could have been injured by the upper teeth; however, Stanko never concluded that the injured person had bitten her lip deliberately as this is normally assumed in the case of men-tally retarded patients or persons under the influence of alcohol or drugs. According to Stanko, Malinová's wound may have been caused by a blow but he could not rule out that she bit her lip as she was knocked down to the ground. He said he had not written the part of the report that referred to his expertise, he had not even read it and if he had been shown the report he would have certainly asked for specification.[52]

Additional clarifications

The next day after Kořínková and Stanko had dissociated themselves from the Labaš report, surgeon Luděk Vrtík followed suit. In a statement veri-fied by a notary public, Vrtík publicly announced that the document had listed him as one of its co-authors without his knowledge and consent, adding that he had never worked as a forensic doctor for Comenius University and that nobody had ever consulted him about the condition of Hedviga Malinová. Another supposed co-author, plastic surgeon Jozef Fedeleš, declared for the media that approached him that he did not feel any need to comment on the document because he had not taken any part in elaborating it, he had not read it or signed it and had nothing to do with the entire affair. Those surgeons who stuck to the Labaš report – namely Marián Vicián, Martin Huťan and Ján Škultéty – were unable to identify the issues Labaš had consulted them on.

Despite his phantom colleagues' protests, Labaš first maintained that each person involved knew about being included on the list of experts; he claimed he did not ask them for more specific opinions because Malinová had not authorized publishing her medical records. Later he changed the tune and said that for the sake of objectivity he deliberately requested gen-eral information and did not reveal to his consultants what particular case he inquired about.

Although Peter Labaš abused the names and reputation of a number of his colleagues, Rector of Comenius University František Gahér refused to comment on questions whether he would initiate Labaš's removal from the post of dean. "The media incorrectly interpreted the report and cited or

highlighted only those parts they viewed correct or those that led to incorrect conclusions," Gahér wrote in his statement for the media. A similar position on the report was presented by Attorney General Dobroslav Trnka who said he did not believe the media and wanted to hear from the doctors whether they dissociated themselves from the report. According to lawyers, the only way of "legitimizing the Labaš report" *ex post* is to summon all doctors listed as the report's consultants as witnesses before the special investigation team and ask them to confirm or deny particular conclusions, although the report's trustworthiness has already suffered an irreparable blow. The Office of Attorney General refused to comment on its plans regarding the report.[53]

Lies surrounding CT scan

On September 28, 2009, legal counsel of Hedviga Malinová Roman Kvasnica sent to the Office of Attorney General his comments on the expert's opinion elaborated by Peter Labaš. On 35 pages, Kvasnica refuted and/or corrected Labaš's conclusions. He argued that the expert's opinion did not comply with even the most basic formal requirements as its author had deliberately selected from available interrogation transcripts and even altered some of the testimonies. Kvasnica pointed out that the Labaš report failed to provide satisfactory answers to questions explicitly asked by the special investigation team regarding Malinová's injuries or drugs administered to her and completely ignored her mental condition. To his comments, Kvasnica also attached written statements by the two doctors who had dissociated themselves from the Labaš report.[54]

On October 1, 2009, it turned out that Labaš had lied by concluding that Malinová's CT scan did not establish any facial injuries. In fact, the victim's face was never scanned because the doctors focused on ruling out skull fractures and brain haemorrhaging. The media obtained the protocol from CT scan from the Nitra hospital based on Malinová's consent. It remains unclear how Labaš got his hands on the CT protocol; he certainly did not have the patient's consent and most probably didn't have the Office of Attorney General's authorization either since the CT scan is not part of the case files. The CT scan reveals that contrary to Labaš's conclusions, the doctors did not scan Malinová's "entire body" but only the skull, brain, chest, stomach and pelvis minor. The CT examination had been requested by the traumatologist who aimed to establish potential fractures and internal haemorrhaging as opposed to contusions. According to Labaš, "the CT scan provides fundamental direct evidence that except a minor lip lacera-

tion and bruises of earlier origin on thighs, Hedviga Malinová did not sustain any other injuries". In the meantime, the media have presented views from several radiologists who explained in unison that the principal goal of a CT scan is not examination of contusions and that a failure to establish fractures or internal haemorrhaging does not necessarily mean that the patient was not battered or kicked about.

In his report, Labaš maintained that blue-violet contusions with a diameter of about three centimetres on Malinová's thighs had already begun to absorb by August 25, 2006, i.e. they originated much earlier; oddly enough, the report makes no reference to Labaš's consultation with dermatologist. According to dermatologists who have spoken for the press, the colouration and absorption of contusions is too individual to allow establishing the time of origin.[55]

Epilogue

The whole affair started out by battering an innocent Slovak citizen of Hungarian origin on the street because she was using her native language. In the beginning, it all seemed like a simple case, no matter how outrageous; two weeks later, though, the public learned from top political leaders that the incident had not happened at all and that the victim had apparently beaten herself. It took about one year before the president of the Slovak Police Force admitted under the weight of evidence that the victim had indeed been battered and before the attorney general admitted that law enforcement organs had made several mistakes while investigating the case.

But whoever thought that all those involved would do their best to investigate the case properly from now on was deadly wrong. The Office of Attorney General set up a special investigation team that carried out new investigation experiments and requested new experts' opinions; all this was in vain, as three years after the attack, the state of affairs is more complicated than ever before. Thanks to Dean of Comenius University's Medical Faculty Peter Labaš, the previously existing two investigation versions were extended to three; according to his opinion, the wounds of Hedviga Malinová originated before August 25, 2006, and were self-inflicted. After all her 'adventures', victim Hedviga Malinová continues to face charges of giving false evidence while Attorney General Dobroslav Trnka remains silent. Originally, Trnka promised that the investigation would be completed soon after the final medical expert's opinion was released; however, since several doctors identified as the document's co-authors dissociated

themselves from it, nobody – not even Trnka himself – can take the document seriously anymore.

One thing is for sure: regardless of its outcome and no matter how long it continues to drag on, the case of Hedviga Malinová will remain a rich breeding ground for extremists' views. The innocent student involuntarily became the symbol of a mendacious Hungarian, although more and more evidence seems to indicate that this symbol was deliberately fabricated by those who need to have a counterargument ready against ethnic Hungarians.

But this seemingly never-ending case also has far-reaching consequences for the entire society. It shows that government's law enforcement organs (i.e. the police and prosecution) have little respect for the law themselves, that politicians are allowed to say anything and act as they please and that extremists are allowed to insult minorities' members – all this with impunity. The politicians who vehemently declared three years ago that the attack had never taken place and cited one piece of 'evidence' after another to disprove assertions by Hedviga Malinová have remained silent ever since it turned out they had lied themselves. They did not show any indignation over abusive video clips and refused to take decisive measures even when law enforcement organs faced accusations of having violated the law, either because they are involved in the case in a not-so-seemly fashion or because the current state of affairs suits them just fine. Silence implies acceptance of giving bad names to Hedviga Malinová, ethnic Hungarians or anybody for the sake of achieving political goals while impunity is guaranteed in advance. The only question is whether those who let the genie out of the bottle realize its true proportions?

Notes

1 "Nyitrán megvertek egy magyar diáklányt" ['Hungarian Student Battered in Nitra'], *Új Szó*, August 26, 2006.
2 Interrogation transcript No. ČVS-ORP-810/OVK-NR-06.
3 "Tiltakozás Nyitrán" ['Protest in Nitra'], *Új Szó*, August 31, 2006.
4 "Kaliňák: a diáklány kitalálta a támadást" ['Kaliňák: Student Made up the Attack'], *Új Szó*, September 13, 2006.
5 "Hedvig és a rendőrség is ragaszkodik igazához" ['Hedviga, Police Stick to Their Versions'], *Új Szó*, September 14, 2006.
6 "Szlovák védője van Hedvignek" ['Hedviga Has Slovak Legal Counsel'], *Új Szó*, September 16, 2006.
7 "Roman Kvasnica pöstyéni ügyvéd képviseli Malina Hedviget" ['Hedviga Represented by Piešťany Lawyer Roman Kvasnica'], *Új Szó*, September 19, 2006.
8 "Hedvigu Malinovú môžu stíhať za zavádzanie" ['Hedviga Malinová May Face Prosecution for False Evidence'], *TASR* news agency, October 18, 2006.

9   Motion for criminal prosecution No. IV/1Gn 2912/06.
10 "Hedvig ügy: irány az alkotmánybíróság" ['The Hedviga Case Headed to the Constitutional Court '], *Új Szó*, December 19, 2006.
11 "Kihallgatták Hedvig diáktársait" ['Hedviga's Classmates Questioned'], *Új Szó*, February 12, 2007.
12 Formal indictment No. ČVS-ORP-1080/VK-NR-2006 LG.
13 "Felakasztotta magát Hedvig feljelentője" ['Author of Motion on Hedviga Hanged Himself'], *Új Szó*, May 25, 2007.
14 "Ketten voltak a feljelentők" ['There Were Two Motions'], *Új Szó*, May 26, 2007.
15 "Prežila si peklo" ['She Lived through Hell'], *.týždeň*, May 28, 2007.
16 "Hedviget igazolja egy tanú" ['Witness Speaks up for Hedviga'], *Új Szó*, June 20, 2007.
17 "Polícia nepopiera, že Malinovú napadli" ['Police Don't Deny that Malinová Was Attacked']; available at: www.aktualne.sk, July 23, 2007.
18 "Az ügyészség egyezkedne Hedviggel" ['Prosecution Proposed a Deal with Hedviga'], *Új Szó*, August 1, 2007.
19 Dismissal of the complaint against formal indictment No. Pv 1165/2006-74.
20 "Šátek žaluje premiéra, ministra, a šéfa polície" ['Šátek Sues Premier, Minister and Police Chief']; available at: www.aktualne.sk, August 21, 2007.
21 "Fico: Kauza Malinová mala viesť k pádu vlády" ['Fico: The Malinová Case Was Supposed to Topple Government']; available at: www.aktualne.sk, August 22, 2007.
22 "Trnka o Hedvige: polícia pochybila" ['Trnka on Hedviga: Police Made a Mistake'], *TA3* television, September 13, 2007.
23 "Már Kvasnicánál van a jegyzőkönyv" ['Kvasnica Receives Transcript '], *Új Szó*, October 3, 2007.
24 Transcript from interrogation at the Office of Attorney General No. IV/1 GPt 234/07 of October 8 – 9, 2007.
25 "Újabb bőrfejű támadás" ['Another Attack by Skinheads '], *Új Szó*, October 24, 2007.
26 Transcript from interrogation at the Office of Attorney General No. IV/1 GPt 234/07 of October 22, 2007.
27 "Bejárták Hedvig útját" ['Hedviga's Route Examined'], *Új Szó*, November 16, 2007.
28 "Malina Hedvig beperelte a szlovák államot" ['Hedviga Malinová Sues the Slovak State'], *Új Szó*, November 22, 2007.
29 "Titkos a Hedvig-videó" ['Hedviga's Video Is Secret'], *Új Szó*, November 30, 2007.
30 Transcript from interrogation at the Office of Attorney General No. IV/1 GPt 234/07 of December 11, 2007.
31 Transcript from interrogation at the Office of Attorney General No. IV/1 GPt 234/07 of July 4, 2008.
32 "Rendőrök lőnek Hedvigre?" ['Policemen Shooting at Hedviga?'], *Új Szó*, January 22, 2008.
33 "Korček kihallgatása" ['Korček Interrogated'], *Új Szó*, February 1, 2008.
34 "Kihallgatták a másik fantomot" ['Another Phantom Interrogated'], *Új Szó*, March 8, 2008.
35 Expert's opinion by the Institute of Criminal Expertise of the Slovak Police Force No. PPZ-3537/Keu-BA-EXP - 2008, IV/1 GPt 234/07
36 "Újabb gyalázkodó Hedvig video" ['Another Abusive Video on Hedviga '], *Új Szó*, September 9, 2008.
37 "Lezárnák a Malina-ügy vizsgálatát" ['Abandoning Investigation of the Malinová Case Proposed'], *Új Szó*, September 13, 2008.
38 "Hazugságvizsgálatra küldené a legfőbb ügyész Hedviget" ['Attorney General Wants Hedviga Take Polygraph Test '], *Új Szó*, October 16, 2008.

39   Transcript from interrogation at the Office of Attorney General No. IV/1 GPt 234/07 of October 30, 2008.
40   Proposal to perform questioning No. IV/1 GPt 234/07 of December 5, 2008.
41   "Hazugságteszten mossák tisztára Hedvig támadóit?" ['Hedviga's Attackers to Be Cleared on Polygraph Test?'], *Új Szó*, December 5, 2008.
42   "Benci megúszta feltételessel" ['Benci's Sentence Suspended'], *Új Szó*, December 9, 2008.
43   "Megint garázdálkodott és megint megússza" ['Benci Gets Away with Hooliganism Again'], *Új Szó*, May 13, 2009.
44   "Az elhunyt kórházigazgatót is besározzák" ['Attempts to Defame Late Hospital Director'], *Új Szó*, July 16, 2009.
45   "Furcsaságok Malina Hedvig állítólagos támadóinak hazugságvizsgálata körül" ['Odd Circumstances of Hedviga Malinová Attackers' Polygraph Test'], *Új Szó*, August 4, 2009.
46   "Hazugság a vizsgálat?" ['Interrogation Is a Lie?'], *Új Szó*, August 17, 2009.
47   "Malina Hedvig ügyvédje elfogultsággal vádolja az orvosszakértőket" ['Attorney of Hedviga Malinová Accused Experts of Bias'], *Új Szó*, August 14, 2009.
48   "Amnéziás nyomozók" ['Investigators Suffer from Amnesia'], *Új Szó*, August 26, 2009.
49   "Korček pálfordulása" ['Korček's U-Turn'], *Új Szó*, August 27, 2009.
50   An expert's opinion issued by the Medical Faculty of Comenius University in Bratislava.
51   "Malina Hedvig-ügy: Megnémultak vagy eltűntek az orvos szakértők" ['Case of Hedviga Malinová: Experts Went Mute or Disappeared '], *Új Szó*, September 9, 2009.
52   "Malina Hedvig-ügy: Elhatárolódnak a szakértők" ['Case of Hedviga Malinová: Experts Dissociate Themselves '], *Új Szó*, September 10, 2009.
53   "Malina Hedvig-ügy: a főügyészség takarít Labaš után, kihallgatja az orvos szakértőket" ['Case of Hedviga Malinová: Prosecution Cleans up after Labaš'], *Új Szó*, September 12, 2009.
54   Position on the expert's opinion No. IV/1 GPt 234/07.
55   Protocol of CT scan of Hedviga Malinová of August 25, 2006, by the Jessenius Diagnostic Centre, a.s.

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345

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László Végh

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANO   Aliancia nového občana (Alliance of a New Citizen)

DÚ   Demokratická únia (Democratic Union)

DS   Demokratická strana (Democratic Party)

HP   Hnutie poľnohospodárov (Farmers´ Movement)

HZD   Hnutie za demokraciu (Movement for Democracy)

KDH   Kresťanskodemokratické hnutie (Christian Democratic Movement)

KSS   Komunistická strana Slovenska (Communist Party of Slovakia)

LS-HZDS   Ľudová strana – Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko (People's Party – Movement for a Democratic Slovakia)

MKDH–MKDM   Maďarské kresťanskodemoktaické hnutie – Magyar Kereszténydemokrata Mozgalom (Hungarian Christian Democrat Movement)

MNI–FMK   Maďarská nezávislá iniciatíva – Független Magyar Kezdeményezés (Independent Hungarian Initiative)

MOS–MPP   Maďarská občianska strana – Magyar Polgári Párt (Hungarian Civic Party)

PES   Party of European Socialists

PSNS   Pravá slovenská národná strana (True Slovak National Party)

ROI   Rómska občianska iniciatíva (Roma Civic Initiative)

ROMA   Politické hnutie Rómov na Slovensku – ROMA (Political Movement of Romani in Slovakia – ROMA)

SDK   Strana demokratickej koalície (Party of the Democratic Coalition)

SDKÚ   Slovenská demokratická a kresťanská únia (Slovak Democratic and Christian Union)

SDĽ   Strana demokratickej ľavice (Party of Democratic Left)

SDSS	Sociálnodemokratická strana Slovenska (Social Democrat Party of Slovakia)
SF	Slobodné fórum (Freedom Forum)
SMER – SD	SMER – sociálna demokracia (SMER–Social Democracy)
SMK–MKP	Strana maďarskej koalície – Magyar Kolíció Pártja
SNS	Slovenská národná strana (Slovak National Party)
SOP	Strana občianskeho porozumenia (Party of Civic Understanding)
SZ	Strana zelených (Green Party)
SZS	Strana zelených na Slovensku (Slovakian Green Party)
VPN	Verejnosť proti násiliu (Public against Violence Movement)
ZRS	Združenie robotníkov Slovenska (Association of Slovak Workers)

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Political development in Central European countries took a peculiar turn after their accession to the European Union in 2004 but especially after a series of national elections in 2005 and 2006. They put in driver's seat politicians whose mode of expression, style of pursuing political goals and attitude to political opponents was – to say the least – unusual for suave politicians from Western European saloons. Analysts, journalists and civic activists openly began to speak of the rise of new populism.

The present publication is one of the outputs of a project titled *Challenging National Populism and Promoting Interethnic Tolerance and Understanding in Slovakia* that was carried out by the Forum Institute for Minority Research in Šamorín. Its main goal was not to make just another contribution to the theoretical discourse for we believe that the phenomenon of populism has been relatively thoroughly described by a great number of authors. A partial list of their works is included in the bibliography at the end of this publication.

The principal ambition of the collective of authors of this book was to examine a specific form of populism that is frequently referred to as national populism. In Slovakia, the nationalist scion of populism emerged in the mid-1990s and was closely related to the name of Vladimír Mečiar. On the pinnacle of his political career Mečiar managed to convince the critical mass of the Slovak electorate that he was the best safeguard able to protect the Slovak nation against the triple threat of national doom: first, against the Czechs regarding the constitutional model of the dying Czechoslovak federation and just division of its common goods; second, against the Hungarians regarding Slovakia's territorial integrity and political sovereignty and elimination of discrimination against Slovaks on ethnically mixed territories; finally, against multinational corporations, international institutions and all capitalists from abroad who in conspiracy with ethnic Hungarians and other internal enemies of the state (i.e. political opposition, NGOs and the media) tried to undermine the economy, security and political independence of the young and fragile Slovak Republic.

After the parliamentary elections of 2006 brought to power the ruling coalition of Smer-SD –SNS – LS-HZDS, many analysts gained an impression that Slovakia was again embracing national populism as the key vehicle of political campaigning and rivalry we remember from the 1990s. Is it truly so, or are we dealing with some 'softer' and harmless version of national populism that produces smoke rather than fire?

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