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ON THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL CONDITIONS OF INFORMATION IN JOURNALISM

Tomáš TINÁK – Slavomír GÁLIK

ABSTRACT:

This study examines the causes of the polarisation of society in Slovakia and identifies weak public trust in the media as one of the main factors. The authors argue that the failure of the media to report objectively and truthfully stems from the lack of epistemological training of journalists, which leads to ethical lapses such as the prioritisation of ideological, political, or economic interests. The main aim of this study is to clarify the epistemological and ethical conditions that influence the process of journalistic reporting in Slovakia. Using a hermeneutic-semiotic method, a deeper and more coherent understanding of these principles is achieved. The text emphasises the need to develop epistemological competences of journalists, which include the ability to comprehensively understand social phenomena, the limits of language and the relationship between fact and interpretation. Equally important is the moral integrity of journalists and their resilience to external political and economic influences. The authors conclude that improving the epistemological and ethical levels of journalists can contribute to mitigating the polarisation of society, but this process requires the prioritisation of education, which is a long-term and difficult task.

KEY WORDS:

epistemology, ethics, journalism, moral integrity, polarisation

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1 Introduction

In recent years, Slovakia has witnessed a significant polarisation of society as a result of several crises and social conflicts. The COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine have only accentuated the already existing tensions, which have been exacerbated by society-changing events such as the attempted assassination of Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico on May 15, 2024. However, this polarisation, reinforced by the constant conflicts between opposing

political forces, is also largely influenced by the way in which the Slovak media present information. Journalists, *ex definitione*, are supposed to be impartial observers and conveyors of truthful information. They should, however, strictly follow the SSN Code of Ethics for Journalists, which, in addition to the aforementioned impartiality and truthfulness, also includes the principles of balance, objectivity, honesty, responsibility, and rigorous fact-checking. The code strictly prohibits, amongst other things, any political involvement by a journalist, as this could give rise to a conflict of interest and call into question the journalist's impartiality or objectivity (SSN, n. d.). Despite these principles, however, more and more journalists are inclined towards activism and one-sided interpretations of events. This trend contributes to the deepening of the so-called trench warfare, where the media, instead of being objective, becomes an instrument of political or ideological struggle. Hence the declining trust in the mainstream media, which has fallen by 18% when measured from 2009 to 2022 (Urbániková, 2022). What has happened to cause journalism in Slovakia to lose its independence and slide into irreconcilable ideological stances? What epistemological and ethical conditions are needed to preserve the integrity of journalistic work? How can the critically low level of trust in the media be repaired?

The need for deeper clarification of basic concepts that are key to professional journalism is more than urgent. Although concepts such as truth, objectivity, impartiality, and others are formally included in the Journalist's Code of Ethics, their practical and especially deeper (philosophical) understanding in Slovakia often remains inadequate and shallow. Slovakia still lacks a comprehensive study that would define, interpret, and apply these concepts to contemporary journalistic challenges. This study therefore offers new perspectives on interpreting the basic principles of journalism, in a period when public trust in Slovak media is at an all-time low (Chlebcová Hečková & Smith, 2024).

In Slovakia, the epistemological and ethical conditions of information in journalism are poorly developed. One bright exception in the field of ethics is Remišová's monograph *Ethics of the media* (2010). Epistemology is even worse off. Currently, this area is dealt with by Gálik and Gáliková Tolnaiová in some journal outputs such as "Slovak media (not only) at the time of Covid-19: Weaknesses, problems and their factors" (2023) and "Epistemic and ethical risks of media reporting in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, as challenges for the development of journalistic practice" (2022). Also important are the publications "On ontological definition of media truth and the role of media" (Gálik, 2019) or "Media and truth in the perspective of the practice and life form of the modern 'Homo medialis'" (Gáliková Tolnaiová, 2019). Abroad, the situation is considerably better. There are several authors who deal with these issues, such as Deuze, Ward, Pereira Júnior, Correia, and many others. But even in these studies it is quite difficult to find comprehensive epistemological-ethical approaches to journalism.

The main aim of this study is to clarify the epistemological and ethical conditions of information in journalism in Slovakia. Partial objectives include the reflection on the causes of polarisation of society in Slovakia and then the individual identification and clarification of the epistemological and ethical conditions in journalism that should lead to the improvement of public information in Slovakia.

The method used in the study is based on hermeneutic-semiotic principles. In the field of epistemology, this is mainly the explication of an event, phenomenon, etc. in their original and broader contexts, whether current in time-space or past, which had some connection to or influence on the current event (Martinich & Stroll, 2026). The aim of this approach is to gain as comprehensive a view of the social phenomenon under study as possible. In our study, we have equally worked with methods of logical analysis such as induction, deduction, comparison, synthesis and abstraction, which complement the hermeneutic-semiotic approaches and provide a deeper perspective on the subject under investigation. A special case of such unrestricted semiosis is the interpretation of facts.

A fact, especially a social fact, is indeed regarded as a certain degree of knowledge, but it also requires interpretation. In this context, understanding the possibilities and limits of language in relation to descriptions of reality and in the ability to distinguish between linguistic descriptions of reality and reality itself plays a very important role (Černík, 2008). In the epistemological domain, it is also very important to realise that knowledge is generated in communication or even in controversy and disputes. Also, scientific knowledge is not absolute and has to be constantly verified (Artigas, 1995). The ethical domain goes hand in hand with the epistemological, because the journalist is required to be unbiased (political, economic, etc.) and to have moral integrity. Otherwise, the journalist's efforts will miss the stated goal, which is based on providing objective and truthful information to the public.

2 Epistemology in Journalism

Undoubtedly, one of the most important principles of journalism is to inform the public objectively and truthfully. People in a civil and democratic society have the right to truthful information, while the media have a duty to convey such information. Truthfulness, objectivity, and impartiality are key elements for every journalist, on which they should base their professionalism (Poláková, 2010). On the other hand, it should be remembered that at the same time it is an ideal, a measure that cannot be achieved in an absolute sense, but which we can at least approach (Mlynářčík, 2018).

Achieving this, however, requires a strong foundation in the epistemology of journalism. Epistemology, understood as the theory of knowledge, raises fundamental questions: How do we know what we know? What do we believe, and what would we like to believe? What standards and evidence are necessary to seek understanding and truth about a given subject, event, or phenomenon? (Audi, 2010). These questions are crucial in journalism, as they guide journalists in distinguishing between fact and interpretation. Whether we consider hermeneutics, which aids in understanding the deeper meanings of texts and events, or semiotics, which examines the signs and symbols through which truth is communicated, epistemological inquiry remains central. Additionally, incorporating analytical philosophy into journalistic frameworks is vital, as it helps define the boundary between fact and opinion – an essential distinction for producing high-quality, trustworthy content.

In today's digital age, society faces several challenges, such as the spread of disinformation, algorithmic manipulation, and, in the case of the Covid-19 pandemic, *infodemic* – a phenomenon characterised by an overload of information, including inaccurate or misleading data, which spreads in both digital and physical environments, leading to confusion and risky behaviour (WHO, n. d.). The ability to understand the epistemological foundations of journalism allows journalists not only to withstand these challenges, but also to better understand the dynamics of knowledge – that is, how new meanings are created, how facts are transformed in different contexts, and the limits of the language we use to convey these facts.

To ensure and build journalism that is of high quality, objective, and truthful, it is necessary to understand several epistemological conditions – contextuality, the relationship between language and truth, fact and interpretation, and the dynamics of cognition.

Contextuality

Contextuality is very important for objective reporting. One solitary, oversimplified statement, such as “War in Ukraine will not solve anything”, is not enough for a comprehensive understanding of the complex, long-term political, ideological, and territorial conflict involving (not only) Russian Federation and Ukraine. To understand this problem in more depth, it is necessary to assign this statement diachronic and synchronic coordinates. The diachronic coordinate represents the historical context: the collapse of the Soviet Union, the uneasy question whether to expand NATO (except for the former GDR) to the East, the Maidan in Ukraine in 2014 and its often overlooked political consequences, the Minsk Agreements from 2014 – 2015 which have been broken and ignored multiple times, etc. The synchronous coordinate represents the current geopolitical changes related to the transition from a unipolar to a multipolar world. The unipolar world is represented by the contemporary Western world led by the USA and the multipolar world by the members of the BRICS group (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa as founding members). In the background of these changes is the technological and economic progress of Asian countries, especially China, along with the efforts of these countries to weaken the position of the US and the dollar in the world (The Soufan Center, 2023). Under these coordinates, any statement about Russia's aggression against Ukraine might be misunderstood, questioned, or even justified as Russia's defensive behaviour towards NATO's eastward expansion. This example points out that such unprecedented situations always require a multidimensional analysis and comprehensive explanation taking into consideration a variety of historical contexts.

Moreover, the current information environment is heavily influenced by social media algorithms (Metzler & Garcia, 2023), which can be seen as double-edged weapons depending on the context. On the one hand, they select and highlight relevant posts, thus supporting the reduction of data and information overload (Narayanan, 2023). On

the other hand, however, social media algorithms raise significant concerns about disrupting users' psychological and especially mental states (self-harm, depression, etc.), as well as fuelling social polarisation (Twenge, 2020). We can continuously add to and extend the explanation of this problem through a diachronic and synchronic approach. In the language of semiotics, this process is called unbounded semiosis, which allows for an infinite deepening of meanings based on constant flow of new information and perspectives (Novoselov, 2014). This dynamic approach is of particular importance in the contemporary media environment, where information is often fragmented and taken out of context. As Habermas notes, public discourse should not lack inclusiveness (Singh, 2012). In other words, asserting diverse views should be balanced by rational and science-based information – facts, without undue coercion and manipulation. Therefore, journalists and media analysts should be proficient in semiotic and hermeneutic methods that allow for a more complex treatment of reality and provide a value framework for ethical and balanced reporting.

Language and Truth

Journalists with less philosophical erudition also easily succumb to the “seductions” of language, namely the identification of linguistic statements about reality with reality itself, and the absolutisation of linguistic-semiotic polarities, such as truth-lie, good-bad, black-white, etc. Philosophers have been investigating the nature of language in relation to reality for more than a century. Rorty, for example, argues that truth is not something external or separate from human perception – it is intrinsically tied to the human mind (1989). “Only descriptions of the world can be true or false” (Rorty, 1989, p. 5). We can only talk about reality, or whether something is true or false, in language. Heidegger said that we think in speech (1993). Speech, or in a broader sense language, is also the medium through which we relate to the world. And mediated relating to the world is essentially a construction. Welsch (1995) suggests that in relation to media, our understanding of reality is not of a fixed or objective world, but rather of a reality that is always constructed. Constructing knowledge in language, however, does not mean that it is an arbitrary construction, but rather, in the pursuit of the truest possible knowledge, it is a reconstruction of the world in language. This implies that we live in a media matrix (extra-media knowledge does not even exist in principle, and if it does, it is only marginally in the form of intuition as immediate knowledge), and therefore it is no longer possible in principle to speak of true knowledge in an absolute sense. Furthermore, reality is varied, multidimensional, and cannot be reduced by language to linguistic bipolar oppositions such as true-false. Even such a banal statement as “this wall is white” may not be seen as entirely true, for there is the question of what is white and with what whiteness it should be compared. Such a statement can only be relatively true. On the other hand, the statement claiming that “the [same] wall is black” is inevitably false. However, journalists work with much more complex statements, especially in the field of social phenomena, so more caution is required of them.

Dynamics of Cognition

Cognition is a very dynamic process, driven, amongst other factors, by discussion. Philosophers in ancient Greece recognised very early on the potential of discussion, which can take many forms. Heraclitus spoke of the “struggle” that constitutes the principle of all action, including human cognition. In a more concrete form, he believed it was *polemics* (Gr. *polemos*) (Hussey, 2006). Zeno of Elea came up with the epistemological concept of dialogue, which was perfected by Plato (Palmer, 2025). In the 20th century, debate has come to the forefront and should be guided by clear rules such as rational argumentation, the ability to listen to the other, etc. However, dissenting opinions are also a *conditio sine qua non* (unconditional condition) for the development of cognition. Paradoxically, but ultimately correctly, Lyotard states that that disagreement (*dissensus*) with the other is better for the dynamics of cognition than agreement (*consensus*) (Cartlidge, 2022).

For this reason, journalists should not close themselves off to dissenting opinions, because only these can move the process of cognition forward. In Slovakia, there is a well-known statement by the journalist Zuzana Kovačič Hanzelová, who said in the context of the pandemic that truth should no longer be discussed (Kovačič Hanzelová, 2022). The journalist's approach cannot be seen as professional. On the contrary, the truth must always be debated, because it is only through the discussion of different views that new aspects of reality can be revealed, and the frontiers of knowledge pushed forward. At the same time, it must be stressed that debate is not an end in itself, but a tool for approximating to the truth. It is important not to succumb to a chaotic battle without rules, where pseudo-opinions

dominate over professional and factual information. Furthermore, the phenomenon of “information bubbles” often leads to situations where people choose discussions and information that only reinforce their own beliefs, without truly confronting differing perspectives – a phenomenon known as confirmation bias (Pinker, 2022). Therefore, any discussion should be conducted with respect for the facts, openness to criticism, and a commitment to avoiding any reductions – whether political, economic, cultural, ideological, religious, or otherwise (Levitskaya & Fedorov, 2020). We must not forget that the basis of any meaningful debate is respect for ethics and good manners.

3 Ethics in Journalism

Ethics in media and journalism is a fundamental framework that shapes the behaviour of media professionals and ensures that their actions are in line with moral principles and societal expectations. According to Poláková (2010), this “ethical package” covers various aspects such as impartiality, truthfulness, balance, objectivity, and transparency. McQuail (2002) emphasises the need to preserve and respect the privacy of the individuals involved, to have basic decency, and to promote responsible behaviour not only towards society but also towards legal regulations. This ethical portfolio can also include principles that are universally applicable, not only to journalists but also to the public. These are norms such as not lying, not taking bribes, or not cheating, which form the foundation of moral integrity and social trust (Jiráček et al., 2005). The importance of ethical principles in this area stems from the media’s extraordinary influence on shaping public perceptions and social norms. The media play a fundamental role in shaping social opinion and outlook, especially in relation to political discourse and public figures (Iszatt-White et al., 2019). It is important to recognise that the media have significant power to influence and direct public opinion, making it a strategic instrument of control. Therefore, if a government wishes to consolidate its control over society, its first step is often to gain control over the media (Poláková, 2010), which is currently being done, for example, by the Russian Federation, which is unprecedentedly spreading harmful propaganda amongst its citizens.

This fact underlines the crucial role of ethical principles in the work of journalists, as it is their strict observance that is a prerequisite for maintaining public trust and fulfilling the social responsibility of the media. In an environment that is dynamically changing and subject to increasing pressure from technological and political influences, a commitment to ethical conduct is becoming an integral part of professional media practice. Ethical principles and tenets have only a limited impact, because ethics, especially moral integrity, should be rooted in the very essence of people’s lives, but people must also strive to achieve harmony with their future direction. The absence of ethics in the journalistic environment can lead to serious consequences, including the distortion of thinking, behavioural shifts, and emotional coldness (Ambrozy & Barteková, 2017). A striking example of this occurred after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, when disinformation and propaganda spread rapidly across social media and mainstream news outlets. Russian state media portrayed Ukraine as the aggressor, while Ukrainian and Western news agencies understandably focused on the emerging humanitarian crisis caused by Russian armed forces. This struggle for information did not merely shape public perception – it eroded the social consensus on truth, deepened divisions between nations, and contributed to an emotional chill that weakened trust not only in journalists but also in ordinary people living in one country or another. Such consequences threaten human dignity and have the potential to undermine or degrade positive interpersonal relationships.

In the third millennium, the promise to uphold ethical principles, especially impartiality and moral values, is becoming of paramount importance, becoming an essential pillar for maintaining integrity, authenticity, credibility, and accountability in a relentlessly fast-changing (digital) society.

Impartiality

The ethical imperatives of any journalist should include impartiality (Orban, 2024). However, impartiality should be understood more as an ideal to be approached, which is similar to the epistemology of journalism in relation to truth. The opposite of disinterestedness is bias, which can take different forms. From a hermeneutical point of view, we are all biased in some way because we have beliefs, judgments, and convictions. In this way, the human brain adapts to the complexity of this world. The mind automatically creates patterns throughout life that are based on the

consumption of information and individual experiences in a given environment. It does this mainly because the human mind, explicitly speaking, cannot tolerate uncertainty – and the longer such a state persists, the more it forces a person to form conclusions. This involves the formation of “mental shortcuts” that help a person evaluate information and make decisions more quickly and efficiently (Meterko, 2021). The question arises whether these decisions are justified and adequate given the circumstances.

In this so-called preunderstanding, ideas can be both right or true and wrong or mistaken. In the process of cognition, we can become aware of them and confront them with reality or other approaches. This stage in the process of cognition can be called conscious, and therefore we can work with it – correcting preconceptions and re-entering the cognitive process with corrected attitudes. An ethical problem arises when a person or a journalist is unwilling to correct their attitudes, beliefs, or to admit their error, thereby closing themselves off from objective truth. According to Nietzsche, our beliefs can be more harmful or even dangerous than lies, as we have the tendency to not question them and thus become blind to reality (Finger & Wagner, 2022). These unwavering beliefs can lead to ignoring or obfuscating the truth in an attempt to protect one’s own version of reality.

Ideology is another form of cognitive bias. The difference between a common opinion or belief and an ideology is that an ideology is supported by a larger or smaller number of people and is also more or less associated with power, which is usually political in nature (Martin, 2015). Thus, a journalist can consciously manipulate information by withholding certain contexts and setting the news with the “right” ideological meaning. However, in this case there is an extraordinary breach of ethics, as only certain parts are deliberately selected. However, as is the case in epistemology, a message or a piece of information is objective if it is contextual and comprehensive. It is in this way that media actors can approach ideal journalistic behaviour, especially when producing texts that are built on the principle of *sine ira et studio* (without anger and bias).

Another form of bias may have an economic dimension. If a journalist is economically dependent on the owner of the newspaper, they are likely to write in accordance with the owner’s ideological orientation, which may also be at odds with their personal beliefs (Trend.sk, 2021). For this reason, the mainstream media have eliminated dissenting views from the public debate. Social media platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram, have used algorithms to remove unwanted content, such as posts questioning the necessity of Covid-19 vaccinations. This practice was even acknowledged by Mark Zuckerberg in a 2025 interview, where he stated that his platforms filtered information based on recommendations from Joe Biden’s administration, some of which were later proven to be incorrect (Fung, 2025). On the other hand, this interview was conducted by Joe Rogan, American podcaster and former television host well known for his own political affiliations and inclination towards Republican worldviews.

In epistemology, correct and true knowledge is achieved by debating different opinions. Eliminating or suppressing dissenting views is unethical and contrary not only to the principles of science, which is based on debate, but also to moral values.

Moral Integrity

In journalistic ethics, we undoubtedly encounter moral requirements that form an integral part of it. One of the most essential is moral integrity, which includes the capacity for self-reflection, disciplined behaviour, and social maturity (Platková et al., 2008). This value goes beyond adherence to norms or principles and represents the fundamental basis of professional practice. It is crucial for journalists, especially for maintaining public trust, which is closely linked to objectivity and is often subject to political and ideological pressures.

Moral integrity is not a static state, but a dynamic process that involves conscious decision-making, identifying and confronting one’s own prejudices, as well as a readiness to address ethical dilemmas in situations where moral boundaries are not clear. Rai and Fiske (2011) emphasise that the moral judgments of individuals, including journalists, are influenced by social relationships and contextual factors. These aspects are related to the principle of *causa et effectus* – every action has an effect, a consequence. Awareness of this principle helps journalists critically evaluate their motivations and the potential consequences of their own decisions.

In the same way, in philosophically attuned reflections we find the basic essence of moral integrity. The ancient thinker Aristotle (1999), in his work *Nicomachean Ethics*, stresses the importance of virtue as a key element of moral integrity. Virtue, according to him, is not innate, but attainable through long-term practice and purposeful work on

one's character. In a journalistic setting, this virtue manifests itself by striving to achieve harmony – the so-called golden mean – between the extremes that journalists often face. This process is not an easy one, as the journalist must balance several conflicting factors that can affect their professional and personal integrity. Finding a balance between the desire for sensationalism and a commitment to objectivity and truth is a long-standing challenge in the profession.

Kant's philosophy, in turn, points to the importance of autonomy and individual judgement. According to his teachings, a journalist should not blindly follow external rules and commands – just being a kind of “good and obedient lapdog” of their editorial office. The moral professionalism of a journalist lies in the ability to act according to one's own reason and conscience (EUvsDisinfo, 2021). This means maintaining authenticity, resisting pressures and manipulations, and striving for the truthfulness of one's outputs, even when this may conflict with the economic, political, ideological, and other interests of the management or owners of the media houses. According to Polowczyk (2017), a misunderstanding of moral principles can lead to dangerous and ethically problematic practices. For example, a journalist who interprets moral integrity as loyalty to an employer may tailor the content of their reporting to the ideological or economic interests of the media owner. Such actions erode public trust and damage the very (ethical) essence of journalistic work.

It follows that moral integrity requires more than passive adherence to ethical standards. It represents an active process of reflection and self-regulation (Platková et al., 2008) that enables journalists to resist pressures while ensuring that their work contributes to a plurality of views and promotes public debate. In a similar vein is the call of Habermas, a prominent figure in modern philosophy, who argues that we – human beings – must constantly move towards open and rational dialogue (Arneson & Bowle, 2025). In the context of journalistic ethics, this means maintaining a discussion that is based on facts, transparency, and respect for different opinions. The journalism profession must be seen as a service to the public, not as a tool to advance narrow interests, as doing so only promotes and deepens the fragmentation of society, where citizens are exposed to only a one-sided view. This is a problem to which we cannot turn a blind eye.

4 Discussion and Conclusion

One of the main causes of the polarisation of society in Slovakia is the declining public trust in the mainstream media. This situation is leading to a rise in the popularity of conspiracy media, which offer different, often contradictory narratives with an admixture of aggressive rhetoric. The result is the emergence of two polarised camps, which poses a significant risk to the stability of society and democratic processes.

The declining trust in traditional (legacy) media can be partly attributed to the decreasing level of journalists' epistemological competence and moral integrity. The lack of journalists' ability to comprehensively analyse social phenomena, correctly interpret facts, and effectively communicate with the public undermines not only the quality of reporting but also its credibility. This study has identified and clarified some key epistemological and ethical conditions that are essential for truthful and objective reporting. In particular, it is the link between epistemological skill and ethical – especially moral – integrity, which involves a journalist's ability to evaluate events dispassionately, to work with their biases, and to resist external pressures from political, economic, ideological, and other interests.

Of course, the question remains whether there could be more of these conditions or whether they are sufficiently precise. In any case, they represent a “basic package” that can be further developed and applied in practice. However, on the basis of this theoretical study, we conclude that it will be necessary to fill the existing gap, namely, to thoroughly define, clarify and, with attention to detail, analyse the epistemological and ethical principles in journalistic work that do not yet have a coherent and systematic form. At the same time, we recognise that improving the epistemological and ethical standards of journalists is a difficult and long-term process. Positive results can be expected only in the context of regular improvement in the level of education and training of journalists, which also requires a considerable amount of effort (Fedorov & Levitskaya, 2015).

In this discussion, we point out that strengthening the epistemological and ethical levels of journalistic work is essential, not only for improving trust in the media, but also for overall social cohesion and reducing polarisation –

one of the most important challenges we face as a society, not only at the national level, but in many cases also at the global level.

Media and society are like connected vessels that reciprocally influence each other. Yet it is the media that first broadcast information and thus influence the thinking of society. Thus, if society in Slovakia is highly polarised, we can rightly assume that this polarisation is fuelled and encouraged by the media. This is confirmed, for example, by the declining trust of Slovaks in traditional media such as printed newspapers, television, and radio. In 2009, it was 68% and in 2022 it is only 50%, which is half of all citizens (Urbániková, 2022). The other half of the population distrusts these media and probably gets their information from conspiracy online media, thus creating a perfect ideological division and consequent polarisation of society.

Based on our research, we conclude that if the media, and journalists in particular, adhered to the epistemological and ethical principles of objective and truthful reporting, this problem could not have arisen on such a large scale. To the extent that journalists are failing, there is a question of their professional education, but this cannot be completely isolated from the broader social context that shapes and continually influences journalists in some way. Slovakia, for example, is steadily declining in reading, mathematical and scientific literacy, which is also reflected in the adult generation (OECD, 2023).

These trends are not easy to change, and the possibility of positive change appears only in the long term. Nevertheless, it will be essential to bring education and upbringing in Slovakia to the forefront of public concern.

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