MEDIA GAMES IN THE BACKGROUND OF SLOVAK PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION IN 2016

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ABSTRACT:

Our analysis deals with the electoral contest of individual political parties both before and after the 2016 Slovak parliamentary election was held. The space, which is provided from all kinds of media to political parties, is various. Each medium has an owner and each owner supports different interests. Parliamentary election is considered to be the most important election in Slovakia and thanks to that really wide media coverage is given to them. A couple of months before the opening of the polling stations, discussions had already been underway in both professional and amateur circles regarding the possible variations of the next governing political parties. The media play a large part in decision-making because they can have a meaningful influence on public opinion. Many voters today decide who they will vote for according to media coverage. Political programmes and agendas of the parties and political representatives come second in this decision. In our analysis we also look at online social networking sites, which are currently a huge phenomenon. Every political subject nowadays has its own website and every modern politician has a profile page on *Facebook*, an account on Twitter and on other social networks. We will also try to approach the possible perspectives of the development of the Slovak political scene.

KEY WORDS:

electoral campaign, government, mass media, parliamentary election, political development, political parties, social networks

1 Introduction

In modern human society the media have become social actors of high importance. We could consider them as one of the guarantees and focal points of democratic existence. Reflecting on their main roles, we look at the most discussed spheres of media interest – playing an important role in informing citizens, creating a space for wider social dialogues, presenting of various opinion groups and also controlling the state power. Media also play a crucial role in shaping and transforming the public opinion. This statement is especially true when we consider the conditions of Slovak cultural and political environment. The media are often marked as the fourth pillar of democracy and thus fulfil the watchdog role by 'watching over' the other three pillars – legislative, executive and judicial institutions. Sometimes they are also defined as the most powerful part of the societal power division. If we thought about the real power of the press, radio, television and the Internet

we would find out that they are highly influential – sometimes even more influential than they actually believe. As in every democratic country, in Slovakia we frequently encounter various ambitions to influence the media environment; in many cases politicians and political parties tend to do so. They know very well that the easiest way to inspire citizens to follow their agenda and share their objectives is to appeal to them via the mass media – namely through specific media-created social dialogues, which can be directly linked to the superior status of the single worldview or opinion. In any ideal state establishment, every philosophy has its own space and can present itself publicly. Ideologies that promote infringement of human rights, xenophobia, racism, chauvinism and other pathological social phenomena are, ideally, excluded from these categories. However, as we can see currently in Slovakia, it does not always work like that and these undesirable directions of the public discussion are always able to find their way of becoming visible. The question is as follows: Can we find a truly ideal model of media system? According to Vlastimil Růžička, one of the best known characteristics of media systems is proposed by James Curran: *"In his article Mass Media and Democracy Revisited, he introduces this model as a system that provides citizens with the possibility to find out what is in their best interest. It should strengthen unity of the society, carry through the collective interests, cautiously control the government and centres of power, protect the interests of unorganised and weak citizens, establish the conditions for creation of real social contracts and so on."*[1] The media should preserve their objectivity, their free and independent character (it is not appropriate that they are often owned by people who are directly connected to political and economic elites). However, this is a common practice in Slovakia; for example, if we consider ownership ties related to the most followed and preferred electronic and print media. Similarly, as the above-mentioned three components of the state power, even the fourth one cannot act and operate without limitations. There are always specific boundaries – professional, ethical, social, internal – and even the media production is no exception to this general rule.

Political importance of the media started to increase significantly at the end of the 19th century. This increase in relevance of the media outlets was also related to the improved educational level of citizens and to the emergence of many new means of mass communication, especially the mass press. The media started to be taken more seriously even by the political elites and thus quickly became an important element of the creation of public policy.[2] Citizens (or rather voters) began to focus their electoral decisions on specific problems and, most importantly, on these problems' solutions proposed by politicians. The system of social interaction changed as well and so did the role of the media. Their social functions now included dissemination of information; citizens were able to regularly receive information from their elected representatives. Nowadays, the mass media and digital media are the key actors of political communication; it would not be reasonable to question the importance of the media for political parties which are emerging on the political scene. To put it simply – a politician, who is not publicly visible via the mass media, is perceived as someone who does not even exist. Any subject that wants to function in the sphere of state administration has to present itself publicly, and this self-presentation is only possible via the nationwide media. Various alternative parties and movements, which refuse to engage in the processes of mass propagation, have – at least in the Slovak cultural environment – only minimal chances of achieving success, for example in parliamentary elections. In our analysis we will look at the situation in Slovakia after the general election which was held on the 5th March 2016. According to numerous discussions and viewpoints, this election was altering one; some interested analysts even say that it was more important than parliamentary election in 1998 that brought the end of so-called 'mečiarism'.[3] Only time will tell whether this statement is definitive and valid or not. Anyway, a few new political parties profiled, even though their modest electoral support was not able to position them at the top level of state administration. Immediately after the election, the media space was flooded by results of the exit polls; predictions of who would pass or not pass 'the quorum of 5%' began. We will look at the whole post-election process and especially at the role of the media in it. Our objective is also to find out how much space in the media was given to individual political subjects and how often we could find their representatives on TV, radio or on the front

pages of newspapers and magazines. These media agendas were strongly influenced by a number of factors. Above all, we have to consider the cultural environment in which the news is created, since this environment should – to some extent – reflect on, spread and strengthen, possibly even shape and re-define the value frameworks, dominant concepts and basic ideas of the society.[4]

2   Short Overview of Electoral Campaign Period

The electoral campaign was officially started by the Speaker of the National Council of the Slovak Republic Peter Pellegrini, who on 12th November 2015 announced the term of general election – 5th March 2016. Pellegrini also expressed his belief that a clean and polite campaign could lead to better results and socio-political progress. He did not forget to mention 'the national question', either. He wished that 150 patriots would sit in the future National Council, which would be helpful to Slovakia and its ambition to further build a successful and modern state. During the first day of the campaign the media stated some basic terms which are obligatory to subjects fighting for voters' sympathies. Candidature instruments had to be forwarded at least 90 days before the election (until 6th December 2015 in this case).

The interesting thing is that every candidate party is required to put down a deposit in the amount of 17,000 euros. This amount is given back to single subjects after the election. The only condition that must be met is to obtain at least two percent of the votes. The campaign financing also has its limitations. Financial resources that are dedicated to propagation and presentation of a political party's electoral campaign cannot exceed three million euros. All transactions must be transparent. The same applies for bank accounts which each party creates solely for this purpose. The electoral moratorium is established 48 hours before opening the polling stations; in this case it started to be compulsory on 3rd March 2016. However, much longer moratorium is in place for the pre-electoral surveys. These cannot be published less than two weeks before elections. The last surveys were therefore published on 19th February.[5]

2.1 Increased Number of Voters from Abroad

In the last parliamentary election we noticed – probably for the first time in Slovakian history – an increased interest of Slovak citizens living abroad who were able to vote by post. Until then it had been notable that Slovaks living abroad had not shown any interest in the possibility of voting in their home country. In our opinion this change in the mood of voters from abroad had several reasons. Firstly, we have to mention a notable simplification of the registration process and the creation of an application for electoral registration cards. Before that these procedures had been administrated by a long and unpleasant bureaucratic process, which had discouraged lots of potential voters and that is why they had given up and just had not voted at all.

As we have stated above, the question under discussion is the relations of the political parties in Slovakia to voters living abroad. It is well-known that especially citizens living, working and studying abroad tend to be interested in new political parties. Thus, their votes would not help the 'traditional' political powers, but they could help to increase the support for parties such as *Sloboda a solidarita* (abbr. *SaS,* in English *Freedom and Solidarity*), Obyčajní ľudia a nezávislé osobnosti (abbr. *OĽaNO,* in English *Ordinary People and Independent Personalities*), *Sieť* (*Network*), *Slovenská občianska koalícia* (*Slovak Citizens' Coalition,* abbr. *SKOK!*) and so on. Thanks to this we could hardly expect an open prompt of the long-term members of the Slovak National Council that would encourage voting from abroad. They do realise that it would not bring them the desired results. However, before the last parliamentary election there was a certain movement even in this case. Leading representatives of the IT sector and civic activists started their own initiative in the area of offering

1   RŮŽIČKA, V.: *Politika a média v konzumní společnosti.* Praha : Grada Publishing, 2011, p. 109.
2   HEYWOOD, A.: *Politologie.* Praha : Eurolex Bohemia, 2004, p. 225.
3   A word that refers to decisions and governing practices of Vladimír Mečiar – the former Slovak Prime Minister (remark added by the authors).

4   GREGUŠ, Ľ., MINÁRIKOVÁ, J.: News Values in Slovak Television News. In *Communication Today,* 2016, Vol. 7, No. 2, p. 78-89.
5   TASR: *Parlamentné voľby budú 5. marca.* Released on 12th November 2015. [online]. [2016-03-19]. Available at: <http://www.teraz.sk/slovensko/parlamentne-volby-budu-5-marca/165837-clanok.html>.

innovations related to public services. Their main goal was to help the state sector in the area of information dissemination and processing. They wanted to point out to the long-term problems which nobody had tried to find a solution to and strived to create a discussion among the professional public. This discussion was mainly about improving the efficiency of tax payers' money investments in this area.

The first step was the activation of the web portal *Slovensko.digital*. One of its subsections is now directly connected to the topic of future elections and could have already been used during the previous one in 2016 – its name is *Volby.digital*. People can use it for simple preparation of the application for the electoral registration card. Voters are also able to request their electoral cards via phone, it is not necessary to print out or scan anything. Pieces of information which are required for this procedure include the voter's birth number and address of the permanent residency. This community also warns of wasting public finances and their inappropriate use. In the last 10 years, around 900 million euros should have been spent in order to provide more effective public administration. However, according to activists, the real solutions have not been implemented yet. It is necessary to add that another 500 million euros will be needed for keeping up the existing systems and 800 million euros should be used to develop new projects. *"Improvement of the information systems is expected to achieve simplicity; 'one time and it's enough', proactive services, new opportunities and normal prices. They say that these are in no way new or innovative processes and they are functional even in countries, which have not drawn as much money from the EU as Slovakia has."*[6] The given propagation of this initiative had started before the official announcement of the election took place. For sure it had helped to increase the amount of voters from abroad or the voters with electoral registration cards.

Another relevant aspect, which seems to influence opinions of the voters living abroad, is mobilisation via online social networks. These could be considered as one of the main communication channels of Slovaks living abroad. Mostly in the last weeks of the year 2015 and during the first two weeks of 2016 we could see the intensification of the civic sector's ambition of mobilising up to 300,000 Slovaks living abroad. The voters living abroad could only vote by post and thus had to request this kind of voting until 15th January 2016. On 10th January *Pravda*, one of the most read daily newspapers in Slovakia, even wrote that there was no real interest in voting from abroad through post. Many analysts agreed with this statement – the sociologist Martin Slosiarik argued that *"lots of Slovaks living abroad will not vote. The interest will be minimal especially because of the administrative difficulty".*[7] Using a similar tone, one of the political analysts affiliated with the agency *Polis* Ján Baránek stated: *"The biggest motivation Slovaks abroad could have to vote would be related to those citizens who are planning to return back to Slovakia. These votes are more symbolic than decisive".*[8] These pessimistic opinions took into account the insufficient number of 'voters by post' in 2012 (approximately 7,000 voters living abroad in total). The pace of requesting the applications was very slow from the beginning. The issue of the daily *Pravda* from 10th January 2016 published an official statement by the leader of the election field and referendum at the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic Eva Chmelová that there were only 280 submitted requests for voting by post. This is a very small number. Of course, we have to differ between the citizens with permanent residence in Slovakia and abroad. If the voter still has permanent residency in Slovakia and lives abroad only temporarily, he/she sends the request to the particular local office. The Slovak citizen with permanent residency abroad sends the request to the Ministry of Interior. So in January 2016 it was generally anticipated that there would be a very low percentage of votes received from abroad. However, the final numbers caused a slight shock, especially amongst experts. Their predictions were not confirmed at all. In 2012 the number of Slovaks living abroad who had requested the electoral voting cards had reached 728. Their number increased in 2016 election significantly – to 1,196. However, the most surprising fact was the amount of applications. Compared to the previous period when the number had been 7,290 applications in total, the amount of the applications submitted in 2016 increased to 20,275. Most citizens with permanent

residence were from the Bratislava District – 3,593. *"Amongst the people interested were mostly Slovaks from traditional destinations such as the Czech Republic, Austria, Germany, Great Britain or Switzerland. A few citizens also turned out to be from the USA, Canada and the Emirates. These locations are followed by France and Australia. Citizens of the Slovak Republic voted also from exotic places all over the world; for example, New Zealand, South Africa, Kenya, Brazil or Barbados."*[9] This was the fourth time the parliamentary election by post was realised. However, for the first time the process was all covered by the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic. In the previous elections in 2006, 2010 and 2012, a special committee had dealt with the requests of the citizens with permanent residence abroad. The complete information about the elections and the number of voters from abroad from years 2006, 2010, 2012 and 2016 are shown in Tables 1 and 2.

The third important factor influencing the bigger interest in the parliamentary elections in association with Slovak citizens living abroad is, undoubtedly, social situation. *"At this time, the individuals act according to their own free choice and are more themselves."*[10] Currently, the social and cultural climate is more turbulent than it has ever been in the past (the total number of people that cast their votes in 2016 was around 60%). If we compare this statistics with the previous elections of various types, this number is truly high. We do not even have to mention the fact that in 2016 the general public's attitude towards politics was still apathetic and they did not really show so much interest in what was happening on the political scene.

Today, however, we have lots of young people studying or working abroad and many of them plan to come back home after a certain time period. They for sure played their part in the increased number of votes from abroad. Given the previous administration of the applications for voting through post, it seems that the improved simplicity of access is what possibly pushed more and more people to vote as well. The first mentioned aspect – the simple ways of requesting voting by post – allowed the voters to register their applications digitally, either on a computer or via an intelligent mobile phone. This assumption refers to opinions of many of our citizens which are living outside of our country. Moreover, numerous political activists carried out successful PR campaigns on social networks and blogs which only cost 200 euros per region, so people would know about the possibility to vote from abroad; as the related information suggest, a lot of people had not even known about this possibility before. The activists therefore succeeded where the state projects could not – they directly aimed the campaign at the fellow Slovaks living abroad, even without millions in the budget, and created an easier way for the citizens to exercise their political rights. The magazine *Trend* also offered very interesting results. *Trend* asked various political parties about the citizens abroad in order to inquire if this was even an interesting category for them and if they tried to get their votes by any specific campaign elements and if so, how. *"Answers were received from Sieť, SaS, OĽANO-NOVA, KDH and Most-Híd; the governing party SMER-SD did not answer by the given deadline. Opposition parties' answers showed a big interest in the votes of these people, and some of them also described the forms of campaigns which they used to gain these votes. Most of them used the Internet and online social networks, recorded videoblogs or sent marketing e-mails."*[11]

The most helpful would be, of course, to introduce e-voting, i.e. a possibility to vote through the Internet. However, is the Slovak society developed enough to handle this tool typical for highly developed democracy? There is no simple answer to this question. It would be interesting to follow this idea in the future, since the topic of voting through the Internet is widely discussed nowadays. To start with e-voting is the aim of almost all relevant political parties in Slovakia, with the only difference of how intensively they try to establish this possibility. The political culture in Slovakia will have to, according to our opinion, overcome many obstacles and complications in order to accept e-voting as a relevant option.

6   KOSNO, L.: *Vznikla IT iniciatíva. Chce radiť štátu, ako predísť neefektivite.* Released on 2nd November 2015. [online]. [2016-03-19]. Available at: <http://www.zive.sk/clanok/109650/vznikla-it-iniciativa-chce-radit-statu-ako-predist-neefektivite/>.
7   SLOSIARIK, M.: *O voľbu poštou veľký záujem nie je.* Released on 10th January 2016. [online]. [2016-03-19]. Available at: <http://spravy.pravda.sk/parlamentne-volby-2016/clanok/379468-o-volbu-postou-velky-zaujem-nie-je/>.
8   BARÁNEK, J.: *O voľbu poštou veľký záujem nie je.* Released on 10th January 2016. [online]. [2016-03-19]. Available at: <http://spravy.pravda.sk/parlamentne-volby-2016/clanok/379468-o-volbu-postou-velky-zaujem-nie-je/>.

9   SITA: *Voliť chce aj 1173 občanov SR s trvalým pobytom v zahraničí.* Released on 18th January 2016. [online]. [2016-03-19]. Available at: <http://spravy.pravda.sk/parlamentne-volby-2016/clanok/380307-volit-chce-aj-1-173-obcanov-sr-s-trvalym-pobytom-v-zahranici/>.
10   LUKÁČ, M.: Museum Visitors in the Whirlpool of Social and Demographic Changes. In ONDŘEJ, J. (ed.): *Selected Problems of Demographic Trends.* Beroun : Nakladatelství Eva Rozkotová Publishing, 2016, p. 128.
11   DEVERA, Z.: *Slovákov v zahraničí prebrala z voličskej letargie aplikácia IT nadšencov.* Released on 17th February 2016. [online]. [2016-03-19]. Available at: <http://www.etrend.sk/ekonomika/mnohi-slovaci-v-zahranici-uz-volili-z-letargie-ich-prebudila-aplikacia-it-nadsencov.html>.

2.2 New Political Subjects in 2016 Electoral Campaign

As we have mentioned above, the citizens of Slovakia are starting to be more and more negative about politics. They do not trust the elites which have been switching the political power distribution since 1989. This is a very well-known fact and we cannot deny it. However, most aspiring political subjects often cannot enter through the 'gates' of the Slovak National Council, because they are able to reach the minimal quorum of 5% of votes. It has been discussed for quite a while if this limitation should be lowered because, for example, independent candidates that are not affiliated with any political party practically do not have any real chance to gain that much support. To become the members of the Parliament, all candidates have to be associated with some political party. However, this topic is not directly related to the discussed issue. The same scenario was visible in the case of the parliamentary election in 2016. The candidate that was least expected to appear on the political scene was probably the well-known businessman Boris Kollár. The owner of the highly popular commercial radio station *Fun Radio* had announced his interest in politics on 9th November 2015. Apparently, at least according to his own public statement, he had been prompted to make this decision by the voters themselves: *"People wrote me thousands of messages asking me to establish a new political party. And so I said to myself – why not?"*[12] Kollár is sharply criticising the course of the migration crisis and the abuse of the social system. However, he considers himself to be right-wing; he stated that if it had been possible to create a right-orientated government he would have supported it. Surprisingly, he did not express any interest in claiming the seats in the government, because he apparently did not want to go into politics just to *"warm the seats of Ministries"*. He named his party *Sme rodina* (in English *We Are Family*). Of course, he could not avoid the satiric comments regarding this name in relation to his private life (he has ten children with nine different life partners or short-term female acquaintances). Anyway, he started his campaign quite remarkably. He stated that the campaign was all paid for thanks to his own financial resources and so he was not dependent on the money obtained from someone else. Today, his official *Facebook* fan page has more than 55,000 followers and Kollár's personal profile attracts even more *Facebook* users – specifically more than 70,000 followers. Research and survey agencies did not pay too much attention to him at the start. For example, on 23rd January 2016 the *Focus* agency predicted only 3.4% votes for Kollár. A month later, however, the situation was already different. On 17th February 2016 the agency *Median SK* stated that he would gain around 5.5% of votes. This was the first survey where the political party *Sme rodina* gained a percentage which would allow them to be elected to the Parliament.

The general surprise related to this development was shown even by various political scientists. According to the statement of Tomáš Koziak, which in our opinion represents very well what most of them thought at the time, it could have been expected that Kollár would have been interesting for voters: *"However, I did not expect that they would get interested in such a short period of time. Kollár has the advantage of being a well-known public figure. Moreover, he is able to react to people's interests, because he is directly pointing out to the problems such as corruption, the topic of migrants, i.e. those which are bothering people the most. And he could talk about them in a way people understood."*[13] The final electoral result of the party is well-known. The initial prediction of 5.5% for the party was much less than how many voters it actually gained. *Sme rodina* gained 6.62% of the votes and received 11 seats in the Parliament. However, some questions and controversies rose in association with the names of the future members of the Parliament. The controversial television anchor Martina Šimkovičová or the businesswoman Petra Krištúfková, the mother of one of Kollár's daughters,

were both elected to the Parliament. On the other hand, the leader of the party stated that he stood behind all the names on his list of candidates and that he fully trusted them.

The political party *Sme rodina* was created as the citizens' reaction and prompt regarding the political and social situation not only in Slovakia but also in the European Union. The name of the party very obviously refers to one of the main thoughts guiding Kollár's political agenda. Boris Kollár and his colleagues very sensitively observe that many Slovak families feel threatened; not only from the international perspective, but also from the domestic point of view. As *Sme rodina* was so successful, we have to mention their publicly presented slogans. The party's billboards could have been seen around the whole country, claiming that "I do not vote for politicians – I vote for Boris!" or "You can trust me, I'm not a politician". Here we could see the marketing matureness of the leader. As confirmed by Tomáš Koziak, Kollár *"played on lots of voters' tone"*.[14] His support is mainly related to voters who normally do not go to the elections or have trouble deciding on whom to vote for. It is questionable whether this would be possible to repeat in the future by someone else. On the other hand, it will be interesting to observe if this political party or rather movement is able to keep up with the latest trends and get into the Parliament during the next election as well. We have already had several initially successful, but short-living political parties (for example, *ANO* established by the former media mogul Pavol Rusko). However, it is too early to predict this party's future.

If we were interested in a short characterisation of Kollár's political movement, we would have to talk especially about two key points. The first point is the proclaimed 'invasion of the migrants' to the old continent. *Sme rodina* is surely on the side of those who 'do not want the migrants here'. They are convinced that Muslims from Syria, Iraq, Pakistan or those escaping from the countries in the north of Africa may disturb our culture and freedom and also our integrity and property. *Sme rodina* define their politics as 'protective'. Its basic premise is to protect the state and its citizens against migrants. Their second point is to remove the oligarchy, or weaken the oligarchy enough so that the oligarchs were not able to intervene to the state or public administration anymore: *"They are able to 'buy' almost everyone and that is what they do during every electoral period. That is why this movement was established by the leader Boris Kollár who has enough money so that no one can control or manipulate him, so we can cut the oligarchy and financial groups off the state budget. We believe that the rules of the economic competition and also the criminal responsibilities are the same for everyone in Slovakia. Slovakia is a rich country, but it has been robbed for years at the expense of its own citizens."*[15] According to experts, the success of Kollár's party in 2016 parliamentary election is a precedent. In his rhetoric, it is possible to find the elements of populism, but the current election system offers chances even to public figures of this type. Ján Baránek explains that in the future some other similar alternatives of this type will likely arise. Boris Kollár's movement was created due to the fact that its leader had overtaken and renamed some other political party so he had not been obliged to collect 10,000 signatures needed for the registration; however, it is not relevant to question the eligibility of political subjects established in this way. A significant change could only be brought about by reforming the electoral districts: *"If there were 16 districts instead of just one electoral district with 16 self-governing districts, as once proposed by Viktor Nižnanský, we would not have to deal with situations such as Kollár's movement or Kotleba's party having access to the Parliament. In every region they would have to find a leader who would have to persuade voters and who already has some experience with regional politics."*[16] It will be interesting to watch if there ever appears political will to change this electoral system. We have seen a few weak attempts, but they have been forgotten before they could really have changed anything.

The doors to the Parliament are also open for businessmen. In our cultural area this is not an unusual case. For example, it is also common in the Czech Republic. The Czechoslovak billionaire and owner of the

12   HOSPODÁRSKE NOVINY: *Boris Kollár bude bojovať o hlasy Slovákov. Volili by ste ho?* Released on 9th November 2015. [online]. [2016-03-20]. Available at: <http://dennik.hnonline.sk/slovensko/512224-boris-kollar-bude-bojovat-o-hlasy-slovakov-volili-by-ste-ho-anketa>.
13   KOZIAK, T.: *Najnovší prieskum: Smer prudko padá, do parlamentu by sa dostal aj Boris Kollár.* Released on 17th February 2016. [online]. [2016-03-20]. Available at: <http://hnonline.sk/slovensko/592398-najnovsi-prieskum-smer-prudko-pada-do-parlamentu-by-sa-dostal-aj-boris-kollar-grafy>.

14   KOZIAK, T.: *Najnovší prieskum: Smer prudko padá, do parlamentu by sa dostal aj Boris Kollár.* Released on 17th February 2016. [online]. [2016-03-20]. Available at: <http://hnonline.sk/slovensko/592398-najnovsi-prieskum-smer-prudko-pada-do-parlamentu-by-sa-dostal-aj-boris-kollar-grafy>.
15   SME RODINA: *O nás.* [online]. [2016-03-20]. Available at: <http://hnutie-smerodina.sk/o-nas/>
16   BARÁNEK, J.: *Kollárovo hnutie je v parlamente vďaka volebnému systému, tvrdí politológ Baránek.* Released on 7th March 2016. [online]. [2016-03-21]. Available at: <http://www.hlavnespravy.sk/kollarovo-hnutie-je-v-parlamente-vdaka-volebnemu-systemu-tvrdi-politolog-baranek/753112>.

agrochemical holding *Agrofert* Andrej Babiš is currently the First Deputy Prime Minister for the Economy and the Minister of Finance in the Government of the Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka. This highly successful businessman with Slovak origin established the party *ANO* in 2011 and it became the second most powerful political power in the Czech Republic right after the election in 2013. Another example is related to activities of the Czech politician Tomio Okamura – a businessman with Japanese and Korean roots. In May 2013, he established the political movement *Úsvit přímé demokracie* (in English *Dawn of Direct Democracy*). In the same year he exceeded the limit for getting into the Parliament and together with his colleagues they became the members of the Parliament. However, there were various disagreements inside the movement and the conflicts were connected with the questions of political programme and financing. In March 2015, Okamura was excluded from the party's structures and shortly after that he announced establishment of a new party *Svoboda a přímá demokracie* (SPD, in English *Freedom and Direct Democracy*). Some members of the original party 'Úsvit' joined him as well. Okamura is still in the Parliament, along with his new party.

Another new parliamentary power in Slovakia is *Kotleba – Ľudová Strana Naše Slovensko* (abbr. *ĽSNS*, in English *Kotleba – The People's Party Our Slovakia*). The leader of the party, Marian Kotleba, is not completely new at the political scene. Between 2003 and 2007 he was the leader of the ultra-national political movement *Slovenská pospolitosť* (*Slovak Fellowship*). It was registered at the Ministry on 18th January 2005. On the 1st of March 2006 this party was dissolved by the Supreme Court of the Slovak Republic, because its political activities were in conflict with the Constitution of the Slovak Republic. However, the organisation is still active in the form of a civil association. This was historically the first case when the Supreme Court dissolved a political party in Slovakia. In the media this party was given the label of 'the far- right'. The organisation does not hide its celebration of the army-oriented and clero-fascist Slovak State established during the WWII and its admiration of this State's President Jozef Tiso; its members also often engage in public propagation of racism and fascism. Kotleba is perceived as the main leader. As the only one of the party leaders he presents himself publicly, mostly by giving announcements and joining various meetings. He also has a lot of experience from various protest actions and marches, which were closely watched by the mass media and the general public.

In the election related to public administration on the level of Self-Governing Regions (Slovak abbr. VÚC) in 2009, Marian Kotleba was one of the candidates aspiring to the post of the Chairman of the Banská Bystrica Self-Governing Region. Being an independent candidate, he gained the fourth place with 13,629 votes (10.03% of all votes). He did not proceed into the run-off. In the parliamentary election in 2012, his party *ĽSNS* gained only 1.58% of votes and thus did not get any seats in the Parliament. However, *"In the election to Self-Governing Regions in 2013, Marian Kotleba passed to the run-off for the Chairman of the Banská Bystrica Self-Governing Region with 21.30% of the votes. The acting Chairman gained first place. He needed only 0.5% more to successfully defend his position of the Chairman in the first round of the election (he gained 49.5% of all votes). Nevertheless, in the run-off Kotleba was elected as the Chairman of the Banská Bystrica Self-Governing Region with 71,397 votes (55.53% of all cast votes). In the same election, he was also one of candidates aspiring to become the member of the local assembly. He gained 8,678 votes, which was the second best result in Slovakia; only József Nagy in the Trnava Region had more".*[17] So Marian Kotleba has been politically active for a longer period. The moment that changed everything for him was the already mentioned election of the Chairman of the Banská Bystrica Self-Governing Region in 2013. He officially started his function on 20th December 2013, which meant his entrance into the higher politics. His functioning as the 'Region's Chairman' is evaluated as rather controversial. He still has a lot of support from the local citizens (considering how many votes his party got in the parliamentary election in 2016). However, experts usually criticise him: *"Banská Bystrica Self-Governing Region is controlled by Kotleba and his close colleagues from ĽSNS. For this fact his functioning as the Chairman of the Region is not taken very positively. He could not avoid the same thing we know from the higher politics and what is most criticised by the common people – nepotism, preferring of his own friends in terms of selection of employees and so on. However, we have to say that according to his own*

sources, he decreased the debt of the Region by 5.739 million euros without taking any loans."[18] Given the facts, in the next election in this Region he will be one of the favourites for the post of the Chairman.

Similarly as in the previous case of the party *Sme rodina*, it was not expected that these radical nationalists would be able to get into the Parliament so easily. Looking at statistical data, we cannot find in any relevant surveys even a single mention about his party reaching or overcoming the 5% quorum. In our opinion, this fact could be a result of so many votes for *ĽSNS*. Traditional political parties did not wish to share the National Council with these extremists and that is why the survey agencies did not publish those polls. We cannot argue with the fact that the 'mainstream' political parties and movements are the most important clients of the agencies in question. That is why we need to consider their numbers and findings about Slovak citizens and public opinion as only approximate. *ĽSNS* declared zero interest in supporting the exit polls and that is why it was always shown under the limit of 5%. One of the higher numbers was given to them by the agency *Median SK* in February 2016 – 3.4%. Now we can see how big the difference was between the exit polls and the real numbers. Kotleba's sudden political 'ascension' was confirmed by online election of the daily newspaper *Pravda*. Although obtained on 29th February 2016, the results were shown only after the election because of the election moratorium – on 7th March.

We have to say that today these results would not surprise us. More than 12,000 readers cast their votes for *SMER-SD* (33%), very closely followed by *SaS*. However, the third place belonged to Kotleba's *ĽSNS*, which meant that their entry to the Parliament was achieved without any problems. We would like to highlight again the social networking website *Facebook* where *ĽSNS* administrates a fan page with more than 74,000 followers. Marian Kotleba's personal profile is watched by almost the same amount of people – more than 70,000. These are clearly very high numbers and they basically contradict the fact that this party should not have got to the Parliament. In this case we can say that lots of people watching the party's communication on *Facebook* also mean electoral success. However, from this number of followers we are able to draw several conclusions. The number of *Facebook* fans of the individual parties is shown in Table 3. Radicals are surprisingly dominant among the first-time voters. These factors appealed to them most – the party's simple rhetoric, offering aggressive solutions to the migration crisis, the strict or rather harsh attitude towards the Roma minority, the lack of historical knowledge and political awareness in case of the young adults and so on. At the end of the parliamentary election this resulted in *ĽSNS* gaining 8.04% of the electoral votes and gaining 14 seats in the Parliament. Most of these places were given to the family members, associates and friends of Marian Kotleba. We could only assume which style of politics they will present. Already on 21st March 2016 a member of the party, Peter Krupa, brought a gun to the parliamentary session. He apparently wore it for his own personal security and he did not consider this to be anything more than normal practice.

In the next paragraphs the successes or failures of other new parties are looked at. The biggest hopes were related to the party *Sieť*. Its leader Radoslav Procházka was well-known for making a significant public mark via his rather successful – although not victorious – candidacy for the position of the President of the Slovak Republic in 2014. He was placed third after the Prime Minister Robert Fico and the current President Andrej Kiska. His new political subject saw some space for different kinds of politics, a turn towards young voters and higher participation of the citizens on the national level. In this particular area the party had, according to experts, the best programme. Some polls considered this party as the 'black horse' of the election, and lots of them saw Procházka as the next leader of the right-wing political parties with a gain from 11 to 15%. However, in the end Slovaks decided differently. Procházka and his party gained only 5.6% of the votes and thus 10 mandates in the National Council. *"That is how they became the main losers of this election. From the party aspiring to gain the function of the Prime Minister there was only a small right-wing political subject left. They wanted to analyse the reasons for their failure with colleagues. But the leader of the party who had had more than 21% support in the latest presidential election, claimed that the reason could also be the fact that they had not clearly shown their statement against the politics of SMER-SD."*[19] The pillar of their campaign, the gov-

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17   SME: *Vyhral Smer, extrémista Kotleba je v druhom kole*. Released on 9th November 2013. [online]. [2016-03-21]. Available at: <http://domov.sme.sk/c/6953915/vyhral-smer-extremista-kotleba-je-v-druhom-kole.html>.

18   BÁRDY, P.: *Kotlebovo? Ako vládne župan Marian Kotleba v Banskej Bystrici*. Released on 24th February 2015. [online]. [2016-03-23]. Available at: <http://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/271100/kotlebovo-ako-vladne-zupan-marian-kotlebu-v-banskej-bystrici/>.

19   MIKUŠOVIČ, D.: *Procházka pripustil, že na čele Siete môže skončiť, o úver sa nebojí*. Released on 6th March 2016.

ernment without *SMER-SD*, had shattered as during the last couple of weeks prior to the election Procházka had started to discuss these topics more carefully and on multiple occasions he had also outlined various possible scenarios after the election. Due to these communication mistakes he had actually lost a big percentage of his former voters.

We would like to pay attention to one more political party – *Slovenská občianska koalícia* (*SKOK!*). It was established on 5th March 2014, exactly two years after the parliamentary election in 2012. It was created by Juraj Miškov, the ex-member of *SaS* and former Minister of Economy. The party wanted to get into the Parliament with a quality programme, which was also considered by various independent institutions and analysts as one of the best political programmes. They presented themselves as a liberal and reforming party. However, their functioning on the political scene had a rather non-parliamentary character from the beginning. The founders did not communicate in a stable way. *"Juraj Miškov, Daniel Krajcer and Jozef Kollár, after leaving SaS, first established the party Liberálna dohoda (abbr. LIDO, in English Liberal Pact), so they could join forces with the conservative movement NOVA led by Daniel Lipšic; however, they left after a certain time and established the already mentioned SKOK!. After all these steps they offered on 3rd December 2015 a common candidacy to their original party SaS. That offer was declined."*[20] They wanted to follow the successful progress of Lipšic's movement *NOVA*, which was taken to the Parliament by Igor Matovič and his party *OĽANO*. However, SKOK! did not succeed with this idea and it was also the end of their parliamentary ambitions. They gained hardly more than 21,000 votes, which meant only 0.83%. On the other hand, we cannot exclude the possibility of *SKOK!* trying again to unite with one of the current political parties and pushing themselves to electable positions in the next elections.

Other new political parties failed in this election. The parties such as *Šanca* (*Chance*) and the coalition of the parties *Spoločne za Slovensko* (*Together for Slovakia*) and *Odvaha* (*Courage*) – the big national and pro-Russian coalition – achieved only 0.44%. In this light the pre-election resignation of the party *Demokrati Slovenska* (*Slovak Democrats*) led by Ľudovít Kaník seems very logical. They announced their support for the party *SaS* shortly before the election. Their real chances were very similar to those of the subjects mentioned above. The interesting thing is that there were still around 2,000 voters who cast their votes for them. These small political parties with practically no chance to get to the Parliament are traditionally part of the 'election mosaic' and this will – most likely – not change in the near future.

3   Political Situation after the Election and Media Portrayal of Political Parties

The results of the parliamentary election spoke clearly and definitively. Slovakia had two possible variations of the new government. The first option was to create a rainbow right-wing coalition of the parties *SaS, OĽaNO-NOVA, Most-Híd, Sieť, SNS* supported by Boris Kollár with his party *Sme rodina*. In this case, the former governing party *SMER-SD* and Kotleba's ĽSNS should have been in opposition – any cooperation with the latter party was denied by all leaders of the other political parties. The second option was the continuous governmental leadership of the social democrats from *SMER-SD*. On the other hand, they could not govern by themselves as they had been able to in 2012. They needed to establish a coalition partnership. This kind of cooperation was strictly declined by *SaS, OĽaNO-NOVA* and *Sme rodina*. In the electoral campaign these parties were using slogans directly against *SMER-SD*, along with *Most-Híd* and *Sieť*. However, as we have mentioned above, the leader of *Sieť* started to change his rhetoric. What was really surprising is that he was later joined by the leader of the *Most-Híd* – Béla Bugár. This kind of public statements was expected from him even

less than it was from Procházka. There were several long-term members of this party who had previously gotten into some major conflicts with the members of *SMER-SD*. We could hardly presume that František Šebej, Lucia Žitňanská or Ivan Švejna would ever agree with this solution (that *Smer-SD* and *Most-Híd* would cooperate in order to create a new government). Nonetheless, on 7th March 2016 Béla Bugár stated that *Most-Híd* would not negotiate with *SMER-SD*, because they preferred a stable right-wing government. It has been decided on that day by the leaders of the party: *"Our priority is to negotiate about a stable right-wing government. We would not go for negotiations with SMER-SD."* The leaders have evaluated the results of the election and were not satisfied with them.[21]

However, this situation only lasted for a couple of days after the election. The leader of the strongest right-wing party *SaS* Richard Sulík started a few informal negotiations about a possible cooperation on this side of the political spectrum, but he was only partially successful. He first appeared in the media alongside Boris Kollár; according to Sulík's own words, they had reached an understanding almost immediately. Cooperation was also confirmed by Igor Matovič and, at least from in this moment, also by Bugár and Procházka. The opinion of *Slovenská národná strana* (abbr. *SNS* or the *Slovak National Party*) was not clear until the very last moment. The leader of the party Andrej Danko even stated that a temporary interim government was also possible. He also declared very clearly who could lead this government as he said that its leader should have been Miroslav Lajčák, the most renowned Slovak diplomat. However, Andrej Kiska, the President of the Slovak Republic, was the one to decide. He was to authorise the leader of the winning political party – in this case Robert Fico – to establish a government, but he could later authorise someone else as well since it was generally expected that Fico would not be successful and authorization thus would be given to the leader of the second strongest party – Richard Sulík. The first meeting between Fico and Kiska was planned to take place on 8th March 2016. In the end they met a day later because of the Prime Minister's political duties in Brussels. The President made a decision in accordance with the general expectations. He authorised Fico to establish a government until 18th March. That meant that the Slovak Republic could have expected a new cabinet within 10 days.

According to various statements of the political leaders, this decision had opened the doors at least in case of *SNS*. However, the mandates which these two parties possessed together would not have been enough for establishing a government. So it was clear that the Prime Minister would try to negotiate with at least one more party. Kotleba's ĽSNS was excluded straight from the start so it was clear that the only possibility was related to the possible cooperation with right-wing parties. Fico admitted that there were not so many alternatives for establishing a government, but he would try to create at least a basis for a stable government, which would be able to stabilise Slovakia's political situation during the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the EU in the course of the migration crisis. He also admitted that if he had not been successful no one would have been interested in wasting more time.[22] He met with Andrej Danko on the same day and Andrej Danko agreed with further cooperation with *SMER-SD*. The other party leaders, including Bugár and Procházka, settled that they would not establish any negotiations with Fico.

3.1 Controversial 12th March 2016

The situation radically changed after the assembly of *SNS* broadcast online by almost all mainstream media. On 12th March 2016, one week after the election, Danko was confirmed as the party's leader for another four years. The most important moment, however, was the party's decision to make an agreement with *SMER-SD* about the future government. The previously discussed establishment of a government under Rich-

[online]. [2016-03-25]. Available at: <https://dennikn.sk/395045/prochazka-pripustil-ze-cele-siete-moze-skoncit-uver-sa-neboji/>.
20   KRAVJAR, M.: *Miškovovi nie je do SKOK-u... Chcel sa votrieť na kandidátku SaS, sulíkovci ho poslali, slušne povedané, kade ľahšie.* Released on 3rd December 2015. [online]. [2016-03-25]. Available at: <http://www.parlamentnelisty.sk/arena/monitor/Miskovovi-nie-je-do-SKOK-u-Chcel-sa-votriet-na-kandidatku-SaS-sulikovci-ho-poslali-slusne-povedane-kade-lahsie-257451>.

21   BUGÁR, B.: *Béla Bugár: Most-Híd na rokovania so Smerom-SD nepôjde, preferuje stabilnú pravicovú vládu.* Released on 7th March 2016. [online]. [2016-03-25]. Available at: <http://www.hlavnespravy.sk/bela-bugar-most-hid-na-rokovania-so-smerom-sd-nepojde-preferuje-stabilnu-pravicovu-vladu/753326>.
22   SITA: *Fico prijal Kiskovo poverenie, na zostavenie vlády má 10 dní.* Released on 9th March 2016. [online]. [2016-03-25]. Available at: <http://www.webnoviny.sk/parlamentne-volby-2016/clanok/1046302-fico-prijal-kiskovo-poverenie-na-zostavenie-vlady-ma-10-dni/>.

ard Sulík's leadership was, according to them, not real anymore. Andrej Danko said that he neither consider OĽANO-NOVA and Sme rodina to be real and functional parties nor it was acceptable for him to create an interim government. According to his own words, he refused the hybrids and the chaos, claiming that Sulík was not the whole right wing: *"In such a wide coalition there would be lots of groups with unpredictable behaviour."* Danko was not interested in taking the responsibility for that and to hazard with his voters' favours in a government like this. *SNS* said that they would wait for negotiations of *SMER-SD* with other relevant parties. Danko also modified his strict rhetoric against *Most-Híd*, as before the elections he had not been able to imagine any cooperation with them at all.[23]

Unlike his predecessors, shortly after the election Andrej Danko could connect two different – in a certain sense ground-breaking – things. Firstly, there was his willingness to cooperate with the political party *Most-Híd* that included many members of Hungarian nationality (i.e. something utterly unacceptable in *SNS*'s previous era of existence under the leadership of Ján Slota). However, the possibility to share the power and accomplish their goals via the places in the new government was too attractive to be ignored. Since *Sme rodina, OĽaNO-NOVA* and *SaS* had declined the cooperation with *SMER-SD* long before, it was interesting to wait for statements of the last two right-wing political parties available for cooperation – *Most-Híd* and *Sieť*. Unofficially it was said that the new government would be established around *SMER-SD*; Procházka and Bugár therefore kept repeating that they would not agree with any negotiations with *SMER-SD*. Procházka promised his voters that he would not be discussing with SMER-SD, but later it was discovered that he had already talked to Robert Fico. The leader of *Sieť* first said that it was not true, but then he confessed that he had met with Robert Kaliňák the day after the assembly of *SNS*.

This prompted a sharp critique not only from their voters, but also within the party. The first party member who stood up against Procházka's decision was Miroslav Beblavý. Reacting to Procházka's unclear statements related to meeting or not meeting with *SMER-SD*, he gave up his high position in the party. Beblavý stated that the reason for him leaving the party was the direct violation of his previous trust in Radoslav Procházka's leadership. Using a similar tone, Zsolt Simon also argued against Procházka's decisions contradicting the party's political programme and philosophy. He confirmed that he would have rather preferred an interim government or snap election over being in the new government with *SMER-SD*. His negative attitude was closely related to the intensively media-covered criminal case of Hedviga Malinová, a young Hungarian student who allegedly had been attacked for speaking Hungarian over the phone and then had moved to Hungary because of the long-time (and court-discussed) questioning of her side of the story. Taking into account this fact, some of the members of *Most-Híd* apparently did not see *SMER-SD* as the real problem – *SNS* was their main concern instead. Simon also presented numerous worries about the future of the party. According to him, the intended connection with political parties such as *SMER-SD* and *SNS* could end up in complete disruption of the party or in necessary fusion with their main competitor, *Strana maďarskej komunity* (abbr. *SMK*, in English *Party of Hungarian Community*). In his announcement he stated that their voters had voted for *Most-Híd* because they had wanted to change the current policy, not because they had wanted to join *SMER-SD*'s new coalition.

Media space was shaking under the pressure of critics from the side of right-wing politicians but also from voters – mostly via discussions placed under related articles available on the Internet (on online news websites, weblogs, social networks and so on). Definitive decisions about the new government were made on 17th March 2016. The leader of *SMER-SD* Robert Fico took the proposal of the Coalition Agreement to the President, but he did not speak to him about specific names of the new Ministers yet. The new coalition parties also decided that *SMER-SD* would get nine Ministry posts, *SNS* three, *Most-Híd* two and *Sieť* one. The final form was approved by all four leaders of the given political parties on 22nd March 2016 by signing the Coalition Agreement at the Bratislava Castle. A day later new Ministers could be appointed and named and the inaugural session of the new National Council of the Slovak Republic could be assembled as well. The post of the Speaker of the Slovak National Council was appointed to the leader of *SNS* Andrej Danko, three posts of the Deputy

Speakers were assigned to Andrej Hrnčiar (*Sieť*), Martin Glváč (*SMER-SD*) and Béla Bugár (*Most-Híd*); the fourth spot was given to Lucia Nicholsonová from *SaS*, the strongest party in the opposition.

The changes in political situation and media-presented disputes immediately reflected in the mood of Slovak society. Some of the most influential elite media in Slovakia (especially the daily newspaper *Denník N* and magazines such as *.týždeň* and *Trend*) did not stay quiet and intensively criticised Radoslav Procházka and Béla Bugár for having created the new coalition with *SMER-SD* and *SNS*. It is necessary to point out that they were representing the opinions of most voters of these parties and voters of the right-wing parties in general. They called them 'traitors' who did not respect the will of their supporters looking for substantial political changes. Especially *Facebook* discussions on the profile pages of *Sieť* and *Most-Híd* were really fiery. Both of these official accounts (administrated by employees of the parties in question) mentioned that the leaders tried to ease the public tension by writing open letters, which they publicly shared. However, these communication acts had only a minimal effect. Procházka and Bugár tried to explain the necessity for having a stable government; even in exchange for lots of compromises and unconventional relations between the coalition parties. The question was how their voters would be satisfied with these affairs. The first surveys after the election showed a 'huge sinking' of rating of these two parties and an increase in power in case of the other right-wing parties. For example, the news portal *Aktuality.sk* published on 15th March 2016 the following survey of the *Polis* agency:
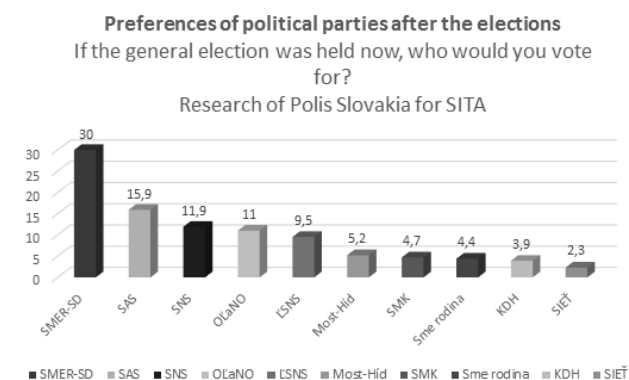

Preferences of political parties after the elections
If the general election was held now, who would you vote for?
Research of Polis Slovakia for SITA

Chart 1: Ratings of political parties after the election
Source: Agency Polis for SITA. Released on 15th March 2016. [online]. [2016-03-25]. Available at: <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/321887/prieskum-podpora-sulikovcov-po-volbach-rastie-velky-prepad-siete/>.

There were more surveys like this after the election. However, the scenario was more or less the same. The winning party would have been *SMER-SD* again. The social democrats with their approximately 50 stable mandates would still have needed a coalition partnership. The highest increase in public support after the election was recorded in case of the liberals from *SaS*. Today, however, they have much bigger support in comparison with their electoral results (their rating is currently around 15%). Political parties such as *ĽSNS* and the movement *OĽaNO-NOVA* would also gain more voters than they did in 2016. The rest of the political subjects maintain their stable numbers. Certain differences are most notable when we look at the parties *Most-Híd* and *Sieť*. As we have stated above, their voters are still taking hardly the parties' cooperation with *SMER-SD* and *SNS*. Coalitions created by right-wing and left-wing parties are nothing unusual in many modern democracies; however, it is very strange in terms of Slovak cultural and political environment. *Most-Híd* is around 5% now so their poor gain from the election in 2016 (6.5%) is constantly decreasing. The former opponents of *SMER-SD*'s left-wing government in 2012-2016 even took some seats in the new government (for example, Lucia Žitňanská is now the Minister of Justice). It will be interesting to watch how the rating will change in the future and how voters will react to more serious decisions of this government. It is not unexpected that *Most-Híd* may follow the destiny of *Sieť* and its support will decrease deeply under the limit of 5%. The party of Radoslav Procházka, now led by Roman Brecely due to Procházka's resignation, is nowadays balancing between 2 and

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23   ŠOLTINSKÁ, V.: *Pravicová vláda zrejme nebude, Danko odmieta chaos a hybridy.* Released on 12th March 2016. [online]. [2016-03-25]. Available at: <http://hnonline.sk/slovensko/593738-pravicova-vlada-zrejme-nebude-danko-odmieta-chaos-a-hybridy>.

3%. It is surely the highest fall from all the parliamentary parties. What is even worse for them, even their parliamentary caucus has fallen apart; Miroslav Beblavý left shortly after the election, the same steps were taken by Katarína Macháčková, Simona Petrík and the first alternative member of the Parliament Zuzana Zimenová. The initial number of the members of *Sieť's* parliamentary caucus (ten) was reduced to seven and the minimal number has to be eight. It is a very bizarre situation. For the first time in the history a party, which was elected to the Parliament, fell apart before the Parliament's inaugural session so they could not establish their own caucus. It meant that the members of *Sieť* would act independently. *Most-Híd* lost Zsolt Simon, so the Parliament's inaugural session included 11 independent members.[24]

3.2 Development Perspectives

The inaugural session of the Slovak National Council showed that in the coming weeks and months we would have to count with different scenarios of the future development. The governing coalition was expected to be under the watch of the opposition parties. The highest passion to control the majority of the Parliament is now showed by *SaS, OĽANO-NOVA* and currently also by *Sme rodina*. According to our opinion, the main aim of the current coalition is to make sure that snap elections will not happen. They want to keep their power for the whole four years at any cost so they publicly show the declared stability. The first big test was to successfully handle the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the EU. It started on 1st July 2016 and lasted until the end of 2016. The main priorities of Slovak Presidency was to continue in the development and strengthening of the Single European Market, increase the economic progress, discuss the actual topic of migration but also future expansion of the European Union. Slovakia led the discussion about the European legislation and reacted to other relevant political questions. The terrorist attacks in Brussels renewed the long-time discussion on the common measures taken for strengthening the EU's security.[25] No members of the current government wanted to risk destabilisation of Slovak political environment. Snap election would have probably meant an increase in public support of the extremist and anti-Semitic political parties.

We also have to realise that Slovakia is nowadays experiencing a certain reorganisation of its political scene. However, no politician would have wanted to lead an early electoral campaign during the EU Presidency. It is possible that a sufficient interim government would have been able to calm the situation and drive back the extremist parties. In these days some of the experts say that if there were no corruption causes there would be a chance to minimise the public influence of the extremist and anti-Semitic parties, although we cannot confirm this for sure. We could already have seen the instability of the opinions of the Slovak public. The situation is very accurately evaluated by Silvester Lavrík: *"I am not an analyst, but even on my fingers I can count how many per cent of new voters did the so-called 'standard' middle-right parties gain and lose in this election. If I counted among them also SNS (really just for the academic purposes), I would think that they did not gain anybody. The amount of people who went to vote was almost the same as in the last period, which shows the inability of these parties to mobilise the voters."*[26]

So the next development looks quite clear. Even when the strongest political party *SMER-SD* has lost some power, it preserves its highly important, even key place in the state administration. The important Ministries are still in their hands and their coalition partners show a lot of willingness to cooperate. It is in their best interest to make sure the coalition will last for the whole standard period, especially in the case of *Sieť* and *Most-Híd* which are fighting for their basic existence on the Slovak political map (on the contrary, *SNS's* support is rather stable). Only possible conflicts about the programme or bigger affairs could disturb this 'ideal' course of matters or otherwise disturb the Parliament majority involving 81 members of the coalition. We

have to mention that this majority could be more confident if there had not been further resignations from the parliamentary caucuses of *Sieť* and *Most-Híd*. However, the current majority is generally considered as stable since no other resignations are planned, at least for now. We can expect more surprises from the members of *ĽSNS* or *Sme rodina*. The parliamentary caucuses of these two political subjects are just at the beginning of their activities. Their members are mostly unexperienced politicians starting their political career. Given this fact, we cannot really directly predict anything in relation to their future initiatives. However, certain conflicts are related to the process of choosing the members of the Parliamentary Committees, specifically in the case of the Defence and Security Committee.[27] According to various members of the opposition, the coalition representatives aim to gain a super-majority. This Committee mainly deals with the most serious causes and corruption. It is reasonable to presume that meetings of this Committee need to happen very often. However, other Parliamentary Committees are critically reflected on too; widely discussed is mainly the Human Rights and Ethnic Minorities Committee that also includes Milan Mazurek, a member of Kotleba's political party *ĽSNS*.

4   Conclusion

Mass media are an important source of knowledge and experience concerning the world and society around us. More and more data can be drawn from them and together with our own experience we can create a certain image of both the world and reality.[28] This statement was also true for Slovak parliamentary election in 2016. In terms of media coverage, the biggest surprise was the political party of Marian Kotleba (*ĽSNS*). Their presentation in the national media was minimal and despite that they achieved a great success. We can use the same argument also in the case of *SNS*. On the other hand, *SNS* had unusually broad media coverage before the election – given the fact it had been a non-parliamentary political subject recovering from various causes and changes in leadership. There are several reasons. First of all, *SNS* had received a sufficient financial capital from its sponsors. The party's representative had appeared in almost every political debate for more than a year before the election. It is quite uncommon practice, at least in the Slovak cultural and political conditions. We are convinced that extensive media campaigns in media also helped Boris Kollár and his party *Sme Rodina* to get to the Parliament.

The programme priorities of the new government mainly react to what Slovakia needs or rather to problems which people marked in the election as the most important. This new Cabinet's personal composition is also seen as a historical compromise; there are representatives of four different political parties with varying ideologies and opinions. The future of the parties *Most-Híd* and *Sieť* is still very much unclear. Even if this solution to the turbulent situation after the election in 2016 might have seemed to be the only one right outcome possible, the voters of the right-wing parties are considered today as those voting for a change. Even though most of them wanted a new government without *SMER-SD*, two right-wing political parties *Sieť* and *Most-Híd* supported the existing status quo so it is rather questionable if their former supporters cast their votes for them in the next election. Currently, this seems very unlikely. On the other hand, the time period of four years is more than long enough for some kind of stabilisation. It is still hard to comment on the future development because at present, the public opinion merges both euphoria and disappointment from the previous election. However, the political opinions of Slovak people may change quickly; one day someone says one thing, but the same person might express a very different view on the next day. The agreements and negotiations between the political subjects are often hard to uncover so the topics which are presented in the media could be just a very small part of a bigger picture. *KDH* did not become a part of the Parliament for the first time in the history of independent Slovakia. *SDKÚ-DS*, the former leader of the right-wing parties will probably fall apart, since their electoral result (0.26% of all submitted

24   SITA: *Strany už majú svoje kluby. Pozrite sa, kto ich povedie.* Released on 23rd March 2016. [online]. [2016-03-26]. Available at: <http://www.parlamentnelisty.sk/arena/monitor/Strany-uz-maju-svoje-kluby-Pozrite-sa-kto-ich-povedie-265040>.
25   TA3: *Slovenské predsedníctvo v Rade EÚ môže pomôcť turizmu.* Released on 25th March 2016. [online]. [2016-03-26]. Available at: <http://www.ta3.com/clanok/1080739/slovenske-predsednictvo-v-rade-eu-moze-pomoct-turizmu.html>.
26   LAVRÍK, S.: *Primitívny pragmatizmus gazdov a charakterov.* Released on 25th March 2016. [online]. [2016-03-26]. Available at: <https://dennikn.sk/418035/primitivny-pragmatizmus-gazdov-charakterov/?ref=cl>.

27   MELUŠ, M.: The Reasons of Possible 'Brexit' from the European Union. In KOVÁŘOVÁ, E., MELECKÝ, L. (eds.): *Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on European Integration 2016.* Ostrava : VŠB – Technical University of Ostrava, 2016, p. 617.
28   HORVÁTH, P., MACHYNIAK, J.: Electoral Behaviour as Affected by the Media. In *European Journal of Science and Theology*, 2014, Vol. 10, No. 1, p. 219.

votes) is hugely disappointing. We have already mentioned the significant losses of *Sieť* and *Most-Híd*. The question is what will happen with the smaller parties which aspired to gain supporters in the last election. The Slovak political scene has involved several politicians who are not ready to retire. We cannot exclude any further turbulent changes; on the contrary, the Slovak political environment will probably present us with a lot of surprising outcomes over the course of the next four years. It is beyond questioning that media presentation of these public affairs will shape the opinions and attitudes of the general public, maybe even more than ever before.

Table 1: Number of voters from abroad (permanent residency in Slovakia)

Election year	Number of requests for voting by post
2006	3,427
2010	5,861
2012	7,290
2016	19,079

Source: own processing

Table 2: Number of voters from abroad (permanent residency outside Slovakia)

Election year	Number of requests for voting by post
2006	641
2010	570
2012	728
2016	1,196

Source: own processing

Table 3: Fan pages of political parties on Facebook – number of followers

Political party/movement	Followers
Sloboda a Solidarita (SaS)	119,680
Kotleba – ĽSNS	74,443
OĽaNO-NOVA	56,107
Sme Rodina	55,282
SMER-SD	31,217
SNS	29,645
SKOK!	29,442
ŠANCA	27,482
SIEŤ	22,488
SDKÚ-DS	18,189
VZDOR	16,055
SMK	11,351
KDH	9,382
MOST-HÍD	7,967
TIP	6,213
Strana zelených Slovenska	3,938
Priama demokracia	1,880
KSS	1,823
Koalícia SPOLOČNE ZA SLOVENSKO	943
Strana moderného Slovenska	820

Source: own processing (retrieved on 27th March 2016)

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