

The presidency of the Council, COVID-19 and Croatia. What do they have in common?

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Abstract

Currently, the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, also known as COVID-19, is spreading throughout the world. This pandemic currently affects not only the lives of citizens in everyday life, but also the pursuit of the activities of politicians, statesmen or employees of the European Union institutions. In our paper, we have analyzed and described in detail the Presidency of the Council, which is currently chaired by Croatia and what challenges Croatia is currently facing.

Keywords: presidency, Council, Covid-19

1 The current state of the issue discussed

The Croatian Presidency started on the 1st of January in 2020 and ends on June 30 in 2020. The Presidency lasts for six months. In our paper we want to look at the Presidency of the Council, in the EU, as an institute, its development and the mechanism of rotation of presidencies using the descriptive and comparative method. The contribution in our paper is the evaluation of the Presidency of the Republic of Croatia in response to the operational management during the COVID-19 pandemic, and we will respond on what challenges Croatia is currently facing.

The Presidency of the Council is one of the most important activities, which is quite demanding and complex, as it involves several activities. The three basic activities during the Presidency of the Council are administration and its management, followed by the administration and management of the Council of Foreign Ministers to the management and administration of the other levels of the Council of the European Union. Activities whether the presiding country's actions may lead to influencing the priorities of the Union and thus opening negotiations on matters that the country considers important. (Hrivík, 2017) However, the Council's negotiations and the enforcement of priorities affect not only the diplomatic capacities of the states, but also the current events taking place in Europe and the world. The most recent is the COVID-19 pandemic, which has led to the suspension of a number of conferences and negotiations under the EU Presidency. In the past, we have witnessed events that have influenced the importance of the Presiding State, for example, by the Ukrainian crisis, unregulated migration to the EU, or the Lisbon revision of the Treaties on the European Community and later the EU.

Each Presidency has certain priorities. Thus, each presiding country has some influence on setting these priorities, often pursuing their national interests, but considering the interests of the European Union as a whole. The constant evolution of the Presidencies and their constant evolution is that priorities are mainly about the priorities of the EU as a whole rather than national priorities.

This is proofed and evidenced by the experience of the Croatian Presidency. The Strategic Program for the European Union of June 2019, which runs until 2024, identifies four priority areas for the Council. This document contains not only priorities but also guidelines for the other institutions of the European Union. The main four priorities of the Strategic Program for the EU are the protection of citizens and their freedom, the development of a strong and dynamic economic base, the creation of a climate-neutral, ecological, green, social and fair Europe, the promotion of European interests and values at world level. The Croatian Presidency fully agreed on this program and continued to prepare and work on addressing their internal and external challenges precisely in line with this program. (Strategic program for the EU, 2019)

The Institute of Presidency was already known in 1951 in the first Treaty on the European Coal and Steel Community, where the presidency was gradually defined for all members for a period of three months in alphabetical order in the national languages of the countries concerned. Several years later, in 1957, the period was extended to six months in the Treaty establishing the European Economic Community, which was

confirmed in so-called The Merger Treaty, later in the Tindemans Report, or the Three Wise Report. The Presidency was supposed to increase the efficiency of communication between the European Council and the Council of Ministers. Subsequently, in 1970 there was a further modification of the Presidency through intergovernmental European political cooperation, which resulted in regular intergovernmental consultations of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs with a view to coordinating the positions of the Member States. In 1981, a presidential trio system was set up in London, which meant cooperation between the previous presiding country, the present country and the following country. The Presidency Trio aims to harmonize and minimize differences between the presiding countries.¹ In 1985, the first revision of the Founding Treaties of the European Community took place, where the presiding country was given greater responsibility, whether in terms of political cooperation or the timetable for negotiations. In 1991 they agreed in Maastricht that the presiding country would be held accountable by being responsible for expressing the international political positions of the European Union. (Hrivík, 2017)

In summary, firstly the Presidency creates a predetermined program and priority issues. This is important to ensure continuity. The program is expected to consider current issues, issues that previous presidencies have failed to address and also urgent current issues, as it was during Croatian presidency about Covid- 19 pandemic. Program is also based on a common agenda and topics set by the trio chair. The presidency has certain roles: the role of the mediator is the flow of speech to ensure agreement or consensus, the role of administrator to ensure organization of meetings, formal and informal events, representative role on international and EU level, the role of coordinator between Council and Member states, the role of agenda setting during the six months presidency. (Vodić kroz Hrvatsko predsjedanje Vijećem Europske unije 2020, 2019)

2 Discussion

As we mentioned in our paper, the so-called Presidency Trio, the aim of this trio is to ensure a simpler and more continuous process of handing over the presidency every six months. They cooperate together and have a common eighteen-month program. Croatia ends the trio, which began with the Presidency of Romania, followed by Finland to Croatia. Germany, Portugal, and Slovenia will be following countries and Slovenia will end their presidency in December 2021.

Their common program formed five pillars of how the Union should work, such as the Union of Jobs, Growth and Competitiveness, a Union that supports and protects all its citizens, a Union that has a strong climate policy progress and is moving towards an Energy Union, The Union of Freedom, Security and Truth and the Union, which is a strong global player. The existing trio program focuses on the common values of the EU, such as respect for human rights and values, human freedom, equality, democracy, and the rule of law. The program also included economic growth, boosting competitiveness, and promoting investment.

Croatia's priorities under the EU Presidency are a Europe that is developing, connecting, protecting and influential, and has recommended topics. These are perceived as important, and therefore Croatia, as the country holding the Presidency, has a strong emphasis on them. These topics include:

- An ambitious, sustainable, and balanced Multiannual Financial Framework for the period 2021-2027
- Implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights
- Stopping negative demographic trends
- Connectivity: The Trans-European Transport Network and the CEF (Connecting Europe Facility)
- Security, strategic guidelines for free, safe and just European Union
- Enlargement policy and the EU-Western Balkans summit
- Green Europe and a 'Green Deal'
- New job markets, the importance of knowledge, education, innovation, and lifelong learning
- Connecting the EU with the public, particularly young people
- Democratization, the fundamental values of the Union, the fight against fake news, intolerance, and disinformation on digital platforms (eu2020.hr, 2020)

As Prime Minister of Croatia Andrej Plenković said in an introductory speech on Croatia's EU presidency, the four priorities summarized in the motto of their presidency, namely Strong Europe in a world full of challenges.

¹ The Amsterdam revision of the Treaty on European Union of 1997 reduced the Trio Presidency down to two, which returned to the Presidential Trio in 2007 in the Nicosian version of the Lisbon treaty.

He also said that the Croatian Presidency is coming at a time of major changes when the virus and pandemic caused by COVID-19 in Europe has not yet been discussed. (eu2020.hr, 2020)

Croatia is interesting not only because of the ongoing Presidency, but also because this country is the “youngest” member of the EU. Croatia should be role-model for the other countries of the Western Balkans how to become a member of the EU. Croatia also joined the United Nations in 1992, the World Trade Organization in 2000, NATO in 2009 and as we mentioned, the European Union in 2013.

The priorities that Croatia has set out in its program are a Europe that is developing as a priority to harmonize regional development, increase competitiveness and also fight against climate changes. The Europe that connects within the economy is harnessing the potential of the common economy, improving the quality of infrastructure, and connecting EU citizens more closely. The priority of a Europe that protects is to protect its citizens by guaranteeing the freedom of each citizen, but also to ensure a sustainable migration policy. The aim is to show strength in the fight against cyberterrorism or misinformation in the digital world. The fourth priority, Influential Europe, is to strengthen the EU's position in the global world. The aim is to strengthen the Union's position, expand its impact, eliminate poverty, develop global development, promote stability. (eu2020.hr, 2020)

One of the priorities in the integration processes is close regional cooperation, support for communication and trade between countries in the region. The European Union is the main trading partner for the countries of the Western Balkans, but also thanks to regional cooperation, which makes accession to the EU conditional, the countries of the Western Balkans also benefit from intensive intra-regional trade and political cooperation. Following the recent enlargements of the EU, the Western Balkans is a priority for the EU, as the countries of south-eastern Europe have become immediate neighbors and thus neighbors of the European Union's external borders. During the Croatian Presidency, this priority was not on the list of priorities that Croatia wanted to achieve during the Presidency. The opening of further negotiations with Northern Macedonia and Albania is a great success.

Western Balkans and the integration of the countries of this region, we are talking about the priority of the European Union as such. For the EU, the integration of these countries into the European structure is important from several points of view. One of them is the promotion of peace, stability in the region, economic development in the Western Balkans and, finally, the provision of secure external borders. Why we are talking about the sustainability of peace and border security is also because the Western Balkans as a region has a very turbulent past and is a post-conflict region where the non-integration of these countries could result in greater isolation but also the threat of further conflict. (Barčáková, 2019)

During the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic many of the meeting had to change into video calls or had to be postponed. The Croatian Presidency had the opportunity to prepare meetings in “online environment”. There have been made significant online meeting, for instance Online Video meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the EU Member States and the Eastern Partnership, meeting of CIO representatives of EU member states, representatives who are in charge of implementing and creating digital policies, minister of foreign affairs were discussing Post- Cotonou negotiations and Team Europe package against Covid- 19. During the Croatian Presidency, The Council in the area of employment and social affairs adopted three sets of conclusions. How to enhance well-being at work, how to become more productive and for better participation in the labour market. How to reduce public health expenditure. (eu2020.hr, 2020)

There were also needed online meeting about tourism and the “summer season” as one of the economic sectors first and most affected by the COVID-19 crisis. The tourism sector has experienced a rapid and sharp drop. Incredibly significant meeting about funding, was in June, via video conference, so called Eurogroup. President of the Eurogroup, Mário Centeno, called on the Chair of the European Parliament's Committee on Economic and Monetary Policy (ECON) to discuss the economic prospects of the euro area in the context of the COVID-19 crisis. *“The Eurogroup has already agreed on some key features of the recovery fund. It must be temporary, targeted and proportionate to the extraordinary costs of this crisis.”* (consilium.europa.eu, 2020)

3 Conclusion

The Croatian Presidency is one of the most challenging presidencies. For Croatia was preparing and leading such important Presidency really challenging. Firstly, because Croatia is the youngest member of the EU with lack of experience, but also there is a question about adequate logistical, administrative, and diplomatic capacity. We can sum up that the presidency is as strength as their national government of the presiding member state. Why is it important we can bring up example of Czech presidency, where there is visible the importance of

political stability. The example pointing out how government instability and domestic problems can significantly undermine the success of the presidency. Czech presidency was criticized for "failing to provide stable leadership" due to the fall of the Czech government during its council term.

Croatia has been experiencing challenging times lately. This is not only because of the importance of the presiding country, but also because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the March 2020 earthquakes, which do not contribute to the well-being of the citizens of Croatia. Among other things, during the EU presidency of Croatia, the migration crisis broke out on the Greek-Turkish border in March 2020. Thus, Croatia had to cope with the crisis, starting with the crisis associated with COVID-19 and many of the upcoming negotiations with EU leaders. Despite all the events, the Croatian Presidency has been successful in supporting one of its priorities - the enlargement of the EU to the Western Balkans. There has been no accession to the EU in the past seven years but opening the negotiations with Northern Macedonia and Albania are opening during the Croatian Presidency. Ministers discussed and exchanged views on enlargement policy, stability in the region and the integration process of the Western Balkan countries through a videoconference in March 2020, with support for a shift in the integration processes of Northern Macedonia and Albania.

The European Union has decided to fight the pandemic through four priorities, and that is it limiting the spread of the virus, securing the procurement of medical equipment, promoting research for treatment and vaccines and support for the preservation of jobs, businesses and the economy by financial support. The current crisis is still ongoing, so further monitoring of the situation and subsequent analysis of the mastery of Croatia's presidency of the European Union is needed.

We dare to state, that Croatia managed good and adequate presidency, when we look at the challenges and existing Covid- 19 pandemic. The Croatia Presidency was test of maturity in the eyes of other member states, if Croatia is possible to bring adequate organization of international events and meeting. We dare to state that Croatia managed those challenges.

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ATTITUDES OF SYMPATHIZERS OF SELECTED POLITICAL PARTIES ON THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC AXIS

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the positioning of supporters of political parties in Slovakia on the socio-economic axis in 2019, immediately after the European Parliament elections. In terms of method we employ secondary analysis of the dataset from the European Parliament Election Study 2019, focusing on Slovak respondents, who expressed they feel close to specific political parties in Slovakia. We then analyse positions of the party sympathizers in socio-economic issues, creating a position on socioeconomic scale for each of them and try to explain their coalition – opposition relationships in relation to it. We argue, that both coalition governments – the one in 2016-2020 and the new one since the March 2020 are ideologically compact in terms of socio-economic positions of their sympathizers. The first one contained parties with the most socialist oriented sympathizers and the second one contains parties with the most pro-market oriented sympathizers in their respective parliaments.

Keywords: socio-economic axis, party sympathizers, left, right.

1 Introduction

In this article, we will focus on the positioning of supporters of political parties in Slovakia on the socio-economic axis in 2019, immediately after the European Parliament elections. This is somewhat different from the positioning on general left-right axis. It is also fully independent from placement on the libertarianism-authoritarianism axis, which is at least equally important for the ideological identification of parties in Slovakia. Nor will we focus on the party positions in terms of foreign policy orientation and European integration issues. We will deal with the average attitudes of voters who expressed proximity to particular political parties, not with the attitude of the political parties themselves. However, it can be assumed that at least in the longer term perspective, there is a certain relationship between the attitudes of parties and their voters and that these two phenomena influence each other. This assumption is supported by data from older party surveys such as the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) 2014 and 2017 as they are analyzed by Bušša (2019).

Contrary to researches concerned with the attitudes of political parties, which are either expert estimates based on party activities or analyses of party program documents, attitudes of party sympathizers are much less reliable as they depend on correct interpretation of questions by the randomly selected respondents. Their ability to correctly understand often quite specific issues may be limited. Also, their subjective perception of one's own relative positions may be distorted, especially in anti-system parties.

Despite these limitations, this is important data for further analysis of the party system and its characteristics. Party position on the socio-economic axis is a valuable information for analyzing the electoral success of individual parties. The ideological proximity or distance between parties allows us to better understand their decisions in coalition negotiations as well as to estimate the unity of the coalition government in economic decisions. We will argue, that both coalition governments in 2016-2020 and the new one since the March 2020 are ideologically compact in terms of socio-economic positions of their sympathizers. The first one contained parties with the most socialist oriented sympathizers and the second one contains parties with the most pro-market oriented sympathizers in their respective parliaments.

2 Political parties included

The European Parliament Election Study 2019 (Schmitt et al. 2019) took place right after the May 2019 European Parliament Election, so just some of the current political parties were already included in it. The most notable party not included in it is ZA ĽUDÍ, which did get into the Parliament and the Government after the February 2020 election. Each country included in the Study had limited number of political parties included¹. Out of these, SNS, MOST – HÍD, PS/SPOLU, and the KDH did not get to the Parliament but we are including them among our data.

¹ In Slovakia these were: MOST – HÍD, Koalícia Progresívne Slovensko / SPOLU - občianska demokracia (PS/SPOLU), Kotlebovci - Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko (ĽSNS), Kresťanskodemokratické hnutie (KDH), SME RODINA, SMER - sociálna demokracia (SMER - SD), Sloboda a Solidarita (SaS), OBYČAJNÍ ĽUDIA a nezávislé osobnosti, NOVA, Kresťanská únia, ZMENA ZDOLA (OĽaNO), Slovenská národná strana (SNS)

Relatively large number of respondents expressed they did not feel close to any of the mentioned parties. This means that we could not ascribe the ideological positions of those voters to any party, just to Slovak society as a whole. This does reflect the fact that many Slovak voters do not feel close to any party, but it does not much help to make our findings more precise and informative. In total, a random sample of one thousand respondents from Slovakia took part in the study, making it relatively representative of the entire population. It would however be problematic to say that these are still the positions of the party sympathizers today, because there may have been significant changes since the data collection, especially during the election campaign.

3 State regulation and control of the economy

Unfortunately only few questions about ideological position of respondents were included in the interview. Even fewer concerned economic policies. Fortunately, all of the questions use the same 11-point scale and in all of them the fully socialist or leftist position are represented by the value 0, while the fully free market or rightist position are represented by the value 10. This makes the values easier to compare and even to combine the values from individual questions into a composite value for each party, as we can see in the table 4.

The first question, as shown in table 1, asks about the opinion on state regulation and control of the economy. It shows that the spread of values among sympathizers of different parties is relatively limited – between 3,3 and 5,9. It also shows that all Slovak voters express relatively socialist opinions. Only two parties have sympathizers preferring the pro-market attitude over socialist one – SaS and PS/SPOLU – and even these were quite moderate. Sympathizers of all the other parties were more in favor of state regulation and control of the economy, SMER – SD being the most socialist, followed closely by its then coalition partners SNS and MOST – HÍD.

From the point of view of the coalition – opposition relations, these values show that the 2016-2020 coalition really was left wing in the sense that its parties were close to prevalently left leaning voters. By 2019, all the members of the former coalition had sympathizers, which were most left leaning than those of any other party. On the other hand, all the then opposition parties, which in 2020 got to the parliament and became members of the new coalition government had sympathizers with the most pro-market attitudes. From that point of view, the right wing opposition triumphed over the left wing government. But the situation is less clear when we consider values relative to the center of the scale. Sympathizers of OLaNO averaged just below the middle value with 4,9 and those of SME RODINA averaged even lower with 4,7. This suggests that even the new coalition government is more centrist than pro-market, from the point of view of values of their sympathizers in 2019.

In the middle between these two blocs were sympathizers of the extreme right KĽSNS, which confirms that the party is not defined by its position on the socio-economic axis, but rather on libertarianism – authoritarianism axis as we have shown in Bušša (2019). Even more in favor of state regulation however were the sympathizers of non-parliamentary KDH. This shows that KDH also is somewhat different in its values from other parties, considered right wing in Slovakia. KDH is also significantly authoritarian.

Table 1 Average answers of party sympathizers to question what do you think of state regulation and control of the economy (0 = fully in favor of state intervention in the economy; 10 = fully opposed of state intervention in the economy)

Sympathizer of:	Position on state regulation and control of the economy
SMER - SD	3,3
SNS*	3,8
MOST – HÍD *	3,9
KDH*	4,2
KĽSNS	4,7
SME RODINA**	4,7
OLaNO**	4,9
PS/SPOLU*	5,5
SaS**	5,9

Source: The European Parliament Election Study 2019 (Schmitt et al. 2019), calculations made by the author

Note: *the party did not get to the parliament in 2020 election; **the party became a member of the coalition government after 2020

4 Redistribution of wealth

The second question, shown in table 2, was concerning redistribution of wealth in the society from the rich to the poor. The results were similar to those in the first question. The spread of values was still quite limited although slightly higher. Sympathizers of the SaS were the only ones who in average were clearly against redistributive economic policies with 6,3 average, while sympathizers of PS/SPOLU positioned themselves in the middle of the scale. Sympathizers of the rest of the parties were more or less in favor of redistribution of

wealth to the poor, all coalition parties scoring 3,4. They were followed by KĽSNS with 3,5 and OĽaNO with 3,9.

The coalition – opposition divide is clearly visible in this case as well. All the sympathizers of the former coalition government were the most in favor of state intervention in the economy, while sympathizers of the new government parties were the most against it. In both tables 1 and 2 the values suggest, that had the PS/SPOLU gotten into the parliament, it would have probably ended up in the coalition government. In both cases average scores of its sympathizers are right in the middle of the coalition group. And so were the sympathizers of KDH in this case. Once again, the sympathizers of KĽSNS had a score between the values of former and current coalition government parties, although in this case it was very close to the values of coalition parties.

Table 2 Average answers of party sympathizers concerning redistribution of wealth (0 = fully in favor of redistribution from the rich to the poor in Slovakia; 10 = fully opposed of redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor in Slovakia)

Sympathizer of:	Position on redistribution of wealth
SMER - SD	3,4
SNS*	3,4
MOST – HÍD *	3,4
KĽSNS	3,5
OĽaNO**	3,9
SME RODINA**	4,2
KDH*	4,6
PS/SPOLU*	5,0
SaS**	6,3

Source: The European Parliament Election Study 2019 (Schmitt et al. 2019), calculations made by the author

Note: *the party did not get to the parliament in 2020 election; **the party became a member of the coalition government after 2020

5 Self-positioning on the left-right axis

We included the question about the general self-positioning on the left-right axis to compare it with the self-positioning on economic issues. As we mentioned earlier, the socio-economic axis and the general left - right axis are not identical in case of Slovakia. It is quite visible in case of KDH sympathizers, who considered themselves to be on the right wing of the political spectrum, while expressing socialist positions in both previous socio-economic questions. Also the KĽSNS sympathizers positioned themselves to the right, although they favored socialist policies, as did sympathizers of OĽaNO and SME RODINA. In all four cases the difference can be explained by looking at their position at the libertarianism – authoritarianism axis on which they are either relatively authoritarian in case of OĽaNO sympathizers, or strongly authoritarian in case of KDH, SME RODINA and KĽSNS. MOST – HÍD sympathizers still identified as relatively centrist, scoring 4,7 points in average. This party also used to be considered a part of the Slovak right wing before entering a coalition government with SMER – SD in 2016.

Table 3 Average answers of party sympathizers to the question about their position on 11-point scale between "the left" and "the right" in political matters (0 = "left"; 10 = "right,")

Sympathizer of:	Position between "the left" and "the right"
SMER - SD	3,2
SNS*	3,8
MOST – HÍD *	4,7
SME RODINA**	5,3
PS SPOLU*	5,5
Kotlebovci - ĽSNS	5,6
OĽaNO**	5,6
SaS**	6,8
KDH*	6,9

Source: The European Parliament Election Study 2019 (Schmitt et al. 2019), calculations made by the author

Note: *the party did not get to the parliament in 2020 election; **the party became a member of the coalition government after 2020

6 Conclusion

In the paper we conducted a secondary analysis the European Parliament Election Study 2019 dataset in order to gain data on self-positioning of sympathizers of Slovak political parties on the socio-economic scale. Defining a position for sympathizers of nine relevant political parties in Slovakia, we found that majority of them are leaning towards socialist policies, even among the parties considered to be part of the right wing in the Slovak politics. Nevertheless we still can say that political conflict can be framed in terms of different approaches to socio-economic policies. Sympathizers of all parties of the former coalition government preferred more socialist policies than sympathizers of any other surveyed party in 2019. And in reverse, sympathizers of all parties of the new coalition government preferred more pro-market policies than sympathizers of any other surveyed party in 2019. The 2020 election did bring change from socio-economic point of view - from parties close to prevalently socialist oriented voters to parties close to centrist voters ranging from moderate socialists to moderately pro-market oriented voters.

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Elections and campaign of the European Parliament

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Abstract

The Slovak Republic has been a part of the European Union since 1st of May 2004. During that time, Slovakia has moved significantly forward. The Slovak economy was thriving and kept in good shape. Thanks to Euro funds, many parts and corners of Slovakia have reconstructed. Thanks to cooperation with international organisations, science and research are at a high level, and we can compete in the free market. But nothing could be done if we had closed borders in front of our neighbours. Thanks to the European family, we have become part of the developed world. Many political representatives raise the issue of the Slovak Republic's withdrawal from the structures of the European Union. Many Slovaks are also in favour of the possibility of the Slovak Republic leaving the European Union. The European Union is not perfect, and it has its downsides. On the other hand, the European Union is a good project and, thanks to the European Union, we are a respected country in the international forum. The Slovak Republic should not close itself off from the world if it wants to move forward. In this article, we will focus on the competencies of Members of the European Parliament. We will focus on the election campaign and the results of 2014 and 2019 EU parliament elections. There are no more slogans in the political campaign. Politicians proclaiming these statements ran for parliament in the European Union as candidates seeking reform. This is also what the election campaign for the European Parliament brings. In this post, we will try to look at the issue of the election campaign for the European Parliament. This work does not claim a comprehensive view of the election campaign for the European Parliament, but we analyse certain aspects of it, in this article.

Keywords: campaign, elections, European Parliament

1 European Parliament

The competencies of the deputies of the National Council of the Slovak Republic and the competencies of the MEPs are diametrically different. However, these differences are not presented in the media enough, so the Slovak public has no place to learn about these competencies. It has an impact on the turnout of EU parliament elections in Slovakia, which is very low in Slovakia. This is due to the public's lack of information about the competences and powers of MEPs. Currently, there are efforts of internet influencers to raise the awareness of youth about policy. Young people, especially first-time voters, are also the primary group for political parties, because their vote in elections is important. It is not so easy to find out how the first voter decides, so the program of individual political parties also thinks of the first voters. The role of the European Parliament is to be responsible for legislative, budgetary and control policy. The European Parliament is a body elected directly in elections. It is the European Union's legislator, elected by citizens across the EU every 5 years. The European elections were last held on 23-26 May 2019.

If we take a closer look at the tasks of the European Parliament, we will find that it has three main roles. The legislative role consists of:

- Together with the Council of the EU, it adopts legislation based on proposals from the European Commission.
- Decides on international agreements.
- Decides on EU enlargement.
- Evaluates the Commission's work program and asks it to propose legislation. " (EUROPE 2019)

The second role of the European Parliament is to scrutinise:

- It exercises democratic control over all EU institutions.
- It elects the President of the Commission and approves the Commission as an EU body. By voting on a motion of censure, it may force the Commission to resign during its term of office.
- Grants discharge, t. j. approves the use of funds from the EU budget.
- Examines citizens' petitions and sets up committees of inquiry.
- Negotiates monetary policy with the European Central Bank.
- Controls the Commission and the Council.
- Establishes election observation missions. " (EUROPE 2019)

The third and final task is budgetary:

- It draws up the EU budget together with the Council.
- Approves the EU's long-term budget - the multiannual financial framework. " (EUROPE 2019)

1.1 Legislation of the SR for elections to the EP

Act of 29 May 2014 on the Conditions for the Exercise of the Right to Vote and on Amendments to Certain Acts no. 180/2014 Coll. amends and supplements the laws relating to elections to the European Parliament. In principle, the law is not very different from regular elections with small changes. As in other elections, anyone with an active right to vote can cast a ballot, and there are no further legal obstacles. "The right to vote in the European Parliament in the territory of the Slovak Republic belongs to a citizen of the Slovak Republic who has a permanent residence in the territory of the Slovak Republic and a citizen of another Member State of the European Union who has a permanent residence in the Slovak Republic." (NOVEASPI 2019) The right to be elected to the European Parliament belongs to anyone who at least on the day of the election acquires the right to vote and has a permanent residence in the territory of the Slovak Republic. The territory of the Slovak Republic forms one constituency in the elections to the European Parliament. "Elections to the European Parliament are announced by the President of the National Council of the Slovak Republic based on a decision of the Council of the European Union no later than 110 days before the day of their holding. The statement shall state the number of Members of the European Parliament who are to be elected to the European Parliament in the territory of the Slovak Republic. " (NOVEASPI 2019)

The recalculation of parliamentary mandates is also an important issue in the European elections. Also on the question of mandates, the law says clearly, the sum of valid votes cast for the advancing political parties or coalitions advancing to the next census is divided by the number of mandates according to § 86 par. 1 magnified by number one. The figure that has been distributed by this division, rounded to the nearest whole number, is the country's election number. " (NOVEASPI 2019) With a low turnout in the elections, a candidate from a political party or coalition with a small number of votes can relatively easily get into Parliament. "The total number of valid votes received by a political party or coalition shall be divided by the national election number and the political party or coalition shall be as many seats as the national election number contained in the total valid votes obtained by that political party or coalition." (NOVEASPI 2019)

2 Methodology

The submitted work entitled Euro Elections and Election Campaign consist of four parts. The first one deals with the competencies of the European Parliament as well as with the brief anchoring of elections in the Act of the Slovak Republic. In the second chapter, we will describe the methodology of work, determine the goal of the research as well as the methods used. In the third chapter of this paper, we examine the election campaign and analyze the results of the 2014 European Parliament elections.

The main aim of this article is to describe the competences and legislation for the European Parliament elections. The partial objective is to describe the election campaign itself into the EP elections. In the paper are used methods of description and content analysis of the text. In this article, we have identified one research question:

VO 1. Did the 2019 European Parliament elections have any major political theme?

The supposed answer to the research question is that the elections to the European Parliament did not have any fundamental theme that acted as a central theme. We will examine this assumption based on election campaigns of individual political parties or coalitions. At the beginning of the work, we briefly envisaged the competences of Members and the next step would be to analyze the political campaign. We will only analyze a political campaign for selected relevant political parties. By analysing the election campaign, we will have an overview of topics that often resonate and will be able to answer the research question more effectively. For a better understanding of the use of marketing in the election campaign and its effects, we look at the results of the 2014 elections and compare them to those of 2019. In 2014, marketing was not used to the extent and scale as it is now. Especially when it comes to online marketing. For this reason, our research material will be focused on the Facebook social network and videos on Youtube. Election campaigns are moving into the online world and therefore analyzing leaflets or billboards is no longer meaningful.

3 Election 2014

3.1 Campaign

The lack of interesting topics for the general public may also be a reason for the low election turnout. Both the European Union and Parliament play an important role in shaping policy. However, the topics that are part of the election campaign are often unknown to ordinary people. „The mass media play a notable role in society – they report essential information about the world, culture, politics as well as presenting the image of socialisation.” (Lincényi, 2017) Elections to the European Parliament are discussed in the media in each Member State. The media try to impress in the most interesting way possible. Candidates try to make people feel important, but the 2014 election campaign was boring in the spirit of boring topics for the average citizen. Fighting bureaucratization or choosing less evil. These were the topics that most likely resonated in the election campaign. The most active candidate was Richard Sulík, who was still on social networks and meetings at that time. The Smer-SD political party had a campaign in the classic format of meetings in regional and some district towns. Nevertheless, the party Smer-SD managed to win the EU parliament election in Slovakia.

3.1.1 The course of the elections

The elections to the European Parliament in 2014 took place after intense and relatively challenging Presidential elections. The presidential elections were held in the spirit of constant accusations, which resulted in the loss of the former Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic, Robert Fico. The citizens of the Slovak Republic were tired of politics, which could reflect in their participation in the elections to the European Parliament. (Spáč, 2014) In 2013, a communication campaign was launched in Slovakia with the motto "This time it's different." It was about encouraging citizens to exercise their right to vote.

The then governing party SMER-SD chose a political campaign aimed at presenting its candidates. It was in the spirit of "We are choosing a successful Slovakia in Europe." The priority was to strengthen the social model, protect the environment and the territorial integrity of Slovakia. Candidates also promised the security of citizens, stopping illegal migration or reducing the risk of terrorism in the European Union. The Christian Democratic Movement pursued a program called "A Strong Family - A Better Europe", in which the main goal was to strengthen the family and raise living standards. The SDKÚ-DS party launched its campaign with the idea "More democracy, less bureaucracy." The program was aimed at supporting individual activities, better services and lower prices. OĽaNO has been profiled since the beginning of the campaign as an independent group of candidates, the aim of which was to protect national interests and change electoral rules so that independent candidates could also run. The coalition of NOVA, KDS and OKS had the electoral slogan "Europe must have reason and heart." In the program, they wanted to increase access to information in the form of the European Info Act. The SaS program dealt with European policy and was in the spirit of "All for Brussels, we for you." The party also proclaimed the importance of reform in the European Union. (Facebook, 2020)

The political campaign had several serious and important themes, but each side sought to promote its policy style. The campaign did not have one central topic that would be a priority.

3.2 Results

Based on recalculation of mandates, 13 seats in the European Parliament belonged to the Slovak Republic. The turnout was very low, only 13.05%. Based on the turnout of election, the following candidates received the mandate of MEP: Maroš Šefčovič (SMER-SD), Monika Beňová (SMER-SD), Boris Zala (SMER-SD), Vladimír Maňka (SMER-SD), Anna Záborská (KDH), Miroslav Mikolášik (KDH) Ivan Štefanec (SDKU), Eduard Kukan (SDKU), Branislav Skripek (OĽaNO), József Nagy (Most-Híd), Richard Sulik (SaS), Pal Csaky (SMK) and Jana Zitnanska (Nova, KDS, OKS). " (Statistics, 2020)

So the election was won by 8 political parties and we have shown the results in the table for a better overview.

Political party	Number of valid votes	Percentage of valid votes in%	Number of mandates
SMER – sociálna demokracia	135 089	24,09	4
Kresťanskodemokratické hnutie	74 108	13,21	2
Slovenská demokratická a kresťanská únia – Demokratická strana	43 467	7,75	2

OBYČAJNÍ LUDIA a nezávislé osobnosti	41 829	7,46	1
NOVA, Konzervatívni demokrati Slovenska, Občianska konzervatívna stra-na	38 316	6,83	1
Sloboda a Solidarita	37 376	6,66	1
Strana maďarskej komunity – Magyar Közösség Pártja	36 629	6,53	1
MOST – HÍD	32 708	5,83	1

Source: Statistics

The table shows that the winner of the elections was the Smer-SD party with four MEPs. It is immediately followed by the KDH party, which had two MEPs, and SDKU-DS is also in third place with two MEPs. Other political parties or coalitions occupied the one mandate.

4 Election 2019

4.1 Campaign

As part of the political campaign for EP 2019, we can meet with various topics. Some political parties demand the reform of the European Union, others want to be the voice of Slovaks in the European Forum. The LSNS political party, which was a priori against the Slovak Republic's membership in the European Union, is now running and holding the leading positions. It states that the Union needs to be reformed in order to preserve the sovereignty of individual EU member states. The coalition of Progressive Slovakia and the SPOLU Civic Democracy Party is running as progressive-minded candidates. They try to arouse people's interest in European politics and bring it closer to young people. Although the Smer-SD party was a leader in surveys, the campaign was aimed mainly at the older generations and does not create activities at all to involve young people in public affairs. The political campaign, however, does not have a significant theme that would resonate in society. Slovak influencers, who went to schools and talked about the importance of the European Union, also tried to help. However, the anti-system in the form of Kotleba's party was expected to have a higher chance in these elections. Kotleba's party was also indirectly or directly supported by several alternative media subjects using hoaxes, disinformations or propaganda. "The tactics of such disinformation campaigns consist of questioning the mainstream media, arousing distrust in institutions, principles and representatives of democracy. Propaganda practices were used, especially lies, half-truths." (Laczko, 2019:141)

4.1.1 The course of the elections

The course of the elections to the European Parliament was again in the background of the Presidential Elections in the Slovak Republic. In the second round competed candidates Zuzana Čaputová as an independent candidate with the support of almost the entire opposition and Maroš Šefčovič as a candidate with the help of the Smer-SD party. The independent candidate Zuzana Čaputová won the election. The scenario in the 2014 elections was repeated, so all attention was focused on defeating the Smer - SD party. The elections to the European Parliament had the motto "The time has come, to choose your future." The peculiarity of these elections was the style of promotion. Influencers, celebrities and, finally, politicians themselves were involved in these elections. Thanks to social networks, citizens were given information about the functioning of Members of the European Parliament. In this way, they could better understand the importance of elections. (Europarl.eu, 2019)

The coalition of Progressive Slovakia / SPOLU- civic democracy parties, had the main electoral slogan "Truly European Slovakia, change is coming." They tried to build on the electoral success in the Presidential Elections, where Zuzana Čaputová, President of the Slovak Republic, belonged to their political party. She managed to win the election, so they came up with new faces and progressive politics in elections with modern themes. They wanted to strengthen a common Europe through European healthcare, European schools, European services and food. With its participation in the European Parliament, the Smer-SD party wanted "Confident

Slovakia in Europe." In the program, they wanted to balance social differences so that Slovaks would not be cheap labour for Western Europe. They also wanted to strengthen a sense of security associated with the influx of illegal migration and the issue of dual food quality. The Kotleba's People's Party Our Slovakia had an electoral slogan "For the interests of Slovakia, against the nonsense from Brussels." In the campaign, they focused on the negatives of European policy, presenting the demise of the European Community. According to them, "Politicians in the European Parliament have betrayed us and are flooding Europe with millions of immigrants. "The Christian Democratic movement ran with the slogan" For a strong Slovakia. " The program included support for European integration, the fight for moral issues and assistance for young people. The Freedom and Solidarity party had the slogan "Choose common sense." The program included the effective use of Euro funds, oversight of the independence of the prosecutor's office and eco-transport. The OĽaNO movement went to the polls with the slogan "Let's save our European house." Their goal was for the European Union to unite and stay together. (Facebook, 2020)

Based on the analysis of the election campaign, we can conclude that the political parties raised essential issues that were relevant at the time. The main topic of the European elections was absent, and instead, each party focused on its vision of the European Parliament.

4.2 Results

„Despite active education for citizenship and democratic values in the Slovak Republic, hate speech is growing in society” (Lincényi, 2019:10) Society feels cheated and so they resort to choosing more radical parties. For this reason, the issue of education is important. "Political literacy applies to all citizens who have the right to vote and to stand as a candidate. These citizens should therefore understand the system in which they live. " (Čársky, Veselská, 2020:43) The media and celebrities have raised awareness against extremism. On the basis of the results we can conclude that the surveys differed from the real figures from the results of citizens' decisions. The turnout was higher than in the previous elections and climbed to 22.74%. It should be noted, however, that the participation of Slovaks in the elections was among the lowest in the European Union. The winner of the election was the coalition of Progressive Slovakia and SPOLU with 20.11%. The third party was the LSNS, which gained 12.07% in the elections. KDH, SaS and OĽaNO were also successful in the elections.

Results of political parties on the European Parliament elections.

Political party	Number of valid votes	Percentage of valid votes in%	Number of mandates
Progresívne Slovensko/ SPOLU- občianska demokracia	198 255	20,11	4
SMER – sociálna demokracia	154 996	15,72	3
Ľudová strana naše Slovensko	118 995	12,07	2
Kresťanskodemokratické hnutie	95 588	9,69	2
Sloboda a Solidarita	94 839	9,62	2
OBYČAJNÍ ĽUDIA a nezávislé osobnosti	51 834	5,25	1

Source: Statistics

5 Conclusion

In this paper we analysed the election campaign as well as the results of the European Parliament elections. In the first part, we described the basic tasks of the European Parliament and also recalled the basic legislative anchors in the European Parliament elections. In the second chapter we discussed the methodology of work. We set a goal, then a research question. We created a hypothesis from the research question and explained what methods we will work with. At last, we have identified a research file and research material. In the next chapter we dealt with the 2014 European Parliament elections. Finally, we went to the election results and based on the table we presented the results. In the last chapter we dealt with the election campaign and the results of the 2019 elections.

The main aim of this work was to describe the competences and legislation for the elections to the European Parliament. The partial objective was to bring the election campaign itself into the EP elections. In this paper, we identified one research question to which we sought an answer.

VO 1. Did the 2019 European Parliament elections have any major political theme?

The supposed answer to the research question was that the elections to the European Parliament have no fundamental theme to act as a core topic. Based on the analysis, we found that the elections have many topics presented by political leaders. However, the main topic was absent from the topics presented, which are uninteresting to ordinary people and therefore we had a low turnout again.

Elections to the European Parliament may not seem as watched as presidential elections in the United States, where the world is watching the results of elections that may have a global impact on world politics. The results in the USA have significant consequences for the US economic policy and thus for the world economy. (Kucharčík, Janas, 2016) However, elections to the European Parliament also watch people around the world, as they are deciding the future and direction of the European Union.

At the beginning of this work, we recalled the importance of the European Union. This idea needs to be presented not only at the time of the election campaign, but throughout the whole parliamentary term. There is low public awareness and this results in a low turnout. The topics seem to be distant from the ordinary citizen. Similar conclusions are confirmed by more detailed studies focused on the research of European citizenship and identity in the Czech and Slovak Republics from 2018).

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Some Reflections on the Phenomenon "BREXIT"

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Abstract

The study presents some ideas and opinions on the withdrawal process of the United Kingdom from the European Union (called Brexit) according to Article 50 in the Lisbon Treaty on the EU. This process has had deep roots in the British post-war history and, in the end, was initiated by a referendum on this issue in June 2016. Victory of Brexit supporters in the referendum clearly confirmed that Britain refused to join its own future destiny with the Union. The study is discussing some aspects of British in/out-referendum, some Brexit reasons, facts on the Brexit politico-legislative process, further, occurrence of democracy deficit accompanying this process, British Euro-scepticism as a main reason of leaving the Union and, finally, consequences of Britain's leave by 31 January 2020.

Key words: European Union, United Kingdom, British referendum, Brexit, democracy deficit, Euro-scepticism, Brexit consequences

1 Introduction

Great Britain's exit (Brexit) became the first step backward in the European Union (EU) expansion. The Brexit was originally recognized by the referendum on 23 June 2016 and was followed by Theresa May, new Prime Minister of British Government. It is an outgoing process that not only has challenged the British and European institutions, but also has explored the position of the United Kingdom (UK) in Europe and its relations with the EU in the future. Thus, Brexit raises political, economic and social questions whose outcome remains to be determined while negotiations have been being held. Brexit became one of the top-priority cases in the EU and Europeans can wonder how it evolved since its announcement. Moreover, Brexit created some new issues on a European level but has entered also into consideration questions peculiar to the UK such as the claim for the Scotland's independency declared by the present regional government represented by the Scottish National Party (SNP).

The British referendum vote in favour of leaving the EU was considered by many right-wing and Eurosceptic media outlets and politicians to be a "victory for democracy". The popular tabloid the Daily Express, on the day following the vote, encouraged other European nations to follow the United Kingdom and "free [them]selves from the shackles of the dying European Union" (Daily Express 2016). Boris Johnson, a prominent Conservative Party Brexiter or Tory "Leave" campaigner (i. e. a Conservative supporter of Britain's leaving the EU) regarded the vote as a defining moment in Britain's democratic history, whilst former Prime Minister David Cameron described the referendum itself as "a giant democratic exercise – perhaps the biggest in our history". Although, unlike B. Johnson, D. Cameron did not regard the actual result as a victory for democracy, but he accepted that the will of the people "must be respected", thus implicitly linking respect for democracy to popular sovereignty. Politicians who supported "Leave" were particularly keen to make this link. B. Johnson, writing just a few days after the referendum, attempted to explain the result, stating that the "number one issue" was "control – a sense that British democracy was being undermined by the EU system, and that we should restore to the people that vital power: to kick out their rulers at elections, and to choose new ones". The former UK Independency Party (UKIP) leader Nigel Farage also suggested that the vote to leave the EU was about popular sovereignty, about "the ordinary people" revolting against the elites and "big politics" to regain control and be an "independent, self-governing" nation. (Bell E. 2017: 52)

Closely linked to this concern to give control back to the people was the desire to restore full parliamentary sovereignty so that their views could be fully expressed and respected via the mechanisms of representative democracy. The need to guarantee sovereignty of the British Parliament has been a long-standing concern ever since the UK had entered into the European Communities (EC) in 1973.

Yet, the result of the referendum reflected the widespread belief that only an exit from the EU will be sufficient to restore the apparent loss of UK parliamentary sovereignty and thus to revive democracy in the UK. Such a viewpoint betrays a rather narrow understanding of democracy, limited to restoring the freedom of British parliamentary institutions. Popular sovereignty is confounded with parliamentary sovereignty, overlooking the fact that the British electoral system and political institutions themselves are often profoundly undemocratic, denying the effective participation of ordinary people in decision-making processes and failing to protect their interests.

Brexit really revealed a turning point both for the UK and the EU. The article judges complexities in politico-legislative process within Brexit, some aspects of democracy deficit and Euro-scepticism going along with Brexit and its transitional period, possible continuation of the disintegration process at the European level caused by Britain's withdrawal from the EU and its possible consequences on the UK and Union and on their future mutual relations.

2 Reflections on the British referendum and some Brexit reasons

In general, whatever Member State of the EU, if it firmly wants, can democratically take decision on its leaving the Union according to Article 50 of the Treaty on the EU (TEU) in Lisbon wording. In a case of the UK, British people, supporting the idea of the UK's divorce from the Union and reclaiming „full sovereignty “for its country, are often called as the Brexiters or Leavers.

This unprecedented move in the EU, affecting one of its bigger Member States, raises a number of questions about both the British polity and future of the European project, which has been confronted with an equally unprecedented number of crises since the late 2000s, starting with the financial crisis in 2007-2008, followed by the Eurozone sovereign debt crisis in 2010-2011. Wars in the Middle-East led to a refugee crisis in 2015 which was a challenge to countries such as Greece, Italy, Germany or Austria, to a pandemics of the new coronavirus COVID-19 hitting mainly developed Western democracies (such as Italy, Germany, Spain, France and others), further, increased mutual tensions between Member States and, in the end, between some Members and European institutions. In the background to these challenges, and fuelled by them, lay the deeper and unresolved question of the growing disconnect between European citizens and elites, reflected in the rise of populist anti-EU political parties across the whole Continent.

It is not too early to assess the long-term impact of Brexit on future of European Integration. But a number of questions on the impact of the vote can already be addressed. Is it the start of process of disintegration of the EU, by which the Brexit has created a precedent attracting other votes in other Member States? Or are we witnessing a hollowing out of the EU independently of Brexit? Or instead can we hope that Brexit will act as wake up call for Europeans and democrats on the Continent? (SCHNAPPER P. 2017)

In order to try and answer these questions, the ideas mentioned above are the specifically domestic factors explaining Brexit in the UK. It cannot be completely separated from a wider legitimacy crisis affecting the EU as a whole, which is well documented in the academic literature. Or it cannot be understood if a number of domestic factors are not factored in which they are a reminder of British exceptionality in the Union.

The decisions to apply for membership were never taken as a result of a full acceptance of the political dimension of European Integration, but rather as a result of a utilitarian calculation that the UK would be better off economically as a Member of the Single Market and Customs Union than outside. The lack of commitment of the British elites, for whom membership in the EU was a stopgap solution at a time of relative economic decline, explains why Britain remained an “awkward partner” for decades. There was never an emotional attachment to the idea of Europe, as consistently shown by barometer opinion polls: the percentage of British respondents saying that they felt European and the percentage of respondents thinking that membership of the EU was a good thing was always lower than the EC/EU average.

Euro-scepticism, now embedded in the EU as a whole, started as a specifically British phenomenon in the early 1990s, after the signing of the Maastricht treaty founding the EU. It exposed strong divisions between and within mainstream political parties, which had already been in view in the 1960s and 1970s but became much more acute, and politically problematic, within the Conservative Party in the 1990s and 2000s. The UKIP was created in that period to campaign for withdrawal from the EU and, after a slow start, became increasingly an electoral threat for the Conservative Party, winning more and more votes in European and general elections.

When David Cameron became leader of the Conservative party in 2005, he pledged to “stop banging about Europe” at the following Party Conference and hoped to keep the issue out of the table. But he gave in to Eurosceptic pressure by pledging to take Conservative Members out of the European Parliament's European People's Party, deemed too federalist, and rejected the Lisbon treaty signed by Gordon Brown in 2007, promising “not to let matters rest” when it was ratified by the Labour majority in the British Parliament. Once he became Prime Minister in 2010 he introduced a EU bill in the Parliament which reasserted its sovereignty and made a referendum compulsory in case of any new transfer of sovereignty to the EU. At that point he refused to contemplate an referendum in the monarchy, which a sizeable minority of his own backbenchers supported. But by January 2013 he had changed his mind under pressure from hard Euro-sceptics in his party, the press and UKIP and had promised a referendum before the end of 2017 in his Bloomberg speech. By May 2015, when he won the general election, the referendum was inevitable.

The referendum therefore took place in a context of increasing discontent towards Europe in the UK, reinforced by the Eurozone crisis (which entrenched the idea that the whole Euro project was doomed) and the massive refugee crisis, even though it did not directly affect Britain, which is not part of the Schengen system. The referendum was also deeply affected, as the campaign showed, by the decision taken by the Blair government in 2004 to lift any restriction to the free circulation of citizens from the new Member States who

joined the EU. This led to the immigration of over one million Poles and other East Europeans in the UK (to a total of over 3.3 million EU citizens living in the UK in 2016), which became increasingly contentious in the British political debate from 2005 onwards. Immigration proved to be the most successful argument of the "Leave" campaign in the referendum, especially when N. Farage sponsored a poster showing a line of refugees in the Balkans with the slogan "Breaking Point – The EU has failed us". More generally, the Leave campaign focussed on the theme of "taking back control", which included reclaiming control of British borders and of the sovereignty of the UK's Parliament over British laws. It was able to tap into a widespread feeling that EU institutions were too powerful and imposed costs and regulation which the British public was opposed to and that it was not accountable in the way national politicians were to their own parliament. (SCHNAPPER P. 2017)

Other domestic issue which was significant for the referendum result, though not directly, had relation with the economic and social policies adopted since 2010 in the UK in response to the economic crisis. Spending cuts, especially affecting benefits, had a lasting impact on many working-class families who also faced wage stagnation and unaffordable housing in many parts of the country. This explains, at least partly, why the economic argument in favour of staying in the EU had little traction with sections of the public for that leaving could have a negative impact on the City or abstract figures like the GDP, but could not make things worse than they already were for them, or so they felt.

The domestic factors such as traditional misgivings about European Integration, a historical attachment to the idea of parliamentary sovereignty, however mythical in reality, immigration policy under the British Labour Party (1994 - 2010) and the spending cuts adopted by the Coalition Government between 2010 and 2015, explain to a large extent the result of the referendum. "Leave" voters were predominantly those affected by immigration and austerity: the less educated, less well-off older English population outside London were the section of the population most likely to vote for Brexit.

Although domestic factors explain to a large extent the result of the British referendum 2016, it cannot be separated from wider developments at play across the EU, to which the UK is not immune. Euro-scepticism, or the rejection of the European project, is now a widespread phenomenon in Europe, reflected in opinion polls and the success of anti-European populist parties in the 2019 elections to the European Parliament. The acquiescence of European citizens to the process of European Integration in the 1950s and 1960s has given way to a so called "constraining dissensus". (SCHNAPPER P. 2017) This has been happening as a result of the politicisation of European issues across the EU, which has led to a widespread contestation of, if not the project as a whole, at least many of the policies and perceived inadequacies of the EU institutions. In 2007, only 34% of respondents in the Eurobarometer poll thought that their voices counted in the EU, in the UK only 22%. (EUROBAROMETER 2007: 100) This may explain why turnout in European elections has been consistently going downwards since 1979, e. g. from an average of over 60% to just over 40% in 2014. The rise of populist anti-European parties throughout the continent has been the most obvious manifestation of voters' discontent.

In the UK, the EU-wide crisis was interpreted as evidence that the EU was not a successful economic bloc but a declining bureaucratic and inefficient system. The refugee crisis of 2015 added to these tensions, with a new, East-West dimension to it when Central and Eastern European states, especially V4 countries, refused to leave their borders open and to accept a quota of refugees, as the European Commission had suggested. It also raised the question of the effectiveness of the Schengen system, with many Member States re-introducing controls at their national borders.

Beyond these separate crises, commentators have pointed more generally to an identity crisis for the EU, where the whole process is no longer seen as legitimate because it is not seen as able to provide security and prosperity to its citizens, risks undermining national sovereignty and has not led to a shared polity with a common identity. Scholars have distinguished between an input (with citizen participation) and output legitimacy, whereby the EU's output legitimacy is no longer sufficient to satisfy voters. Summing up the conundrum in which the EU finds itself when it generates 'policy without politics' whereas the level where politics takes place is national but has largely been deprived of policy outputs – 'politics without policy'. (SCHMIDT V. A 2006)

One of the ways in which Member States attempted to reconnect voters with the European project was to resort more frequently to the use of referendums, as a way to reintroduce direct democracy in a process which seemed too aloof and technocratic. At first referendums were used as bargaining tools for national governments to gain concessions in their negotiations with the EU. Then they became means for gaining legitimacy, leverage and passing the political "buck" all at the same time.

The British referendum and consecutive Brexit therefore came at a time when the European project as a whole was threatened. It was an illustration of the extent of the crisis the EU was facing and had the potential to make it worse.

3 The Brexit politico-legislative process

The Brexit was a slow and complicated politico-legislative process. The issue of this legal process occurred both within the UK institutions and on the negotiations with the EU. Furthermore, it questioned not only the

withdrawal of the UK from the Union but also the future relationship between the country and the EU post-Brexit. To understand the Brexit politico-legislative process, it is necessary at first clarify some main issues and their aspects.

Mentioned above, the Brexit originated from David Cameron's 2013 Bloomberg speech where he promised a referendum on whether the UK should remain or leave the EU. The victory of the Brexiters on June 23, 2016 by 51.9% for a 72.2% turnout led to the Prime Minister's resignation and to the British Government led by Theresa May being under an obligation to apply the referendum result in the British society. However, the expression of the will of British people was not enough to initiate the exit process. Indeed, the withdrawal of any Member State from the EU is ruled by Article 50 TEU. This article was invoked for the first time within the EU history, and gives the possibility to any Member to quit the EU "*according to its own constitutional requirements*" (EUROPEAN UNION 2007). It states that a Member State shall notify the Union and start negotiations for the withdrawal and future relationship between the corresponding Member leaving and the Union. The two years transition period is allowed to find an agreement and the deal must be accepted by a qualified majority voting of the European Council (i.e. in the case of the UK: 16 Member States from the 27 ones with 65% of the Union's population) but can be vetoed by the European Parliament. Article 50 TEU is therefore the main and key legal basis for the Brexit. However, the bare activation of the article became a legal challenge within the UK.

In January 2017, the British Supreme Court ruled that "*the Government cannot activate the Article 50 TEU on its own accord, despite the referendum result, and needs to consult and obtain the agreement of the British Parliament*". (Note: R. Miller and another v. Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union [2017] UKSC. The Supreme Court gave its ruling on the Miller case on January 24th, 2017.) In accordance with this ruling, the corresponding bill of the UK's withdrawal was presented to the Parliament and the Members of Parliament (MPs) approved it in March 2017. The notification of withdrawal was then sent on 29 March 2017 by Theresa May's Government to the European Council's Head Donald Tusk and acted as the first official step of Brexit.

Also, the day after the notification was sent, the British Parliament introduced its EU (withdrawal) bill - also called *Great Repeal bill* – meant to revoke the 1972 European Communities act. This legal act has been considered as one of the most important and challenging steps carried out by British MPs.

Moreover, Brexit has opened a new kind of negotiations and unprecedented politico-legislative process within the EU. After receiving the British notification, the 27 remaining states reunited on 29 April 2017 to discuss Brexit for the first time and the currently on-going negotiations officially opened on June 19th. The talks were held for one week every month with the representatives of both sides – the EU and UK – with the deadline to find an agreement to 29 March 2019. If all agreement's issues were not agreed, there was a possibility to extend this negotiation period.

More than six months after the start of the talks, the first stage of the negotiations – regarding the main separation issues – was officially settled just before the end of 2017. Indeed, for the EU, before any discussions could be made on the future agreement, the question of the exit and some specific points needed to be settled. It concerned especially the rights of the UK and EU citizens, the "divorce bill" and the UK obligations towards the EU as well as the Northern Ireland border. The question of the UK and EU citizens' rights has illustrated the legal challenges faced in those negotiations. Brexit posed a very concrete question for EU citizens living in the UK and UK citizens living in other Member States of the Union. It has questioned freedom of movement first but also the rights associated to EU citizenship, competent jurisdictions in case of legal disputes and a role of the Court of Justice of the Union in the post-Brexit period. On the Northern-Ireland border issue, the question of "regulatory alignment" wanted by Ireland and the EU, as to preserve the peace and stability in the region, has been accepted and recognized by the British Government but has been challenged by the Democratic Unionist Party representatives and contested by the hard-Brexiters within the UK. It raised the possibility of Brexit bit by bit with exemptions for the different countries and territories within the UK. (BIRKINSHAW P. 2018) Although some sensitive aspects were not been entirely and clearly resolved, the EU considered on 8 September 2017 that sufficient progress had been made as to progress on the second stage of the negotiations and an accord was reached in principle, recognized by the European Parliament on 13 December 2017. Moreover, the British Government stated that this agreement is conditioned to the success of the future deal between the UK and EU and in a joint statement (from 8 December 2017) both sides agreed that "nothing is agreed until everything is agreed". This second phase of the talks was described as the most challenging and concerned especially the possibility of a possible two years transition period, the commercial relations and the cooperation on security issues. This phase should also determine the orientation to the British leaving towards actual soft or hard Brexit. The British Government line on the question has been evolving on the European and national stages. If the issue remains dependent on internal and political questions, the UK's Prime Minister T. May expressed on 22 September 2017 that the UK will do its best keeping the idea that no deal may be actually better than a bad deal. The idea was developed because the UK requires special relationship with the EU and therefore needs a unique and new kind of deal. However, it could appear as a treatment favour what the EU may not agree with. Moreover, to have access to the advantages to the EU, the UK would still need to contribute to the EU budget and obligation in parts. This asks how relevant Brexit would be in a configuration where the UK would be

engaged towards the EU but with no representation and voice within its institutions. And this is probably not real.

During the whole time, the Brexit process in the UK's Parliament was very strongly blocked mainly by the main opposition party – the Labour Party. Labours have behaved very strangely and always declared its support for Brexit, but only on the basis of an agreement signed between the UK and the EU (though such an agreement can be signed within the transition period after Brexit). The Labour Party refused all proposals of the agreement in the British Parliament and never submitted any own version of the agreement, nor its own conception of such the agreement.

The deadline for Brexit was prolonged to 31 October 2019. Hopeful progress in the Brexit process happened by a change of the Conservative Party Leader and Prime Minister on 23 July 2019. Teresa May resigned and was succeeded by Boris Johnson, a strong Brexiter. The conflicting state of relations between Conservatives and Labours in the Parliament was going on and the Brexit process was permanently blocked by Labours. The only solution to this problem was a new general Parliamentary election in the UK.

Prime Minister B. Johnson, trying to gain an overall majority in the Parliament to accomplish his main goal of taking the UK out of the EU by the end of January 2020, called for an early general election to take place in December which was eventually passed into law. At first, the new deadline for Brexit was established on the day of 31 January 2020 and consequently the British Parliament announced the general election on 12 December 2019. The election resulted in a Conservatives landslide victory, in their largest majority since 1987.

As we could observe Brexit was a massive, complicated, unprecedented, uncertain and slow politico-legislative process before the last general election. The result of the election revealed the Conservatives strengthening their position on Brexit, with B. Johnson's securing a mandate to ensure the UK's departure from the Union at the end of January 2020.

The legislation passed its final parliamentary stage on 22 January 2020, after more than three years of bitter wrangling over how, when and even if Brexit should take place. The next day on January 23 Queen Elizabeth gave the Brexit bill Royal Assent and so the bill became UK law. Prime Minister Boris Johnson formally signed the EU Withdrawal Agreement on Jan 24 and on the same day the leaders of the European Commission (Ursula von der Leyen) and European Council (Charles Michel) signed this Brexit Agreement in the EU's Europa building. A consent vote in the European Parliament took place on January 29 with a prospect openly expressed by some anti-Brexit MPs that once Britain will return to the Union. The UK was due to leave the EU bloc of states at 24:00 CET on 31 January 2020. Since the next day (1 February 2020), the 11 month transition period has been started within which new mutual relations between the UK and EU should be formed. (HRIVIK P. et al. 2020)

4 Appearance of democracy deficit within Brexit

The whole process of Brexit was accompanied by the phenomenon of democratic deficit. Not only was this process accompanied by a democratic deficit, it was also one of the reasons why Brexit actually happened. In this case, we can talk about the democratic deficit in the period before Brexit, respectively before referendum, during campaign and after referendum. The nature of the democratic deficit is determined on the timeline by the individual stages of the leaving process. While in the first stage of the process i.e. in the pre - referendum period, the democratic deficit was captured by the criticism of the British in relation towards the EU (reasons such as sovereignty, bureaucracy, over - regulation, immigrants ...) in the second stage of the process, the democratic deficit was present within the handling of the election campaign. From both sides of course. The last stage captures the reluctant acceptance of the referendum results, as well as attempts for holding a second referendum which undermining the institute of the referendum as a direct form of democracy. When David Cameron became Prime Minister of the United Kingdom in 2010, he probably had no idea that his country's membership in the European Union comes to its end. He also inherited Black Peter in the form of growing European scepticism inside the Conservative Party. The conservative European sceptics from times of Margaret Thatcher did not disappear. On the contrary, they have strengthened. To the measurement that their reservations against the European Union could no longer be ignored. Euro-scepticism grew because of the democratic deficit they felt in the form of: loss of sovereignty (manifested by the transfer of competences from the national parliament to the institutions of the European Union) increased regulation and bureaucracy and a quota system to redistribute immigrants from the 2015 immigration crisis, thereby losing control of who can enter the country - this would disrupt the established asylum process. From some point of view is leaving the European Union only one possibility how to escape European chains, and regain full control and sovereignty over state and UK territory (Palkovská, 2018).

In this climate, David Cameron pledged to hold a United Kingdom European Union membership referendum, on condition that he would win parliamentary elections (2015). Cameron himself was for staying in the Union. Former President of the European Council Donald Tusk commented situation like that David Cameron never believed he would have to hold an EU referendum because he expected to fall short of an overall majority in the 2015 election. In this case, David Cameron bet on (un)certainty. He assumed that he would rule with the Liberal

Democrats after the elections and that Democrats will reject the referendum proposal. So, the blame for failing to meet his pre-election promise would fall on the coalition partner, and at the same time he could silence European sceptics among the Conservative Party by the fact that he was about to hold a referendum. However, the Conservative Party won the elections in 2015 and formed a government - without liberal democrats. Cameron had to keep his promise and hold a referendum. To this day many people consider the promise of a Brexit referendum after winning parliamentary elections for a gamble that was not worth it.

If the Brexit referendum were based solely on economic debate, most people would probably vote for staying. All key economic players, from Confederation of British Industry (CBI) to City, have called for Remain. This position undoubtedly supported the government's agenda, which highlighted the economic risks associated with leaving the Union. However, the nature of the debate has turned more on political than economic issues. In this case, the Remain campaign provided much weaker arguments and hardly even mentioned Brexit's risk and costs. In this context, the slogan "take back control" won. One of the reasons why the Eurosceptics won was the fact that executive and legislative power over a number of important economic and social policies, and last but not least, those related to immigration, passed to the EU institutions. These institutions have been largely uncontrolled or under-controlled by British citizens (or by any citizens from EU Member States). Leaving the EU would return these competences to democratically accountable politicians and administrators, thereby reinvigorating (or at least getting closer to) the British voters in this process. Of course, many Remainders have lent this argument credibility by criticizing the democratic deficit in the EU for 40 years. The criticism of democratic failures has been observed since 1979 (the first Euro elections). At these times, criticism of Europhiles at the address of EU was often tougher than critique of Eurosceptics. Quite a failure of the Remain campaign can also be found at a point where its members have not taken a positive political stance on European integration. This served to ensure that EU political integration serves to further legitimize the argument on the democratic deficit in the narrative of Vote Leave campaign.

Brexit was supposed to save money from paying to the EU budget. In addition, Brexiters assumed that the FTA would be negotiated quickly and on favorable terms for the City. However, not taking into account the financial consequences of the exit such as: inflation, pound drop, interest rate hikes, etc., the economic claims of Brexit proponents have been constantly disintegrating. Despite this, YouGov surveys have revealed that up to 60% of Brexit supporters consider these political gains profitable at the cost of economic losses (Bellami 2018). However, political costs can be even higher than economic. The fact that the British "take back control" may result in the British electorate losing control of the global and social processes that shape many government policies. The EU does not support such scrutiny by including national democracies within a transnational democratic system (as many Europhiles predict), what creating concerns about both domestic and European democratic deficits, but offering a framework within which national democracies can collectively regulate global processes relatively in a fair way. It also reveals that the states and their peoples have similar concerns and respect for the same things. Outside these agreements, states will face the dominance of other states, as well as foreign agents, multinational corporations, financial institutions and terrorist groups (Pettit 2010). No state today is able to face these influences on its own. Even the US, with its military hegemony, the great strength of the domestic market, and its considerable natural resources, is not able to do so. It is certainly beyond the capacity of a medium-sized economic and military force, such as the United Kingdom, which is heavily dependent on international trade.

The fundamental problem can be formulated in terms of what Dani Rodrik called "the fundamental political trilemma of the world economy" (Rodrik 2011). Specifically, democracy, national self-determination and economic globalization cannot be achieved at the same time. One of them must be "sacrificed". As an example: If we want to maintain a deep democracy, we have to choose between a nation-state and international economic integration. If we want to preserve the nation state and self-determination, we must choose between deepening democracy or deepening globalization.

To make matters worse, the phenomenon of political correctness has entered the Brexit process. The result of political correctness in this case is the idea that every opponent of admission of immigrants and a redistribution quota policy is a conservative bigot xenophobe. It was even more confusing for British workers when former Labor President Tony Blair stood up against Brexit. However, many workers saw the immigration influx as threatening for their work. At that time, Blair coined the thesis: "Free debate is a part of democracy and people are" free to listen". However, many of Brexit supporters were excluded from the public debate. This kind of political correctness was present throughout whole Brexit campaign.

In addition to political correctness, the campaign was also marked by considerable manipulation from both sides. Brexiters were manipulating the referendum mainly in connection with targeted advertising with the help of the British company Cambridge Analytica, which no longer exists. Despite this, Cambridge Analytica has never received any payment for this action from Leave.EU. On the other hand, in addition to the official Vote Remain campaign, globalists and supporters of a united Europe such as George Soros also fought to remain in the Union. He proudly reported that he had spent £ 400,000 on an anti-Brexit campaign (Elgot, 2018). With this sum, he supported the Best for Britain project, which "educates people to make the right choices". The campaign

culminated in a day of referendum on June 23, 2016. It was big blow for European Union. Because it was for first time after deepening integration when member state decides to leave "European house" (Somai, 2018, p. 1308).

Some people began to demand a second referendum after a rigged referendum, so the Supreme Court Judgment in December 2016 stated the following: *"The referendum was not legally binding, merely" advisory, "so it can't be ordered to be re-run by a court - any decision to have a fresh referendum would be made by the government and Parliament would have pass and referendum act."* (BBC editorial, 2018).

However, the second referendum eventually took place "de facto". This happened during the early elections in 2019. Where more support for Boris Johnson meant a more authentic approach to Brexit. It was a kind of "confirming" election to the Brexit referendum. At their end stood the strongest conservative party since Margaret Thatcher's victory in 1987. Despite the fact that George Soros had invested £ 2.7 million in the campaign against Boris Johnson through the Best for Britain project (Hale, 2019).

Democratic deficit in this process was ultimately only the tip of the glacier, the majority of which was submerged under the surface which was formed by the historically rooted British European skepticism against the idea of a common united Europe since the post-war Europe.

5 British Euro-scepticism as a reason for Brexit

Traditional British European scepticism played an important role in the UK's leaving from the EU. According to Greek political scientist Georgios Nastos, the core of this European scepticism is national sovereignty and identity manifested in political rhetoric, the media and public opinion. British European sceptics, especially among the conservative elites, perceive the United Kingdom as a global rather than a European player. In this regard, they consider the current EU, including the vast Brussels bureaucracy, as a major obstacle to the economic and trade sovereignty of the UK. (Nastos, 2016)

Natural British European scepticism from the beginning refused to participate in the United Kingdom in the European Communities (EC), and later in the EU. Another form, so-called. she criticized soft European scepticism and distanced itself significantly from the advancing processes of European integration. The British representatives of soft European scepticism criticized in particular the gradual supranationalization of decision-making processes within the EC / EU and promoted the intergovernmental principle of decision-making. The revision of the EC / EU founding treaties, the growing in the competences of the EU institutions and the disproportionate strengthening of the political and human rights dimension together with political correctness at the expense of common economic and trade policies brought disintegration tendencies culminating of the referendum about its membership. In 23 June 2016, the vast majority of British voters decided to leave the Union. The current US President Donald Trump's policy has publicly supported Britain's efforts to exit the common European market. (Hrivik, 2016)

British trade and the country's economic and economic relations were oriented towards the Commonwealth countries in the 1940s, to which more than 50% of British exports went, while to Western Europe only 20%. The United Kingdom, unlike France, was an advanced industrial production-oriented state, but only a small proportion of the population was employed in the agricultural industry, while a fifth of the population was employed in French agriculture. In May 1950, a key turning point in the development of European integration came. Robert Schuman presented the concept of the European Coal and Steel Community. The British were not informed in advance. The European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) was established by the Treaty of Paris signed on 18 April 1951 by France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. The treaty was concluded for 50 years and entered into force after ratification on 25 July 1952. The aim was for the common market in steel, coal, coke, iron ore and scrap and economic cooperation to prevent further war. Ernest Bevin was disturbed by the federalist tone of the whole community, and he considered it a marketing move stemming from the weakness of France, which, he said, was losing influence over the German industry. In addition, economic commitments to Western Europe would mean a loss of position in the Commonwealth countries. As a result of the British decision, the project was dominated by France. United Kingdom Secretary of State Anthony Eden refused any involvement of Britain in European structures. Anthony Eden was looking for a way to influence integration on the continent. In 1952, Eden came up with the idea of linking the Council of Europe and the ECSC, where the members of the Council of Europe would participate in the ECSC's 'six' discussions, so that a joint Council of Europe and 'six' body would always prevail over multinational institutions. The Monnet's Office immediately alerted the governments of the Member States that the adoption of the British proposal would jeopardize the independence of the Community and, moreover, there were no organic links between the supranational authority and the Council of Europe. Eden's idea of linking the Council of Europe and the ECSC did not pass. The British considered every aspect of integration and their advantages and disadvantages. Despite its ownership structure, British industry was much better than continental. The British had outlets in the Commonwealth countries and trade was principally based on exports of engineering and other industrial products and imports of agricultural products to Britain. Unlike the French in agriculture, the British had only 4% of the population, while the French had 23%. And this is another key point in the dispute. The French considered the

greatest benefit of integration as having gained a market for agricultural products and at the same time protected for their uncompetitive industry. The British needed the exact opposite, a free market for the agricultural products they imported from New Zealand, Australia and other countries of the Community, and expand outlets for their relatively advanced industry. (Loužek, 2010)

The UK's diverging attitude towards post-war European integration was first publicly presented by a speech by former British Prime Minister and leader of the Conservative Opposition Winston Churchill on September 19, 1946 at the University of Zurich. In his speech he suggested building a kind of post-war United States of Europe based on an alliance of sovereign states. He was being inclined to create a common European grouping of states, but he did not count on British participation in a united Europe. Conservative Party policy favoured deepening deeper bilateral relations with the USA. (Hrivik, 2016) The Labour Party was taken similar attitude too. It refused to integrate Great Britain into transnational European structures. The gradual weakening of the British colonial empire forced Great Britain to establish greater cooperation with the EC in the 1950s. Unsuccessful negotiations about the Association Agreement was resulted to establishment of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) in 4 January 1960 by signing the so-called European Free Trade Association calling Stockholm Convention (UK, Denmark, Norway, Austria, Switzerland with Liechtenstein and Portugal). Compared to the Treaties of Rome, it was less comprehensive and mainly less ambitious. Its aim was the gradual convergence of tariffs on most industrial production and sometimes their gradual abolition. EFTA did not emphasize the gradual unification of national economies and had no other open or hidden objectives. Within the Joint Council of Ministers all decisions were taken unanimously. Nevertheless, the UK dominated politically and economically in this economic grouping. The USA perceived competition between the EC and EFTA as a threat to the division of Western Europe. Therefore, the then of the USA top political leaders appealed to the mutual cooperation of both organizations, favouring the European Economic Community. Because that the UK's competitive alternative European integration project EFTA failed, in the 1960s, the United Kingdom began applying for EC accession. (Kovar and Horcicka, 2005a)

The independence of most Commonwealth states and the consequent decline in foreign trade with the former British colonies resulted in a reassessment of the UK's foreign policy towards the EC. The UK's intention to integrate into the common European market was particularly welcomed by the USA. After the resignation of French President Charles de Gaulle, the United Kingdom, together with Denmark and Ireland, joined the EC in January 1973. Britain's accession delayed for some time the integration of the political framework into European integration. Its position prevented the Dutch intention of establishing European political cooperation into the EC system. Great Britain guarded the independence of its own international policy. The victory of opposition laborers in February 1974 put de facto into questioning Britain's EC membership. No Entry on Tory Terms and Keep Britain Out become the main motto of Labour Anti-European propaganda. Together with the poor economic situation and the traditional resistance of part of the British population to engage politically on the European continent, the future of UK's EC membership was uncertain. Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson, together with Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, James Callaghan, has approved the so-called. correction mechanism. Its aim was to reduce British contributions to the EC Common Budget. In the referendum on Britain's remain in the EC on 5 June 1975, the majority of British voters accepted new conditions, with up to 67.2% of eligible voters voting. The result of the popular vote was the victory of Prime Minister Wilson and the British Euro-optimists. The 1979 elections were won by the Conservatives. The new government of Margaret Thatcher, criticized the then increase in payments to the common budget of the European Communities and called for a review of this situation. With the slogan 'I want my money back', it has pushed through a substantial reduction in the UK's contribution to the common budget and the return of part of the funds invested into the Communities by the so-called. compensation. (Kovar and Horcicka, 2005b)

In a further integration period, the United Kingdom supported only the limited economic dimension of the single market. But the United Kingdom did not agree to sign the so-called. Social Charter or the concept of Economic and Monetary Union. Among the main opponents of Economic and Monetary Union was the UK, which, in response to the announcement of the first stage of EMU, specified its conditions of participation: falling inflation, the gradual completion of the single market and the removal of remaining restrictions on the free movement of capital. In response to the Delors's report, the UK introduced its own variant of monetary integration. In 1989, it repeatedly proposed the introduction of the so-called. hard ECU, which would primarily serve as a reserve currency and a currency to conduct payment operations. According to the UK, the replacement of national currencies with the common European currency should have been made only on the basis of direct stimuli from financial and foreign exchange markets. The President of France, Mitterrand, suggested that the UK's exception, which from the outset declared its unwillingness to participate in the creation of a common currency, should be limited. However, the limitation of the British opt-out in the EMU case, which would ultimately not be accepted by the UK, was not subsequently implemented. On the contrary, VB confirmed its opt-out for the third stage of the Economic and Monetary Union project. The inconsistency between the integration intentions of Commission President Delors and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, who supported the limited intergovernmental dimension of cooperation, was also linked to the Commission's efforts

to enforce the harmonization of value added tax (VAT) in Member States of EC. Countries with low VAT levels, including the UK, resisted the attempt to harmonize taxes because they feared a rise in consumer prices. The concerns of British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher about further integration activities, whether social, monetary or tax harmonization issues, were based on the current belief that the level of integration that has emerged is temporary and that the shift of unification to other areas is undermining the sovereignty of Member States. UK's attitude towards integration efforts going beyond the founding treaties is expressed, for example, by: M. Thatcher's speech at a ceremony in Bruges in September 1988, where she said: "... my first principle is this: the best way to build a successful European Community is voluntary and active cooperation between sovereign, independent countries. Efforts to suppress national fixtures and to concentrate power at the heart of a European conglomerate would be highly damaging and would jeopardize the goals we seek to achieve ... Europe will be stronger just because France is France, Spain is Spain and Britain is Britain, and each of these countries have their own custom, traditions and identity. It would be crazy to try to entice her into a kind of unified European identity..." (Fiala, Pitrová, 2009)

The EU Treaty elaborated on the individual problems and caught the exceptions for individual member countries. It was emphasized that the exceptions are taken by the Union as a temporary matter and not as a standard method of resolution. Exceptions The opt-outs, also committed by the EU Treaty, also concerned the UK, which expressed its disagreement with the new integration activities; Permanent exceptions to the Treaty in the UK case covered the single currency agenda. It was also a failure in the so-called. the Social Protocol, which therefore continued only as intergovernmental activity by the Member States and the Schengen Protocol, which remained intergovernmental. The EU Treaty also proposed a concrete path towards a single currency Preparations for the Common Monetary Policy have begun long ago. However, the British pound did not take part in these preparations, in which the UK government did not want to be strongly linked to other European currencies in order to maintain as much autonomy in monetary policy as possible Furthermore, the Treaty introduced institutionalized cooperation in the field of justice and home affairs, confirming the exemption from participation for the UK and Ireland, which were not the only ones to sign the Schengen Agreement. The specific form of intergovernmental cooperation in the case of the Schengen agreements was lost by the signature of the Amsterdam Treaty, which covered the Schengen system within the EU contractual framework. Building the Schengen area has thus become part of the EU's agenda. (Fojtková, Vahalík, 2017)

In forming the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe in 2003, the UK opposed the creation of a superstate and refused, for example. the creation of a European Foreign Minister, but since this treaty was previously rejected by citizens in other EU countries (the Netherlands and France), a UK referendum has never been held. The Treaty of Lisbon was adopted in place of the Constitutional Treaty in 2009, which does not contain any reference to constitutional symbols (such as flag, anthem) and some terms such as EU law, EU constitution have been removed, so the Treaty of Lisbon has become an acceptable form of treaty to reform the functioning of the EU and its institutions. The UK agreed to create a new EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. Other compromises adopted at the request of the UK when signing the Lisbon Treaty include a provision in the area of police and judicial cooperation in criminal matters, which allows some members to continue to work on a particular act while allowing others not to participate. (Fojtková, Vahalík, 2017)

By ratifying the Maastricht Treaty of 1992 by the British parliament, a group of pro-European and European sceptic politicians was formed within the Conservative Party. European sceptics criticized the growing in transnational elements and refused to create a common currency and a common foreign and security policy. Growing the transnational principle of European integration at that time also led to the constitution of new European sceptic parties in the United Kingdom - UKIP (United Kingdom Independence Party) and BNP (British National Party). Some conservatives also suggested leaving the country from the EU. Together to the hard-European scepticism, a new generation of politicians was discovered. They were called soft European sceptics and supported of the UK's membership in EU, but they did not support the adoption of a common European currency.

The United Kingdom Independence Party was founded by Alan Skeda in 1993 on the occasion of a campaign against the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty. It asked for the immediate and complete leaving of the UK from the EU. It criticized the loss of British national sovereignty over the EU institutions or the lack of democracy in the EU because of the non-voting nature of the European Commission or the inability of the European Parliament to represent the interests of citizens of the Member States of the Union. UKIP also strongly opposed the over-regulation of the single European market and the UK's inability to reach independent international trade agreements and migration issues arising from EU membership. The party convinced British society that its suffering could only be greatly alleviated if the country was ruled solely by the British Parliament without outside interference from Brussels. According to G. Nastos, the main factors the decision of most British voters to leave the EU were, above all, the question of the sovereignty and identity of the monarchy. (Nastos, 2018)

6 On some potential Brexit's consequences

To analyse political, economic, social and diplomatic consequences of Brexit, as well as key features and issues of the post-Brexit period within the eleven-month transition period (by 31 December 2020) is difficult because the negotiations on future relations between the UK and EU have not too gone forward, they are still in process.

In general, Brexit is expected to gradual disrupt internal equilibrium of the Union and to decrease its influence and credibility in near future. The EU is losing the world's fifth largest economy, a nuclear power and a member of the UN Security Council. This underlines certain risks for the EU's external relations, due also to weakening its inner cohesion. On the international scene, the EU will lose its position and significance which can mean some certain economic and political risks. Germany and France together achieve a much stronger position and influence within the Union after the UK's departure and this can lead to greater internal instability. (HRIVIK P. et al. 2020)

Another key issue of the Brexit concern refers to relations between Northern Ireland (being outside the EU) and the Republic of Ireland as the EU's Member State. The economies of Northern Ireland and Ireland are completely interconnected, considerable amounts of goods and services are crossing the border every day without any checks. Both sides are determined that the Common Travel Area will remain in place, but that in itself does not resolve the challenge of a hard border re-emerging. Because the UK has announced its leaving the EU's Single Market and Customs Union that immediately turns the internal border on the Irish Isle into an external border for the both mentioned unions with all the potential checks that implies. This is a reason why the Irish Government wants a written guarantee from the UK that Northern Ireland will continue to follow EU rules – so goods can continue to move freely across the border.

The UK henceforth remains economically dependent on the Union, in particular regarding its internal market. In fact, 40% of UK's investments in the world refer to the EU and 50% of the capital inputs on the British region come from the Union, so that represent a certain risk for the UK's economy. Moreover, some industries largely stand on the EU's support, like agriculture. Even if it represents less than 1% of the Britain's economy, 55% of its industry depends on the EU's financial contributions and 72% of the export is destined for the EU.

It seems important to mention also possible depreciation of the British pound, which could affect the UK's economy. According to some European leaders, the UK is depriving itself of the numerous advantages resulting from the European Common Market and can suffer from the reduction of trust of international investors. On the other hand, there are some issues about the potential financial instabilities in the Eurozone and its competitiveness.

A study of the European Parliament "*An Assessment of the Economic Impact of Brexit on the EU27*" shows that the EU is likely to face a hole of 9 billion Euros in its annual budget, being the estimated amount of the UK's net contributions. They also show that the volume of trade in goods and services is quite substantial between the UK and the EU27, with 94 billion Euros of exports from the EU27 to the UK, and 122 billion Euros in the EU27's imports. However, according to the Parliamentary study, it seems that the UK is more dependent on the EU, and even if they agree that Brexit will inflict losses on both sides appearing to be more serious for the UK than for the EU. (BARLES B. et al. 2018)

Within the Brexit process, there occurred some preoccupations referring to European citizens living in the UK (around 3, 4 million) and to British citizens (nearly 1 million) living in the EU. For those who are residents in the UK for at least five years, they apparently will be able to apply for "settled status". Nevertheless, if the UK and EU cannot find a deal within the transition period by the end of 2020, there is an issue that British citizens living in the EU could lose their residency rights and access to full-valued health care. However, British expatriates in the Union's Member States are able, to thanks to the European Economic Area (EEA), to employ right of free movement which means in general that EU Members cannot bar or expel citizens of EEA states. (Note: The citizens of the member states of the European Economic Area (EEA), including the EU and EFTA states, have the same right of freedom of movement in the EEA as EU citizens do within the Union.) There have also been fears that some EU Member States, angered by Brexit, could try to apply pressure on British expatriates as a demonstration of reprisal. Nevertheless, when Brexit had been initiated, EU nationals living in Britain expressed their will of having rather individual "acquired rights" under the 1969 Vienna Convention, which means they can stay. The same appeal will be probably applied by UK citizens living in the Union. Finally, EU nationals arriving in the UK after a "cut-off date" of 31 January 2020 will probably no longer have the right to permanent residence in the monarchy.

Moreover, the Brexit event will have other cardinal effects at different levels. It will undoubtedly have an impact on the EU, with some Member States probably tempted to follow Britain. The consequences will be also acute on the UK itself, as well as on Scotland and Northern Ireland themselves which did not sufficiently support voting for Brexit in the last general election performed in December 2019. However, the overall result was in favour of the Brexiters, mainly in England.

All these consequences and other issues, arising from this singular situation, explain why the Brexit problem is so unusual and interesting for investigation. Fuzziness and uncertainty of the transition period are actual attributes of the post-Brexit process, specifying its content, consequences and continuation in future. This can be

observed from politico-legislative, judicial, economic and human-right points of view, in the UK with the issue of the manner in which this leaving the EU should be officially recorded. Some issues refer to the future relationship between the UK and EU. This is not negligible especially from an economic point of view. The outcomes of the referendum 2016 and the last general election 2019 are compelling the UK's Government and the EU's institutions to redefine the economic partnership between the both entities. This new partnership seems difficult to be designed and set up.

Within the context of the Brexit process the governing Scottish National Party (SNP) in Scotland announced ambitions to organize a second referendum on Scotland's independence, because it refused to support the UK's withdrawal from the EU declaring an interest of Scotland to become a member of the Union in near future. Why is this referendum on Scotland's independence unlikely? To be held, and to have a legal value, this referendum would have to be authorised by some key UK authorities, mainly by the British Parliament. To some extent, this is the same problem as the case of Catalonia in Spain. Aware of this fact, it will be difficult, probably impossible, for Scotland to carry out another referendum on its independence in the following years. But the SNP would appreciate that Scotland, and therefore the UK, can remain a part of the European Single Market. However, this is not guaranteed at all, and there will not be any real answer before the end of the post-Brexit transition period.

To conclude, it appears today that the issue of Scotland's future will be henceforth a part of the UK's destiny. Scotland will remain a firm part of the UK in the next post-Brexit years. This issue is very sensitive. The UK's Government will now really refuse to deal with the second referendum on Scottish sovereignty as well as with the issue of Northern Ireland (being as complicated as the one of Scotland) because its withdrawal priorities have become key in negotiations with the EU's institutions on some post-Brexit relations, cooperation and many other problems.

Another issue referring to Scotland and Northern Ireland seems also very important as these UK countries voted in the last general parliamentary election by their majority to remain in the EU. But it is curious in a case of Scotland where people voted in the 2014 referendum on Scottish independence to remain in the UK. Therefore, it is impossible to set these results aside. That is the reason why the issue of the future of Scotland has been a persistent question since 23 June 2016. Nevertheless, it is a case which could be solved within future economic relationship between the UK and EU.

Brexit's consequences and prospects are now extremely actual which need special exploration for specifying all possible effects and impacts on the European and British levels, as well as on a national level of other Member States. This can enlighten internal dissensions and various questions referring to the future of the EU and UK, and predestination of very European Integration.

Some other possible Brexit consequences in the Union can be, for example, determined by the following ideas:

- the uncontrolled growing of deficit of democracy in the Union caused mainly by European elites and some interests and egoism of the most influential Member States, mainly France and Germany which have been totally controlling European Integration evolution;
- the persisting of the French form of government in the Union which supports centralized governing of the Union and large-scale EU bureaucracy;
- the strengthening of a supranational character of the EU and a position of Brussels' bureaucracy respected first of all by Germany and France;
- the possible loss of a dominant position of the English – the most communication language in the world – among working languages in the EU (this issue is now submitted by some French politicians);
- and next.

To remove these and other risks and doubts on next EU development, to stop disintegration trends, to reduce Euro-scepticism and to strengthen inner stability and unity, the EU inevitably needs acute, reasonable reforms in the post-Brexit period. (HRIVIK P. et al. 2020)

7 Conclusions

None of the Member States' governments, nor interestingly their publics, wished for a Brexit. A poll published in spring 2016 showed that 75% of the German, Dutch or Spanish respondents thought it would be a bad idea for the EU. Even in France, traditionally seen as more hostile to the UK, a majority of 62% of voters thought it was not a good idea for the UK to withdraw from the EU. All EU heads of states and government supported keeping the UK in the EU. (SCHNAPPER P. 2017)

The vote on Brexit was the result of a mixture of domestic, European and international factors. One of its main consequences has been to add a further level of uncertainty and disruption to an already embattled the EU. While opinion polls in the rest of the Member States show that the vote has not, in the short term, led to an increase in anti-EU feeling and the fear of immediate contagion to other countries seems to have been overblown, Brexit remains a huge challenge for the EU as it questions the *raison d'être* of the European project. It is too early to say if the British referendum and Brexit alone will represent a further step towards disintegration

or whether, on the contrary, they will serve as a wake-up call for citizens and leaders who have taken the peace and stability afforded by the EU for decades for granted. The risk is that governments will continue to muddle through in the EU, unwilling to contemplate major reforms for fear of fuelling more discontent or exposing the divisions between Member States.

Once the referendum and Brexit had taken place, the concern of European leaders became to limit the damage to the rest of the Union and contain a possible contagion effect to other Member States where Euroscepticism had been on the rise. Their fear was that, emboldened by Brexit, other anti-European political forces across the continent would put pressure on their governments to organise similar ballots in their countries. The British referendum proved to be a successful precedent; Brexit could be the start of a dangerous process of unravelling for the rest of the EU. This explains why French, German, Italian and other European leaders have been calling for the unity, solidarity and cohesion within the EU-27. But, a new serious challenge for the present EU is mortal pandemics of coronavirus COVID-19 which has totally destroyed the Schengen system and put the leading European institutions, mainly the European Commission and European Council, into the position of inert, inefficient, ineffective and helpless bodies in a deep shock and depression. This can become a next reason for the gradual weakening of European Integration and the Union. The EU so needs inevitably and immediately sound reforms for its salvation.

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Surveys of opinions of Slovak people on Slovak Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2016

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Abstract

The research study offers an analysis of the public opinion of the citizens of the Slovak Republic focused on the Slovak presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2016. The study also presents prevailing opinions, attitudes, preferences, and values of the Slovak people in relation to the benefits of the Slovak presidency of the Council of the EU for the Slovak Republic and the European Union. It follows from the survey of public opinion of the Slovak people that despite its ambitions, the Government of the Slovak Republic did not succeed in waking up the interest of the society in the Slovak presidency of the Council of the European Union as it did not resonate in the whole society. The opinions of Slovak citizens on the benefits of the presidency itself are diverse too. While the questioned respondents rather agree with the statement that the Slovak Presidency made Slovakia visible in a positive way, the majority is sceptical concerning the benefits of the Slovak Presidency for the European Union itself.

Key words: European Union, Presidency, Slovak Republic, survey, public opinion, citizens, opinions,

Introduction

As part of the research study, we decided to implement the sociological research of the public opinion of Slovak Republic citizens on the issues of the Slovak Presidency in The Council of the European Union in 2016.

In the professional literature, there are several definitions of the term public opinion. In general, public opinion is a set of publicly-expressed views, attitudes, values, and ideas that are active within public opinion. There is no single public opinion, but several public opinions, or opinions resonating within society. According to Eduard Chmelár (2003, p. 8), we are subject to public opinion because we want to be part of the majority and we often believe our own experiences only after they have been confirmed by the media.

Public opinion becomes the centre of public attention particularly before the elections, referendum, or exceptional events, such as the Slovak presidency in The Council of The EU. According to Elizabeth M. Perse (2001, p. 117), since the advent of television broadcast and the more sophisticated electoral and projection methods, there were concerns that the presidential election TV news could have an impact on the election day voting an today, there is no doubt that television has a major impact on the political process, in particular the process, through which our political leaders are elected. Ľudovít Šrámek (2000, p. 79) points out the fact, that the information about public opinion state and also about the interest of media recipients according to individual media subsystems are published very often for purely pragmatic, political or economic reasons.

Tadeus Zasepa and Maciej Iłowiecki (2003, p. 70) recall that a substantial part of the public opinion in the elections is made up of prognosis. *"It happens that many initially not decided in final decision-making follow the results and vote for the party candidate, which has received the superiority. This phenomenon is called an "sheep effect".*"

The main objective of the submitted research was to analyse the current public opinion of The Slovak Presidency in the Council of the European Union in 2016.

The secondary research objective was to ascertain whether the respondents register the Slovak presidency in the Council of the European Union in 2016.

Another research objective was to identify the current views, attitudes, preferences and values of respondents about The Slovak Presidency in the Council of the European Union in 2016, regarding the benefits for the Slovak Republic and the European Union.

In the case of further planning and research design, we preferred the concept of research questions before setting research problems. We have identified one research question (RQ), which we have divided into three specific research questions:

RQ1: What is the public opinion of Slovak Republic citizens about the Slovak presidency in the Council of the European Union in 2016?

SRQ1: What is the respondents' political literacy regarding The Slovak Presidency in the Council of the European Union in 2016?

We assume that two-thirds of the respondents will be aware of the Slovak presidency in the Council of the European Union in 2016. There will be also those who do not know about the presidency of the SR or do not want to answer that question. In this case, we relied on the results of the research executed by the Focus agency

for the EurActiv portal on the turn of January and February on a sample of 1008 respondents. According to this research, 65.4% of respondents noticed the fact that Slovakia was chaired to the Council of the EU, while 14% did not know about the presidency at all and the rest, 20.5% thought they might have heard about it, but were not sure. (Gabrižová, 2017)

SRQ2: What are the respondents views, attitudes, preferences and values regarding, whether The Slovak presidency in the Council of the European Union in 2016 promoted the Slovak Republic positively?

We presume that more than half of the asked Slovaks will perceive The Slovak Presidency in the Council of the European Union in the year 2016, as a positive promotion within the European Union. It is known, that the citizens of the Slovak Republic are conservative and nationally sentient at major events. In addition, the stated argument was confirmed by the mentioned 2017 Focus Agency survey, according to which 57.4% of the respondents argued that Slovakia had and positive visibility within the European Union during the Presidency. (Gabrižová, 2017)

SRQ3: What are the views, attitudes, preferences and values of the respondents concerning the benefits of The Slovak presidency in the Council of the European Union in 2016 for the European Union?

We think that most of the respondents will be sceptical of The Slovak Presidency to the Council of the European Union in 2016 contribution to the European Union itself. Repeatedly, we base our claims on the above-mentioned Focus Agency research in which up to 73% of respondents expressed the Slovak Republic role during the presidency was mostly administrative and organisational. However, nearly half of respondents (49.8%) was convinced that Slovakia had contributed to the development of compromises between EU countries. (Gabrižová, 2017).

1 The Presidency of the Slovak Republic in The Council of the European Union

In the second half of 2016, since July 1st to December 31st, the Slovak Republic was the presidency country in the Council of the European Union, which constituted one of the most important tasks resulting from Slovak Republic EU membership. The Presidency was also one of the main priorities to the Slovak Republic Government (SR Government) in the field of European affairs. The performance of our first Presidency in Slovak Republic history has been a unique opportunity to present country and make it more visible, as well as to promote the priorities of The Slovak Republic at EU level.¹

The Slovak Presidency's programme in the Council of the EU was built on four priorities: an economically strong Europe, a modern single market, a sustainable migration and asylum policy and a globally committed Europe. The Slovak presidency came up with four priorities:

a) Economically strong Europe: The aim was to focus on initiatives that will contribute to the creation of an appropriate environment for investment and for the further development of the Union. A supportive environment is a key prerequisite for the development and implementation of unifying European projects, which are the essential elements of a modern single market.

b) A modern single market: The Single Market is considered to be the greatest success of the European Union. The vision of the Slovak Presidency has therefore been the further development of unifying projects such as the energy union or the single digital market.

c) Sustainable migration and asylum policy: the current migration crisis creates enormous pressures on the external border of the Union and member states asylum systems. Therefore, the ambition of the Slovak presidency was to direct the Union to a sustainable migration and asylum policy.

d) Globally committed Europe: The Union cannot be safe without stability, prosperity and democracy in its neighbourhood. Thus, the Slovak presidency wanted to promote an effective European neighbourhood policy and to maintain the dynamism of the accession process².

The priority themes of the Slovak presidency were motivated by three interconnected principles:

a) Achieving concrete results. The Slovak presidency has been able to demonstrate to EU citizens that joint European projects have a practical impact on improving the quality of their lives.

b) Overcoming fragmentation. The Presidency will endeavour to achieve such results, contributing to the better connection of member states in the single market.

c) Focus on the citizen. The ability to bring concrete results and overcome fragmentation is the key to linking the Union to citizens. The ambition of the Slovak Presidency is to restore citizens' confidence in the European project.

1.1 Preparation of the Slovak Presidency in the Council of the European Union

The preparation of the Slovak Republic Presidency of the Council of the European Union (hereinafter the "Council of the EU") in 2016 was in line with the programme declaration by the Slovak Republic government

¹ Slovak Presidency in the Council of the EU (2016). Ministry of Education, Science, research and Sport of the Slovak Republic. Available on the Internet: [https://www.minedu.sk/slovenske-predsednictvo-v-rade-eu/\(1.12.2017\)](https://www.minedu.sk/slovenske-predsednictvo-v-rade-eu/(1.12.2017)).

² Programme and priorities (2016). Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs. Available on the Internet: [http://www.eu2016.sk/sk/o-predsednictve/co-je-predsednictvo\(1st.12.2017\)](http://www.eu2016.sk/sk/o-predsednictve/co-je-predsednictvo(1st.12.2017)).

for the years 2012-2016, which is defined as one of the main priorities in the field of European affairs in the context of the strengthening of the Slovak position within the EU and supporting of promoting and wider involvement in key EU policy-making. The Slovak Republic Government undertakes to ensure the content, budget, personnel, as well as the logistical and organisational preparation of the Bureau.³

In order to ensure a successful and effective course of the Presidency of the Slovak Republic (hereinafter SK Pres 2016), the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, as the preparation and security coordinator of the Presidency, was imposed in point C.2. of The Government of Slovak Republic no. 392/2012 of 2012 August 8th the task of submitting to the Government meeting the material "*Report on the state of readiness of the Slovak Republic for the performance of the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2016*".⁴

Preparations for SK PRES 2016 were launched in 2012 on the basis of the material "preparation of the Slovak Republic presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2016 - basic starting points and current priorities approved by the Government of the Slovak Republic". Although the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic is responsible for overall coordination, it has participated in all of the departments.

In order to guarantee effective coordination and quality of administration of the Government for the SK PRES 2016 performance, the inter-departmental coordinating board, the members of which were the state secretaries of the ministries and the Head of the Government Office of the Slovak Republic, was established in the year 2012. There have also been set up inter-departmental groups concerned with logistics and security, budgeting, cultural and media presentation, human resources, as well as the political priorities preparation.

1.2 The Context of the Slovak Presidency in the Council of the European Union

It should be noted that the beginning of the first-ever presidency of the Slovak Republic in the Council of the European Union was marked by an unprecedented situation for the Union and its member states. This was caused by a decision of the United Kingdom citizens on the withdrawal of their country from the European Union. Although, this decision did not affect the priorities and focus of the Slovak presidency, it was defining for the atmosphere in the European Union in which the Presidency was in progress. The outcome of the referendum underlined the urgent need for a debate concerning the future of the EU, and the Slovak presidency had to host a challenging role – to contribute to restoring the Union citizens confidence in a common European project. The first step on this road was the Bratislava Summit, which, after long years, allowed the leaders of the member states to discuss openly the future of EU outside of Brussels. The beginning and the course of the Slovak presidency also influenced other complex challenges: the ongoing migration and refugee crisis, terrorist attacks and the ever-noticeable consequences of the financial and economic crisis, marked by high unemployment.⁵

During the six-month period, Slovakia became more visible in the world, but it did not pass without affairs, such as the logo for 4.5 thousand euros or its launching event for 200 thousand euros. Initially, the new SK Pres 2016 logo raised the interest of the laymen and experts who discussed whether it is overpriced and ugly. This was accompanied by parodies and remorse on social networks. The logo was picked from a public tendering procedure to which more than two hundred experts and laymen were signed up. The author of the logo is a 23-year old artist and designer Jakub Dušička. The state has paid 4 500 euros for the logo and was featured on documents, promotional items, brochures, banners or official communications channels, during SK Pres 2016 events in Slovakia and abroad.⁶

Subsequently, a case arose about the overpriced Slovak presidency after former employees of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic Zuzana Hlávková, Pavol Szali and Juraj Zelinka claimed in the media that the contracts concerning the SK Pres 2016 were not legally clean.⁷

The NGO Transparency International Slovakia (TIS) revealed on its blog, regarding the SK Pres 2016 opening gala-event, that there were also items from 5 to 20 thousand euros for a few minutes of event hosting.

³ MZV SR. 2012. Preparation of the Slovak presidency in the Council of the European Union in 2016 - basic background and current priorities, material number: UV-22480/2012, departmental number:480.682-2/2012-EGAC, order No.:392/2012. Available at: <http://www.rokovania.sk/Rokovanie.aspx/BodRokovaniaDetail?idMaterial=21286>

⁴ MZV SR. 2013. Report on the state of readiness of the Slovak Republic to carry out the presidency of THE SR in the Council of the European Union in 2016. Material Number:UV-6807/2013 Departmental number:520.028/2013-PRES. Resolution No:119/2013. Available at: http://www.rokovania.sk/File.aspx/ViewDocumentHtml/Mater-Dokum-153115?prefixFile=m_

⁵ MZV SR. 2017. Report on the progress and results of THE Slovak presidency in the Council of the European Union, Material Number:UV-10668/2017, departmental number:005077/2017-EUPO2-0006789. Resolution No:114/2017. Available at: <http://www.rokovania.sk/Rokovanie.aspx/BodRokovaniaDetail?idMaterial=26300>

⁶ KOKI (2016). The Slovak Presidency logo entertains the Internet. Watch the parody. Available on the Internet: <https://slovensko.hnonline.sk/592670-logo-slovenskeho-predsednictva-bavi-internet-pozrite-si-parodie> (1. 12.2017).

⁷ MIKUŠOVIČ, Dušan. 2017. The third Lajčák staff member argues: The competitions for the presidency were not fair. Available on the Internet: <https://dennikn.sk/703093/uz-treti-lajcakov-zamestnanec-tvrdi-sutaze-k-predsednictvu-sa-robili-naoko/?ref=mwat> (1. 12.2017).

According to the TIS representatives, a new analysis of the bids of individual candidates for the mentioned event organisation increases the suspicion that this was a pre-agreed contract. At its end it was supposed to be a victory of the well-known agency Evka. TIS most recently argued that although the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs claimed that Evka received a contract for the logo's gala-event presentation without competition, because the volume of the contracts did not reach the limit necessary for the execution of the competition, it was not so. The Ministry has made the Market Research and the bids had come. The documents show the Evka agency did not cover all the costs that were the subject of the contract.⁸

2 Data Collection and Analysis

The research was carried out in the first quarter of 2016 on the research set of 1398 respondents, which was representative of the adult population in the terms of gender, age, education and regions. The research sample consisted of 643 men and 712 women, while 43 respondents did not reveal their gender.

If we look at the research set by age, 397 respondents had 18-25 years, 326 were aged 26-35 years, 277 aged 36-45 years, 163 aged 46-55 years, 136 aged 56-65, 95 aged 65 and over, four respondents did not reply. From the research file, 475 respondents had a university education and higher, 674 respondents had high school education with graduation, 151 had high school education without graduation, 85 respondents had a basic education, 6 respondents had no education, and seven did not reveal their education.

Respondents from the research set came from the Bratislava region (73), the Trnava region (217), the Nitra region (40), the Trenčín region (506), the Žilina region (309), the Banská Bystrica region (100), the Košice region (48), and the Prešov region (94); eleven respondents not reveal their county.

In the collection of data, the questionnaire was used as the main research method. The administration of the questionnaire ensured 100 trained and experienced interviewers in person "in the field", with a 100 percent return. The questionnaire consisted of 3 closed items that provided options for quantitative processing. Two types of questions were used: dichotomous offer and simple selection. (Gavora and Coll., 2010)

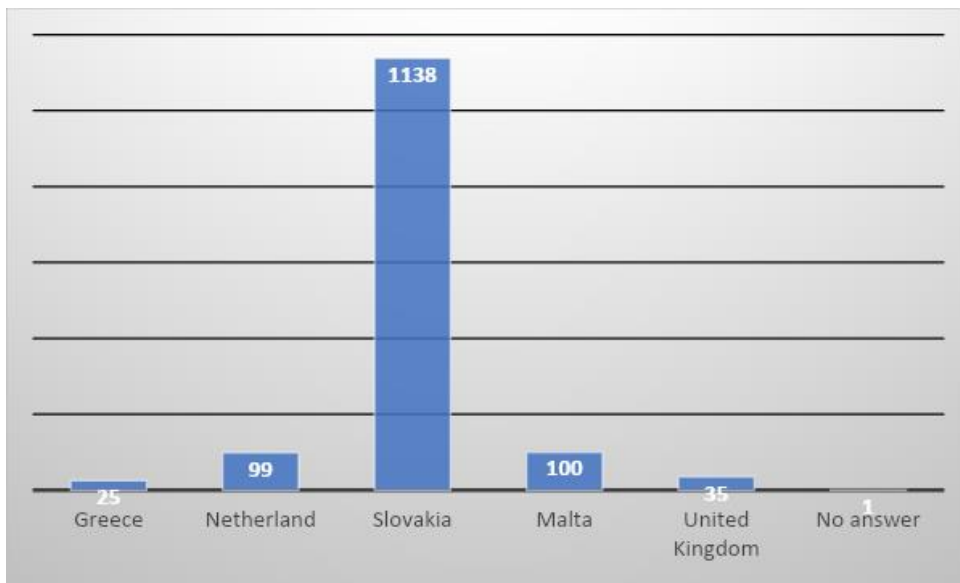
In the methodology, the questionnaire label is mostly used for techniques that identify personality traits, attitudes and motives, or adaptation mechanisms. (Maršálová et al., 1990, p. 278) We have chosen this method for several reasons. The questionnaire is an information source about social consciousness. According to A. G. Zdravomyslov (1972, p. 102-103), when questioning, the sociologist is focused just on the subjective side of things, he cares about how certain objective processes are reflected in the person's consciousness⁹. However, we have also chosen the questionnaire because it is intended for mass data retrieval. The creation of a good questionnaire is very challenging; thus we have been devoted increased efforts towards preparing it.

First of all, we found out whether the respondents had ever noticed that Slovakia was chaired by the Council of the European Union. Majority of respondents approached (1138-81.4%) correctly stated the Slovak Republic as the European Union presidency country. However, it is striking that, despite the extensive campaign on the Slovak presidency and a significant number of information in the Slovak media, 260 respondents (18.6%) did not know that Slovakia was chaired by the European Union. Of the incorrect responses, 100 respondents thought that the Union is chaired by Malta, the Netherlands (99), the United Kingdom (35), Greece (25), and one person could not provide an answer. More information in chart number 1.

Graph 1: Select from the options which country is currently chaired by the European Union

⁸ BARIAK, Ladislav (2017). New facts have emerged in the Slovak Presidency's Cause. Available on the Internet: [https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/500519/v-kauze-slovenskeho-predsednictva-sa-objavili-nove-skutocnosti/\(1.12.2017\)](https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/500519/v-kauze-slovenskeho-predsednictva-sa-objavili-nove-skutocnosti/(1.12.2017)).

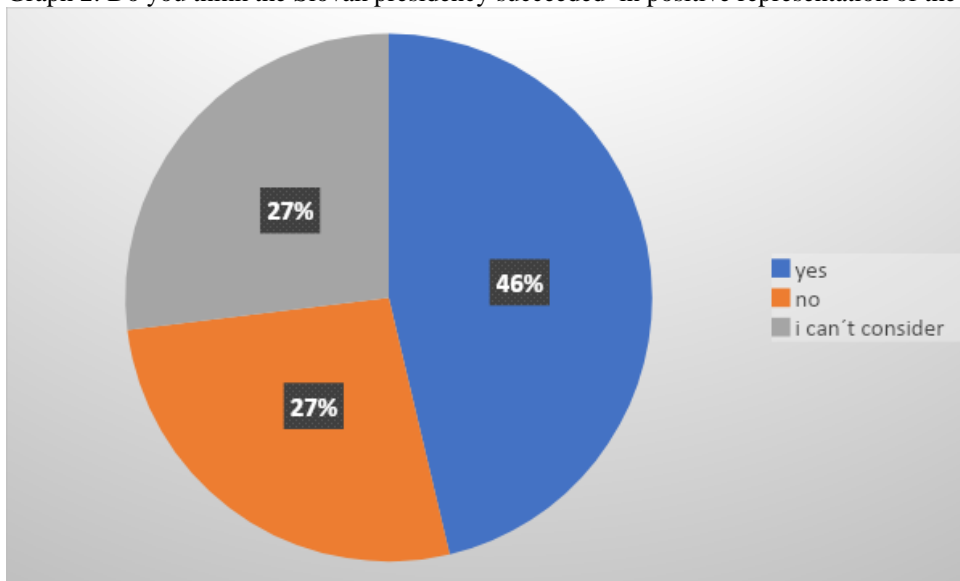
⁹ One of the first questionnaires used for research purposes was created by Charles Darwin's cousin Francis Galton and used to study the imagination, confirming G. T. Fechner's older view of the underdeveloped imagination of many people in the 1980s. (Maršálová, et al., 1990, p. 278)



Source: Processed from the results our research.

Almost half of Slovaks approached (647-46%), believes that the Slovak presidency of the European Union presented the Slovak Republic positively. 374 (27%) had an opposite opinion, and 377 respondents did not respond to the question above(27%). More information in Chart 2.

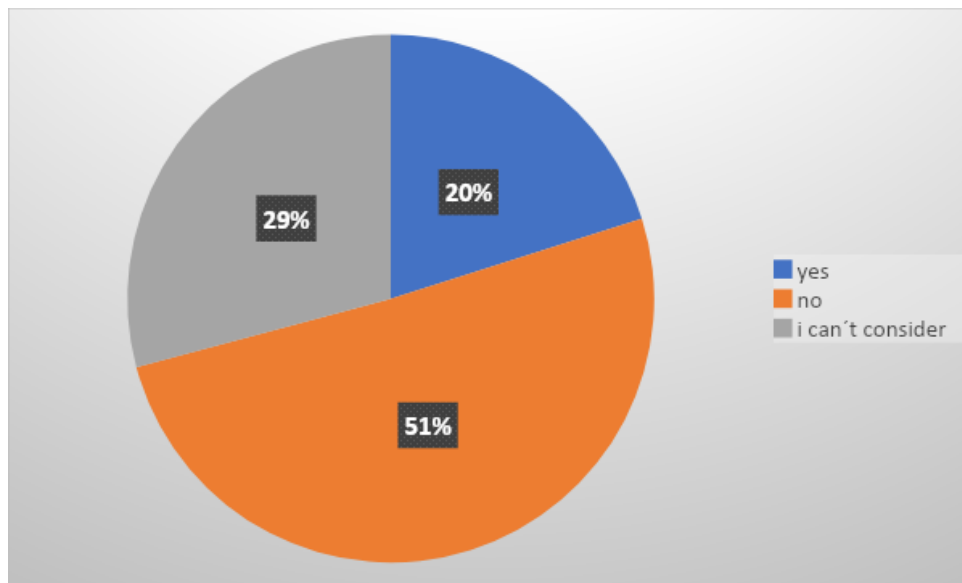
Graph 2: Do you think the Slovak presidency succeeded in positive representation of the Slovak Republic?



Source: Processed from the results of its own research.

On the other hand, the respondents did not believe that the Slovak Republic presidency of the Council of the European Union had any real results. Up to 51% of respondents approached (709), was not convinced that the Slovak Presidency had launched the expected reforms of the European Union, a third of the respondents (408) was unable to tell. 20% of asked was convinced of palpable results of the Slovak presidency towards the future of the European Union. More information in Chart 3.

Graph 3: Will the Slovak presidency launch the EU's expected reforms?



Source: Processed from the results of its own research.

3 Research Conclusions

As part of the first specific research question, we assumed that two-thirds of the surveyed respondents would be aware of the Slovak presidency of the Council of the European Union in the year 2016, though there would be those who never knew about the Slovak Presidency or would not want to answer that question. This claim was confirmed, as 81.4% of the respondents correctly named the Slovak Republic as the chair country of the European Union. It should be noted that we recorded a slightly higher range of correct responses than the Focus agency in the survey, which registered "65.4% of respondents who knew about the Slovak Presidency". (Gabrižová, 2017) It follows from the foregoing, that the Slovak Republic Government failed to fulfil the objective to arouse public interest regarding the presidency. The ambition of the Slovak Republic Government, before the presidency, was to arouse an all-society interest in the presidency in order to familiarize Slovak citizens with European Union and European themes.¹⁰

In the second research question, we presumed that more than half of the respondents would perceive the Slovak presidency in the Council of the European Union in 2016, predominantly as a positive representation of Slovakia within the European Union. In this case, our assertion has not been confirmed, as the positive representation of Slovakia was observed by 46% of approached respondents, which is more than 10% less than the Focus research survey: *"The consent prevails with the proposition that Slovakia was positively visible and that the European Union was positively visible in Slovakia. The evaluation of the Presidency's performance is largely linked to the way in which (by respondents) the EU membership is built up and as such is highly subjective."* (Gabrižová, 2017) If we take into account the proportion of those who agreed and disagreed with this statement, including undecided, it should be noted that most agreed that the Slovak presidency contributed to the positive view of Slovakia. However, The Slovak Republic Government, in the report on the progress and results of the Presidency in the Council of the European Union, speaks only about the successes: *"In addition to promoting the programme, the Presidency is an opportunity for presenting the country abroad and bringing the EU and European topics to the citizens of Slovakia. This aspect has been taken into account in the preparation of the presidency and the half-yearly presidency period, we have made full use of the communication of European themes on domestic land and the promotion of our country and its culture to foreign visitors."*¹¹

In the third specific research question, we expected that the majority of the surveyed respondents would be skeptical of the contribution of the Slovak presidency on the Council of the European Union in 2016 to the European Union itself. This was confirmed, as more than half of the respondents approached were not convinced that the Slovak presidency launched the expected reforms of the European Union. The respondents' views can be considered very similar to those that Focus had already mentioned. *"The respondents were most commonly identified with the statement that the role of Slovakia during the presidency was in particular administrative and organisational. 73% of respondents agree with this. The vast majority also think that the presidency of Slovakia did not involve citizens and civil society."* (Gabrižová, 2017) In this case, the Government of the SR has a different view than the public. As stated in the government paper, the Slovak Republic, in fulfilling the Union's

¹⁰ What is the Presidency (2016). Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs. Available on the Internet: <http://www.eu2016.sk/sk/o-predsednictve/co-je-predsednictvo> (1. 12.2017).

¹¹ MZV SR. 2017. Report on the progress and results of the SLOVAK Presidency in the Council of the European Union. Material Number:UV-10668/2017, Departmental number:005077/2017-EUPO2-0006789. RESOLUTION No:114/2017. Available at: <http://www.rokovania.sk/Rokovanie.aspx/BodRokovaniaDetail?idMaterial=26300>

strategic priorities in the Presidency position, has worked as an honorary facilitator and mediator for a European debate. Slovakia had found itself in a new position during the presidency, when our national goals were set aside and the common interest of the Union had become the priority. *"The specific results and positive responses of our partners are evidence that we have succeeded in this position. In a number of legislative proposals, we have been able to reach agreement with the member states or an agreement with the European Parliament. Thanks to the early and rigorous preparation, Slovakia has managed its historically first presidency even on the organizational and logistical side."*¹²

From the discussion above, it can be noted that the outputs of the public opinion polls of the Slovak Republic concerning the Slovak presidency in the Council of the European Union in 2016 are very similar to the Focus agency conclusions. Thus, our survey results can be considered as general, reliable and therefore relevant. The reasons for slight differences may be the different research file used and the statistical deviations.

4 Discussion

In discussing the causality of citizens' interest or uninterest in the Slovak presidency, it is possible to speak about the lack of promotional campaign by the Government of the Slovak Republic, the lack of communication of politicians with citizens regarding the subject, and also the lack of space in mass media to explain the importance of the Slovak presidency for the European Union, for the Slovak Republic, and its citizens.

Several experts have noted that, in the last decade, the general interest of mass media in the mediation of information from the political scene has declined. The problem is mainly the minimum amount of information, or frequently, no information at all, from the European Union. Although the message from the European institutions to the citizen is undeniable, as the union has an increasingly powerful impact on the development and functioning of our country. (Lincényi, Fabuš, 2012: 166)

Today, it is no longer disputed that the means of mass communication play an important role in social communication. The mass media has an impact on recipients, but the subject of researchers' inspiration are questions of form and intensity of these effects on person and society.. The scientific discussion has abandoned the views that the media are shaping public opinion, but it is said that mass media have a major impact on the shaping of public opinion. The influence, or the creation of public opinion has been challenged by Ivan Stadtrucker (2007, p. 413) who considers the goal of mass media informing the public to be the formation of public opinion in the first place. The person who has control over the media, according to M. A. Vericka (2009, p. 12, 14-15), also controls the public opinion and thus the electoral voices. The journalists decide on the success and the bust, what is right and what is wrong, regardless of the facts. As reported by M. A. Verick, journalists control politicians and ensure that they act in the interests of society. It should be said that the mass media do not persuade the percipients about how they are supposed to think, but by their message we are persuading us about what to think about. Marshall McLuhan (1991, p. 20), marked the media as a message, because it is just shaping and controlling the scale as well as the form of human association and activity.

We think that the mass media in the 21st century are not fulfilling their role, which should be implemented from a functionalist approach of media perception. Despite the fact that they have a prominent role in communicating social realities towards the citizen, they minimise informational, social, cultural and political function at the expense of entertaining content. The media should allocate more space in the news to political reports from home and abroad, including investigative intelligence. Citizens should learn more news from Europe, since the decision-making of European institutions concerns them more and more. We also think that members of the European Parliament and Slovak representatives in the European institutions should be more active in informing the journalists in Slovakia and not wait for the interest of the other party. Slovak representatives in the European institutions should offer journalists such topics that are interesting for information. It is also necessary to put emphasis on understandable information on individual topics, since European legislation is very complex in itself and can discourage some journalists in this aspect.

We think that contributing factors to public's negative assessments were the discussed views (Řádek, 2016) and the negative moods that have been rising within the European Union since the economic crisis (Fabuš 2012, Toth, Mura 2014, Janas, Kucharčík 2014), and the consequent decline of confidence in the European Union, also confirmed by Eurobarometer polls in several member states 2015¹³

We think that an effective marketing and media campaign could help to improve the public opinion on the European Union's actions, as well as citizens' trust in the European institutions. Such a campaign should be carried out throughout the European Union under the European Commission coordination. (See campaign Polakevičová 2016, Szabo 2016, Machová, Huszárík, Tóth 2016)

¹² MZV SR. 2017. Report on the progress and results of the SLOVAK Presidency in the Council of the European Union. Material Number:UV-10668/2017, Departmental number:005077/2017-EUPO2-0006789. RESOLUTION No:114/2017. Available at: <http://www.rokovania.sk/Rokovanie.aspx/BodRokovaniaDetail?idMaterial=26300>

¹³ VAČKO, F. (2015) Eurobarometer / People's confidence in the European Union has fallen. The European Union. Available from: <http://europa.europa.eu/eurobarometer-dovera-poklesla/> (20.12.2017)

5 Conclusion

The implemented sociological research of public opinion of the citizens of the Slovak Republic reveals several political science starting points:

In 2016, the Government of the Slovak Republic failed to arouse society-wide interest in the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the European Union, as it originally intended, as not all respondents were aware that Slovakia was holding the Presidency of the Council of the European Union. From the above, it is also debatable whether the Government of the Slovak Republic has managed to sufficiently bring the European Union and European issues closer to the citizens of the Slovak Republic. This points at the limits of the Slovak Presidency campaign and should be a signal for the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic as the purchaser of the future image campaign. We think that the main reasons why the Slovak presidency did not become a society-wide topic was insufficient promotional campaign of the Government of the Slovak Republic, insufficient “towards citizens” communication of politicians about the Slovak presidency importance, and last but not least, the lack of mass media information about the Slovak presidency importance.

Research has also shown that the respondents’ have different views on the benefits of the presidency itself. So far, as the respondents have expressed, the Slovak Presidency has contributed to the positive visibility of Slovakia, on the other hand most of the asked respondents are skeptical concerning the contribution of the Slovak Presidency 2016 of the Council of the European Union to the European Union itself from the perspective of the start of the expected reforms. We are of the opinion that the skeptic evaluation of the success of the Slovak presidency in the European Union could be the result of the ongoing negative sentiments within the European Union, which transform into a decline in confidence towards the European Union. Even in this case, it is necessary that Slovak politicians working in the European institutions, as well as other politicians, explain more the need and importance of Slovakia's membership in the European Union, as well as the benefits it brings the citizens.

Our study does not claim a comprehensive view of the analysis of the public opinion of Slovaks on the Slovak Presidency issue. This topic offers several other processing options. First of all, it will be very interesting to analyze the Slovaks public opinion on the Slovak presidency of the Council of Europe after the very year of the study, or during the next presidency. It would also be interesting to compare the results of opinion polls in individual member states of the European Union.

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State and democracy in the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle

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Abstract

For this reason, too, people began to gather, and as a result, the specialization of individuals began to thrive on securing certain tasks for society as a whole, and led to the subsequent emergence of crafts. With the enlargement of communities, the company automatically encountered some problems that needed to be addressed.

In many cases, state institutions have not ensured the kind of life citizens hoped for. This has led some citizens to start to feel disappointed about reality. A perfect example is Greece, which has undergone various changes in social systems throughout its history. It is this knowledge that contributed to the fact that Greek thinkers often used this knowledge in their works. After experience with so many forms of organization of society, they thought what harmed social development and what, on the contrary, benefits.

The most famous philosophers of Plato and Aristotle were among those who did not consider the society and its establishment ideal. It was reflected in what bothers the society and poses questions about how such an ideal establishment should work. As part of their work, they summarized policy knowledge and structured the individual establishments, assigning certain characteristics to them and outlining their views on whether this was a suitable or inappropriate type of establishment based on the vision of their ideal state.

The positions of Plato and Aristotle differed in this. While Plato believed that the individual was supposed to contribute to the benefit of the whole society, Aristotle considered the individual's personal happiness to be an important contribution to society.

Keywords: Plato, Aristotle, democracy, state

1 The term state according to Plato

The work of the Constitution is one of the most important works of Plato, not only from a historical perspective, but also for the benefit of political science. In this work, Plato summed up all his previous knowledge, and these formed the basis for his subsequent writings and works. It is clear from the entire content of the work that Plato's primary objective was to present a clear view of how a perfect state should function. (Platón, 1980)

The basic term for Plato's ideal state is justice. It takes this as a concept that mankind has sought to solve throughout its history, and justice can be viewed from different angles depending on this observer. Plato's goal was to get to know what exactly the term justice is. He based his reasoning on the argument that the concept of justice can be better portrayed within the framework of the so-called. a larger whole. (Platón, 1980) As part of his work, the Constitution, he therefore addressed the concept of the municipality and focused on its development from the very beginning with regard to the political and social context. In his understanding, the term municipality is a group of several individuals who group together in one place, live together and help each other. It follows from the above that a community is formed in a case where an individual invokes the help of other people because he feels insecure.

Plato defines the basic objective of the municipality as a way to improve the provision of common needs of people gathering and living together, especially in the areas of food security, housing and clothing procurement. On this basis, Plato has determined the essence of his theory of the benefit of a similar organization within a society, which is based on the notion that an individual should not do all the tasks, but only perform one particular activity for which he has talent, abilities and innate abilities.

Because if it does not, by doing other activities that are not in line with its capabilities, it naturally reduces the overall efficiency of meeting the needs of society. Plato states that, in his view, it is more appropriate for society as a whole if the individual devotes all of his attention and time to a particular task, the work he has the talents to, and therefore it is appropriate for the individual to control only one craft, not several. (Platón, 1980)

He further states that the natural and fundamental property of people is the desire to have more and more dissatisfaction with the current goods, which leads to the emergence of other needs, the subsequent satisfaction of which leads to the point when the municipality begins to naturally expand.

Since, as a consequence, it is necessary for the municipality to occupy another territory, which may be considered as the territory of another municipality, it is necessary to provide for the municipality a higher force intervention to ensure the successful occupation of new territories and hence the professional army to acquire new areas.

In his perception, such a new community is an unhealthy entity and is in complete opposition to a community where people will live in synchrony, modesty and respect for their property. The human desire for greater comfort and wealth is crucial to the need to expand territories and to the inevitable war. (Platón, 1980)

In his work, Plato characterizes the ideal state by assigning characteristics to this institution, which also includes the attribute of censorship, the absolute reign of several rulers whom he describes in his work as good, wise and educated government officials who themselves decide what is good for society without to be interested in the attitudes, opinions and ideas of ordinary citizens whose lives affect them. They arbitrarily assign the performance of certain tasks to individuals to perform with the view of ensuring the benefit of the whole state. (Platón, 1980)

For this reason, Plato's concept of an ideal state is defined in his work *The Constitution* as an authoritative type of state. In his ideal world, Plato assumes that it is made up of perfect people whose perfection is achieved through controlled marriage in favor of the state and the birth of children. It states that it is necessary to control the lives of individuals without giving them the opportunity to make decisions about themselves in order to ensure the benefit to society as a whole.

Under the notion of an ideal state, Plato divides its inhabitants into classes consisting of rulers, guards, and other inhabitants. In doing so, it is based on the role of the inheritance of the position of the individual, while not precluding the individual being able to advance or fall within the social hierarchy. Although it is not exactly defined who is a citizen, it can be concluded that, in this context, it is a grouping of individuals who have a certain kind of relationship with each other, given the fact that they live together in one territory, designated by the term municipality. (Platón, 1980)

The Rangers in Plato's work are a group of people that has an important function for society because their primary role is to guard the community, while rulers in an ideal state are defined as leaders of the character and attribute them the task of dedicating life to municipalities based on their opinion. (Platón, 1980)

In order to do so, the condition of best education and the personality characteristics of the individual must necessarily be met. (Platón, 1980) The question arises as to whether a ruler or a group of rulers, however clever or educated, can actually fulfill the essence of the goal of an ideal state as described by Plato, to secure the benefit and well-being of the whole state without there was a preference, or rather, the achievement of their own goals and benefits.

It can also be said that it is still a question of whether it is possible to reconcile the concept of absolute power in the state with the idea of achieving individual goals, which are often associated with the concept of freedom and reflected in individual ideas of individuals to fulfill the sense of good life. (Annasová, 1997)

2 The concept of democracy according to Plato

In its works, the *Constitution and Laws* treat Plato as demanding a state system. It defines it as a betrayal based on freedom and freedom for every individual within the framework of a state establishment. The main problem of democracy is that such an establishment does not have the ability to force an individual to act against his will, because the very nature of democracy rejects it. Each individual may arrange his or her life in his own way, which is in stark contrast to what Plato saw in his ideal state.

In its conception, it is possible to ensure a good function of the state only if everyone is obliged to do what is most suitable for them. Plato is disappointed that an individual with appropriate traits has the ability to refuse to accept the role of ruler in the state if he / she does not want to do so, and the company has no coercive mechanism to force him to do so.

In principle, Plato is opposed to what an individual provides to democracy, and that is the right to renounce voluntarily the duty to serve the whole state and citizens. The essence of the existence of the State is to ensure the benefit of the whole of society, and by carrying out its task everyone should contribute to the achievement of that objective.

In the work *The Constitution*, Plato ranked democracy second from below in his division of inappropriate foundations of society under tyrannidism. Among other inappropriate establishments, according to him, democracy is not a constitution in the true sense, because it leads to the fact that its character, which allows the free expression of man's will and his freedom, causes an unwelcome result - dissension between individuals in society.

Plato sees democracy negatively also because in his ideal state there are one or more rulers, respectively, who have all the necessary prerequisites to decide on the direction of the whole society and thus there is no division of power among the citizens. In his view, there is a negative impact of democracy on laws that citizens will not accept because they could have the effect of restricting their freedom. (Platón, 1980)

Plato outlines a democratic system as a system without laws that citizens would have to adhere to. Nor does it give him too much freedom, which leads to the benefit of the individual, which is contrary to the essence of Plato's ideal state, whose main aim is to place the welfare and benefit of society first.

3 The concept of state according to Aristotle

Plato's pupil Aristotle defines the state as a structure that has enough citizens, which are a necessary condition for the state to ensure its own self-sufficiency. (Aristotle, 1988) His view of the concept of state is essentially similar to that of Plato. For the relationship between citizens and the state that individuals associate and would do so even if the relationship between them did not imply a basic need for mutual assistance. According to Aristotle, the state community has the highest position among the others communities, because it contains the characteristics of all others. Given the presumption that in a state there is a law governed by the power to decide what is and what is not fair, then justice is an unconditional part of the state. It defines the state as the last stage of development of all communities as a natural entity (Aristoteles, 1988).

Aristotle considers the state to be an entity whose goal is to ensure all the conditions of life so as to ensure the existence of man, the development of his abilities and virtues, and so that citizens can develop fully in such a state to their full potential. Aristotle considers a good state to be a community that ensures good coexistence for its citizens and a self-sufficient life for the individual.

Aristotle states that the exact definition of the term citizen varies with the type of establishment and is linked to the state. Aristotle is not of the opinion that citizenship is acquired by a certain person living in a certain defined place. Defines a citizen as a person who participates in the judiciary and government. From this it can be concluded that, according to him, anyone who has the opportunity to participate in an advisory or judicial office is a citizen. Like Plato, Aristotle uses the Policy of Equality in his work to define the role of the citizens, who he says are responsible for the whole, and each individual should strive to perform his or her function to ensure the benefit of the whole state. (Aristotle, 1988)

According to Aristotle, every citizen is responsible for contributing to the benefit of the community. The virtue of citizens is a prerequisite for a good state. Man's virtue and civic virtue are not the same, because Aristotle states that not every person is a perfectly good person. The similarity with Plato is that Aristotle also understands a good ruler as one who has a good virtue, while the virtues of a ruler and a citizen are not conceived in the same way.

Aristotle's concept sees the perfect ruler as being wise and good, and the citizen may lack rationality, which is again similar to Plato's, because he too saw the necessity for the ideal ruler to be wise. According to him, the ruler is a personality who has the ability not only to rule, but also to listen and to be righteous. The essence of the concept of politics at Aristotle is in comparison with Plato the individual and his good, because according to him, citizens should live satisfied. (Šramo, 2012)

4 Democracy according to Aristotle

Like Plato, Aristotle considers democracy harmful. But he considers the constitution the best of all evil institutions. According to him, this is a type of establishment of the government of many people, while citizens who do not possess considerable wealth but have freedom, make up the majority and rule in society.

Freedom is a prerequisite for a state's democracy, including the need to change the cycles of government and subordination. According to Aristotle, all the offices are chosen from all citizens and the People's Assembly decides on all matters in the state. The concept of democracy naturally associates it with attributes such as infertility, poverty and under-education due to the abundance of the majority of the population. (Aristoteles, 1988)

Opposite Plato, who did not pay much attention to democracy, Aristotle knows several types of democracy. The first establishment of democracy is the kind in which every citizen, regardless of his or her property, is equal and is guaranteed equal participation in the running of the state. Decisions are mostly taken.

The second type is democracy, where the citizen has the opportunity to participate in the government according to the estimation of property, while the threshold of property is low, so almost everyone has the opportunity to participate in the running of the state.

The third type is democracy, where the share of state power is governed by origin. Anyone who is considered a citizen has the right to participate in government, and the law decides.

The last form of democracy, according to Aristotle, is similar to the previous one, with the exception that citizens not only participate in the running of the state, but also make their own decisions. (Aristoteles, 1988)

5 Comparison of Plato's and Aristotle's approach to democracy and the state

Although there are many similarities between the understanding of the state and its function by both philosophers, there are many fundamental differences between them. Above all, it is also the direction in which their works take it. While Plato seeks to embrace the essence of an ideal state, Aristotle focuses rather on questions about the functioning and organization of the state by defining interrelated concepts and examining the essence of individual constitutions and establishments.

According to Plato's definition of ideal establishment, the essence of such an establishment is precisely the division of the population into classes, defining the ruler as a wise philosopher who decides on other citizens. Another important group are guardians, who must not own property and must have appropriate education and training.

Aristotle, criticizing the model of his teacher's state, also sees that Plato defines an ideal state as an establishment that resembles one large family without clearly defined family ties, disrupting the classic family and consequently increasing crime. According to Aristotle, people tend to commit crimes in a society where it is not clear who their relatives are. (Karamanolis, 2006)

6 Conclusion

The paper was devoted to presenting a brief summary of the ideas of the ideal state as seen by Plato and Aristotle and comparing their visions. Although both thinkers were convinced that it was natural for people to gather, there was a slight difference between their perception of the initial impulse for community formation. While Plato considered the main reason for people to gather together and form communities to benefit, Aristotle considered that there was another aspect, namely the natural inclination of human beings to seek out the company of other people.

Thus, it can be argued that both saw the root cause of the emergence of communities on a similar level. Well, their other ideas about the state were different. Plato's ideal state can be viewed as a model of a theoretical ideal state that is unrealistic under normal circumstances, given that there is no violation of law, citizens are perfect people, and the individual is unconditionally subject to the wishes of a strong, rational and wise ruler he acts for the benefit of the community and subordinates his whole life to this mission.

In fact, a ruler may actually have many shortcomings, and citizens are also not perfect beings who unconditionally submit to something. Plato denies the individual who has the most appropriate traits for this mission the freedom to refuse to exercise the role of ruler.

According to Plato, the essence of a balanced and well-functioning society was that every class he divided into was destined to do what he had the qualities and talents of, and that would lead to a happy and good life for the company. Plato considered it important to consider a good life for society, not for the individual, as Aristotle saw. Whether he or she has a good life if he / she performs his / her role in ensuring the benefit to society he / she did not care.

Plato also outlined in his ideal state that the guards and rulers should not possess the property he saw as common property, just as the women and children who were also common.

Plato stated that marriages were to be contracted for the benefit of society, and all these measures should subsequently lead to the elimination of disputes, which were mostly caused by problems, whether in the family or in disputes over property.

Aristotle, on the other hand, was of the opinion that it was important for the state to ensure a happy and good life for the individual, and it is the community that is such an establishment that should contribute to the individual's development of his abilities in accordance with his potential. This in turn will ensure prosperity for society as a whole. While Plato argued that the individual has a duty to do whatever is commanded unconditionally, Aristotle believed that a certain degree of independence and freedom was needed for the individual.

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LEGISLATIVE AND INSTITUTIONAL CHANGES IN THE FIGHT AGAINST EXTREMISM SINCE 2016

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Abstract

After the new government of Róbert Fico in 2016 was designed, fight against extremism became its political priority. This paper deals with legislative and institutional changes in the fight against extremism since the Programme Statement of Fico's government was approved by parliament and thus the new government gained the confidence of its members.

First part of the paper deals with the concept of militant democracy, what is the theoretical basis of the fight against extremism in the Slovak republic. Then it examines the political attitudes of previous governments to fight against extremism since the first adoption of Conception to Combat Extremism in 2007. The last part focus on institutional and legislative changes in the anti-extremist agenda since 2016. We found out that important changes have been done in the Criminal Code and even more in Code of Procedure, what led to reinforcement of personal capacity, education and material equipment of its crucial actors. From this point of view, year 2020 will be crucial, either because of adoption of the new government's programme statement for 2020-2024, as well as the Conception of Combat to Extremism, which will replace the outdated Conception for years 2015-2019.

Keywords: Militant democracy. Extremism. Fight against extremism. Criminal Code. National Criminal Agency.

1 Introduction

We have been witnessing the strategy of combating extremism for a long time. The official strategy of anti-extremism specified in conceptions to combat extremism has been prepared since 2007 and is expected to continue in 2020 by its 4th sequel. However, officials of the Ministry of Interior, responsible for coordinating the governmental fight against extremism, assert in *Report on the fulfillment of tasks from Conception to combat extremism for years 2007 – 2010* [1] that collaborating public authorities should be more proactive and involved in fulfillment of Conception's tasks.

Moreover, experts on extremism and human rights agenda sent critical comments to police, prosecutors and courts when pointed out misconducts or lack of professional competence in criminal proceedings led by law-enforcement authorities. Although politicians have argued with statistics showing low number of extremist crimes, critics say it is just the result of their deficient detection and sanctions.

Since 2016 the fight against extremism has become the priority of government and political parties, although it was not caused by any violent attack of neo-Nazis against ethnic minorities such as the murder of Anastázia Balážová in 2000, which led to intense fighting against extremist groups. This time both political elites and public were shocked by success of Marian Kotleba, politician with extremist past, who was elected President of Banská Bystrica self-governing region in 2013. A few years later, his party Kotleba – People's party Our Slovakia gained 8.04% of votes in the 2016 parliamentary elections (i.e. 14 seats in National Council of the Slovak republic).

The aim of this paper is to map the legislative and institutional changes in the fight against extremism since 2016, when the government joined the intensified fight against extremism, with the aim to "*stop the rise of extremism and the radicalization of parliamentary politics*" [2].

In particular, official government documents will be examined, i.e. programme statements, conceptions to combat extremism, and evaluation reports on the fulfillment of the conceptions' tasks; then data of law enforcement authorities, press releases of ministries and published interviews with leading experts on extremism, radicalization and its prevention.

2 The concept of militant democracy as the basis of the fight against extremism

State policies against anti-democratic forces are a frequent topic of political and academic discourse, particularly in the context of restricting their freedom of expression or assembly. However, governments usually defend the tightening sanctions for attacks on democracy with the right or even the duty to protect democracy from those who want to jeopardize it. This belief is a fundamental principle of the militant democracy's theory and practice.¹

The concept of militant democracy was first developed by German philosopher Karl Löwenstein in the context of experience with the Nazi regime. He was convinced that the aim of fascism was to destroy democracy or its

¹ In academic literature militant democracy is also called defensive, defending, intolerant, etc.

fundamentals (e.g. free political competition, pluralism or the guarantee of fundamental human rights), which forces democratic governments to take political and constitutional measures. Even if democratic means to eliminate fascism are insufficient, it is necessary to use non-democratic ones [3]. Even before the start of World War II he developed the concept of militant democracy and proposed 14 principles or measures that would concentrate power in the hands of the government, take emergency measures and adopt ad hoc legislation to limit the rights of expression, participation and assembly. According to Löwenstein, this is the way to prevent fascist movements from abusing democratic freedoms and undermining democracy [4].

After World War II, according to Capoccia, militant restrictions on rights and freedoms in modern democracies are an important element of the legal systems and domestic politics.

In this context, Slovak author Peter Wilfling affirms that the concept of militant democracy in the legal systems is also expressed in Article 17² of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms³, adopted by the Council of Europe in 1950, whose general purpose is to prevent adherents of totalitarian ideologies to abuse the principles enshrined in the "Convention" [5]. Specifically in case of freedom of expression (including the right to receive and disseminate information), Article 10 (2) states that "*in the interests of national security, territorial integrity or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, for the protection of the reputation or rights of others, for preventing the disclosure of information received in confidence, or for maintaining the authority and impartiality of the judiciary*", the exercise of freedom of expression may be lawfully subjected to formalities, conditions, restrictions or penalties.

The exact form, extent and means of militant democracy or state's defense strategy is the subject of academic and lay discussions. Critics rightly point out that if a democratic state opposes ideological enemies too vigorously and offensively, the government will begin to show authoritarian tendencies. Max Steuer, in *Extremes of Freedom of Expression and the Role of Legal Regulation* [6], emphasizes that legal regulation defending democracy may not actually achieve the goal of protecting democracy. He points to the alternative of militant democracy in the form of "law as the facilitator of freedom", which is based on conviction to provide space for the realization of individual's rights and freedoms. In other words, state intervention is legitimate only when individual's freedom or human rights are threatened by other individuals exploiting the same freedoms. On the contrary, it is not legitimate to limit those who could represent anti-democratic forces and threaten democracy as a system. According to critics of militant democracy, we cannot legitimately and efficiently defend democracy as there is no consensus in defining the boundary between tolerated acts or expressions within a democratic space and those that can already be considered as a threat to democracy.⁴

From the perspective of the Slovak legal system, Max Steuer claims that "*after the amendment to the Criminal Code effective from January 2017, legislation in the Slovak Republic has unconditionally shifted to a militant democracy*". From political point of view, the fact is that the militarist-democratic principle has been adopted by anti-extremist policymakers even sooner, what is probably related to the inspiration of Slovak experts in Germany, where militant democracy ("streitbare" or "wehrhafte Demokratie") constitute the basic understanding of democracy for more than 70 years [7]. Authors of *Slovak Conception to Combat Extremism for years 2015-2019* identify militant democracy as a basis for the fight against extremism, arguing with their historical experience with the Nazi and Communist regimes. In their words, enemies of democracy use democratic tools and opportunities for their activities, therefore "*defending democracy and its basic attributes should be as strong and effective as its enemies' will to destroy it*" [8].

3 The Development of Slovak Extremist Scene and Reaction of Governments in Strategic Documents

Until 2009 the fight against extremism was perceived mainly in connection with the activities of some more or less organized extreme right-wing groups, organizing memorial gatherings or participating in sports (mainly football) and cultural (music) events. In the *Report on the Fulfillment of Tasks from the Conception to Combat Extremism for years 2007-2010*, it is noted that one of the hallmarks of extremist crime is "*a group behavior of mostly juveniles or persons close to juvenile age*". The 2006 Programme Statement of Róbert Fico's government proclaimed that the fight against extremism was a priority of the government. It committed to tighten the procedure and not to tolerate "*illegal activities of members and supporters of extremist groups and movements ...*" [9].

Although the authors of the *Conception to Combat Extremism for years 2011-2014* still registered the popularity of unregistered groups, such as National Resistance or Autonomous Nationalists, in 2010 they also warned that

² Article 17 - Prohibition of abuse of rights: „*Nothing in this Convention may be interpreted as implying for any State, group or person any right to engage in any activity or perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms set forth herein or at their limitation to a greater extent than is provided for in the Convention.*“

³ The Convention is signed by 47 member countries of the Council of Europe.

⁴ In Slovak, German or Czech practice, the dissolution of a political party is a dividing issue in this matter. Advocates of militant democracy support this legal regulation, supporters of "law as the facilitator of freedom" do not.

since 2009 extremists had been moving "from confined spaces to streets where organizers have gained the support and sympathy of the population" [10]. *The Report on the Fulfillment of Tasks from Conception to combat extremism for years 2011 –2014 for 2012* [11] even says that "the extremist scene in Slovakia has undergone a visible change from relative anonymity (from the unregistered movement) through civic associations to the political scene". At the same time there is attenuation of weakly organized unregistered groups such as National Resistance or Autonomous Nationalists [12].

However, Slovak public noticed a significant strategic change in the extremist scene only after the election of Marian Kotleba as the President of the Banská Bystrica self-governing region. Even more surprising was the party's success in the 2016 parliamentary elections, with 8.04% of votes and 14 seats in the National Council of the Slovak Republic. The fight against extremism has thus become an important political and public issue and also frequently used political tool for politicians. Although the government of Iveta Radičová in 2010 and also the second government of Róbert Fico in 2012 committed in the government programme statements to promote zero tolerance of extremism and uncompromising struggle against any manifestations of extremism, racism, intolerance, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and aggressive nationalism, abovementioned statements were more or less general declarations about the need of continuity in the fight against extremism. Electoral success of Kotleba's party in 2016 forced the politicians to do more. While in 2012 the government programme statement mentioned the word extremism once, in 2016 it was already 12 times, and the fight against fascism and right-wing extremism has become a cross-cutting theme in several areas, whether education, culture or internal security. The 2016 government programme statement of coalition parties SMER-SD, Most-Híd and Slovak National Party set itself as one of the main objectives "halting the rise of extremism and radicalization of parliamentary politics".⁵

4 Legislative and Institutional Changes in the Anti-Extremist Agenda

The implementation of legislative and institutional changes in the anti-extremist agenda is a practical fulfillment of the government measures set out in the conceptions to combat extremism, "the strategic document on preventing and eliminating radicalization and extremism and the associated anti-social activities endangering fundamental rights and freedoms and democratic rule of law" [13]. On March 18, 2015, the Government adopted the *Conception to Combat Extremism for years 2015-2019*⁶. With some delay the fulfillment of tasks from this Conception will be evaluated and reported in 2020 and simultaneously the new Conception for the next period should be approved.

In the Conception for years 2015-2019, four strategic objectives have been defined with aim to "to prevent radicalization leading to extremism through early intervention and systematic education of individual target groups". Within these strategic goals, 35 tasks have been identified. In this paper we focus on those aimed at implementing of legislative and institutional changes in the area of preventing and eliminating radicalization and extremism. One of them was the task no. 3.6 "Prepare legislative material to amend the Criminal Code and the Code of Criminal Procedure and submit it to the legislative process." On the basis of cooperation between the Ministry of Justice and the Committee on the Prevention and Elimination of Racism, Xenophobia, Anti-Semitism and Other Forms of Intolerance was adopted the *Act No. 316/2016 Coll. on recognition and enforcement of property decisions in criminal proceedings in European Union and on amendments to certain acts* (effective from 1 January 2017), which also amended the Criminal Code and the Code of Criminal Procedure in the provisions related to crimes of extremism.

Besides the introduction of the new offense of apartheid and group discrimination and the extension of the crime of supporting and promoting a movement to suppress fundamental rights and freedoms by establishing such a movement, experience in legal practice has led to a significant change in the definition of extremist material. As the Ministry of Justice states, "for a material to be defined as extremist, it will no longer be necessary for law enforcement authorities to prove its link to incitement to hatred, violence and other unwanted phenomena" [14]. For instance, if an individual disseminates material with extremist content, the law enforcement authorities may classify it as extremist material, whether he/she intended to incite hate or violence or not. Indeed, there have been cases where defendants advocated the possession or dissemination of material containing extremist content by expanding the collection of historical objects or using it for educational and research activities. When they denied allegations of incitement to hatred or violence, it was difficult for law enforcement authorities to prove the opposite. According to the new wording, burden of proof is on the defendant. The need to classify a crime as racially motivated, even if the individual or persons are supposed to belong to a race, nation, nationality, ethnic group, has also arisen from practice. In other words, if someone is

⁵ The fight against extremism become also an important tool in political struggle, since Most- Híd party used it as a political advocacy of cooperation with SMER-SD. Leader of Most – Híd, Béla Bugár, said that if the Most-Híd party did not form a government with SMER-SD, snap election would be held in which extremist forces could gain even higher support of voters.

⁶ The Conception to Combat Extremism for years 2015-2019 continually followed the conception to combat extremism for years 2006-2010 and 2011-2014.

committing an offense against someone in the belief that he is a Jew, it will be considered racially motivated according to the latest amendment, even if the victim is not of Jewish nationality.

Another important legislative change is the adoption of *Act No. 91/2016 Coll. on criminal liability of legal persons*, in the sense of which legal persons (including political parties and movements) will also be liable for crimes of extremism. At last, in accordance with task No. 3.7. *Strengthening the position of victims of extremist crime* of the *Conception to Combat Extremism for years 2015 - 2019* the *Act No. 274/2017 Coll. on victims of crime and on the amendment to certain acts* was adopted. This Act defines the “*victim of a crime committed by violence or threat of violence due to gender, sexual orientation, nationality, racial or ethnicity, religion or faith*” as an “*especially vulnerable person*”. If the victim is granted the status of an especially vulnerable person, the law grants him / her increased attention, consideration, or professional assistance in both criminal and judicial proceedings.

Institutional or organizational changes to prevent and eliminate radicalization and extremism have resonated in public to a greater extent than the amendment of the Criminal Code or the adoption of other laws with the impact on the fight against extremism. Implementation of these changes followed the criticism that law enforcement authorities were not sufficiently investigating and prosecuting crimes of extremism. Critics pointed out the individual failures of law enforcement officers, prosecutors and judges, but also the system shortcoming that does not help actors in their fight against extremism, does not create sufficient personal capacity and does not educate and motivate the existing ones.

However, a fundamental change was brought by the 2016 amendment to the Code of Criminal Procedure (so-called *Žitňanská Amendment to Extremism*), when the jurisdiction to hear and decide on crimes of extremism was shifted from 54 district courts to the Specialized Criminal Court. It also modified the competence of the Special Prosecutor's Office what led to establishment of new department for crimes of extremism with 5 specialized prosecutors. At the same time, the Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic extended the system of expert fields by the Social Science and Humanities section, divided into the branches of Political and Religious extremism. Currently, two experts are registered, whose task is “*to cooperate mainly with law enforcement authorities, courts and public authorities in the investigation of extremist offenses*” [15].

In addition to judiciary, changes were also made at the level of security forces. On February 1st 2017, *National Unit for Fighting Terrorism and Extremism* was formed by association of two abolished divisions dealing with the fight against terrorism and the fight against spectator violence. The new unit is subordinated to the *National Criminal Agency of the Presidium of the Police Force*, which associates the highest quality police staff in the country.

The formation of the unit was a politically significant step, presented to the public by the then Prime Minister R. Fico with Minister of Interior, Róbert Kaliňák, and President of the Police Force of the Slovak Republic Tibor Gašpar. At the same time, the press conference was attended by a few dozen members of the newly formed unit in disguise. According to the Ministry of Interior, 100 police officers were to be involved in the fight against extremism and terrorism, unit director Martin Smiško talked about dozens of specialists who are directly involved in extremism agenda and hundreds of National Criminal Agency's cops who are available if necessary [16]. At each of 8 Regional directorates⁷ of the Police Force there are units for fighting extremism and spectator violence who support nationwide activities of *National Unit for Fighting Terrorism and Extremism*. Moreover, in 2017 was established extremist screening center dedicated to the issue of extremism, particularly in cyberspace, what is an actual challenge for law enforcement authorities in their fight against extremism.⁸

Views on the formation of the unit were not uniform. Former director of the Department of Combating Extremism and Terrorism at the Police Presidium, Martin Kubík, argued that the office is hierarchical low-ranking, what may cause delays in the exchange of information and making of legislation [17]. On the contrary, Daniel Milo, an expert on extremism and a former employee at the Ministry of Interior, welcomed the change, mainly highlighting the expertise of the police officers working in the unit. He pointed out that the takeover of extremist crimes by the National Criminal Agency, the Special Prosecutor's Office and the Specialized Criminal Court seems to be a good step. Statistics show that creating of a dedicated team of investigators and operatives

⁷ However, according to Daniel Milo, the police officers of the Regional directorates dealing with extremism and spectator violence no longer form a separate unit since 2014, but are instructed to address this crime in addition to other activities, what reduces their capacity to perform the anti-extremist agenda. Representatives of the Department of Extremism and Spectator Violence at Presidium of the Police Force reported in 2016 that at each Regional Directorate, two police officers from the investigation department and at least four police officers from the operations department were able to combat extremism. They could perform also other tasks in the area of general crime but must not significantly reduce their performance in the field of extremism crimes.

⁸ All these changes are in line with the strategic objective of the *Conception to Combat Extremism for years 2015-2019*, “*to create institutional and staffing capacities for state bodies performing tasks in matters of protection of the constitutional order, internal order and security of the state.*”

within National Criminal Agency has led to the increase of detected extremist crimes. In 2015 only 30 crimes were detected and in 2016 just 58 crimes, but after special unit took over the anti-extremism agenda in 2017, 145 crimes were detected in 2017 and even 159 crimes in 2018. As Daniel Milo rightly points out, the low numbers of detected extremist crimes in past more likely refers to inability or lack of interest of law enforcement authorities to detect such cases [18]. On the contrary, the specialization helped to detect illegal activities of individuals or groups more scrupulously, especially in cyberspace, what is actually the new ground for extremist activities.

5 Conclusion

In this paper, we mapped out the most important legislative and institutional changes in the fight against extremism since 2016, when the new government declared in its Programme Statement a commitment to intensify the fight against extremism.

Among the most important legislative changes belongs the amendment to both the Criminal Code and the Code of Criminal Procedure, which tightened the criminal penalties of extremist crimes and changed the criminal proceedings by shifting the jurisdiction on crimes of extremism from 54 district courts to the Specialized Criminal Court. The competence of the Special Prosecutor's Office was modified, too. A fundamental change was made at the level of the Police Force of the Slovak Republic, when the issue of extremism was taken over by the National Criminal Agency (NAKA), namely by the National Unit for Combating Terrorism and Extremism.

Although the quality of adopted laws and their consistent and effective enforcement is just one of the necessary measures to combat extremism, the legislative and institutional environment creates the necessary framework for the action of other actors (law enforcement agencies, non-governmental organizations, citizens, etc.), while giving the public a signal of the authorities' commitment. From this point of view, year 2020 will be crucial, either because of adoption of the new government's programme statement for 2020-2024, as well as the Conception to Combat Extremism, which will replace the outdated Conception to Combat Extremism for years 2015-2019.

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THE CONTRIBUTION OF STRUCTURAL FUNDS FOR THE BUILDING AND DEVELOPMENT OF RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURE IN THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

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Abstract

The Slovak Republic has the opportunity to implement the EU Structural Funds since 2004, when it joined the EU. The area of research and development support in Slovakia has long been underestimated. The EU Structural Funds make up the most significant part of R&D expenditure in Slovakia. The main objective of this article is to analyse the impact of the implementation of EU Structural Funds on the construction, support and development of research infrastructure within all three programming periods in the Slovak Republic. To achieve the objective, the methods of analysis, synthesis, deduction and induction have been used. In the shortened programming period 2004-2006, this area was only partially supported by the EU Structural Funds and R&D did not form a full priority for this type of funding. In Slovakia, in 2007 - 2013, the R&D Operational Program was the dominant source of funding for research, development and innovation from the EU Structural Funds, in particular by supporting the development of research infrastructure. The research and development potential in Slovakia can be fully developed in the current programming period 2014-2020 by the OP R&I.

Keywords: EU Structural Funds, Research Infrastructure, Operational Program, Programming Period, Research, Development and Innovation, Implementation of Projects

JEL Classification: O32, R11.

1. Introduction

The support of research and development (R&D) is a key driver of any knowledge-based, dynamically developing society. R&D in general is the pillar of the knowledge economy and ensures its competitiveness. At the same time, it guarantees new solutions to many problems and a source of high quality knowledge. The performance of the economy is significantly - albeit indirectly - influenced by science and research. Empirical analyzes show that investing in education, science, research, development, innovation and new technologies are investments in economic growth and are key to the country's long-term competitiveness in a globalized world (Gonda, 2007). Efficient domestic R&D, the innovative capacity of the economy and the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) are a prerequisite for a higher level of assessment of well-being, economic growth and employment (Morvay et al., 2017).

Likewise, support of innovation plays a key role in ensuring sustainable economic development. There are many definitions for the innovation, but in general it is a solution to the problem in a new, innovative way (for example idea, method or device). The importance of innovation is growing in the context of a globalizing economy, the gradual emergence of larger national and multinational trading companies, with increasing competition on domestic and global markets, with growing demands for managerial activity (Čajka, 2006). Innovation can also be seen as an event occurring at a certain point or place that causes a market or organizational breakthrough (Buček, 2006).

Innovations have written the history of mankind since the great industrial revolution, when the steam engine has enabled population mobility. Since then, innovation has become a driving force for economic development and a decisive factor in the competitive struggle of companies. Innovation activities such as research and development can be seen as a driving force for the development of the economy, as they develop the potential for future competitiveness in the form of new knowledge, increase the efficiency of the economy and its ability to operate, especially through small and medium-sized enterprises (Ministry of Economy, 2007).

In today's world of technology and rapid progress, the ability to innovate distinguishes leaders from followers and those who survive from those who disappear. As a result, in the 21st century we are experiencing innovation in all areas and sectors. Successful innovators are not only those who have ideas, but especially those who can turn these ideas into marketable forms. The investments in the area of R&D are not a case of luxury; in fact it's quite the opposite as it's the only way how to ensure the long term sustainability, prosperity and economic development.

The basic problems of Slovak R&D are low expenditure and the fragmentation of the R&D system. The level of public and private R&D expenditure is among the lowest in the European Union (EU) in the long term. In Slovakia, the share of high quality research publications is relatively low, as well as the low patenting activity. The cooperation between the universities and research centers with business in the field of research is also not as high as it could be due to relatively weak support of private R&D in the Slovak legislation. In 2015, there were some improvements made by the government in this area as the hybrid tax allowance was introduced, that was set at a rate of 50 % to labour costs and at a rate of 25 % to other qualifying expenditures. Another significant problem is that the private investments in R&D are on the very low level. The R&D investments relies highly on foreign sources of funding, most notably the EU funding. The level of R&D infrastructure is insufficient in qualitative and quantitative terms in the long term. At the same time, R&D cannot be realized without the existence of high-quality human resources and without high-quality technical equipment. Research, development and technological innovation are indispensable and the greatest source of high quality knowledge. They are the pillar of every knowledge economy. R&D is a basic prerequisite for maintaining the steady development of the economy and competitiveness of the Slovak Republic (SR) in the long term. The basic precondition for a competitive implementation of research, development and innovation (R&D&I) is to ensure sufficient financial resources.

Research infrastructures are considered a fundamental element of scientific advancement and technological development. Their existence is able to provide the necessary favorable environment for the production of breakthrough discoveries. They include a wide range of sophisticated and modern facilities, devices, resources or related services, used by research disciplines of varying focus on conducting research on outstanding scientific value and recognition. They encourage the development of science culture by opening up opportunities to educate, retain and attract highly qualified experts and build strong teams of national and global importance. Beyond the scientific dimension, research infrastructures are crucial to the sustainable development of an innovative industry, supporting its higher performance, which can translate into positive economic and societal trends.

Developing a high-quality national R&D support system in which high-end research infrastructures are centers of excellent research requires strategic decisions at national level to coordinate investment priorities and initiatives. Investigating the strengths of the research base will enable the R&D policy ambitions to be directed and to focus investment in selected areas of national interest. In the long term, continuous investment in building, improving or maintaining research infrastructures means a return in the form of added value effects for future growth.

Before 2007, in fact there was no system of R&D support in Slovakia comparable to other EU countries. As a result of long-term low R&D funding and the society's overall attitude to research, technical infrastructure has become significantly obsolete. The SR had the opportunity to draw funds from EU Structural Funds since its accession to the EU in 2004. The low level of R&D funding before 2007 was caused by several factors. The primary problem was due to the fact that the state budget (given the preference of other priorities) did not have sufficient financial resources to cover R&D infrastructure needs and in terms of funding from the EU Structural Funds, in the shortened programming period 2004-2006 this area was only partially supported and R&D support wasn't formed in the coherent framework for funding.

The Slovak research and development ecosystem has undergone extensive material and ideological transformation over the last decade, inspired by international trends in the position and use of research infrastructures as a driving force for innovative and socio-economic progress. In 2007-2013, the SR's priority in this area was to mitigate technological, research and organizational barriers to fully exploit the potential of our top research institutions. The creation of an environment conducive to the realization of excellent research, in which modern and technically most advanced research infrastructures would form the basis for the performance of scientific institutions of the SR, was the main objective in the 2007-2013 programming period.

This concept of mitigating the vast technological gap between equipment of our research institutions compared to the international standard and the process of rebuilding and developing research infrastructures would not be feasible without large-scale investments, mainly due to EU funds and our EU membership. Similarly, in the 2014-2020 programming period, the R&D support area is a coherent framework of funding, through which EU funding provide significant resources for sustainability and development of the built infrastructure system. The challenge in this programming period remains the effectiveness of spending these resources, as the course of its implementation raises a number of questions over the relevance of their use.

The main objective of this article is to analyze the impact of the implementation of EU Structural Funds on the construction, support and development of research infrastructure within all three programming periods in the SR. We have set the main hypothesis that the 2007-2013 programming period provided a key contribution to the

building, support and development of research infrastructure in the SR, as the first programming period 2004-2006 was shortened and the R&D support area did not have a comprehensive support framework.

In the 2007-2013 programming period, the situation was completely different, as 1,209 billion EUR was allocated for the area of R&D support from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) for the Operational Program R&D (OP R&D). At the same time, we assume that although the implementation of the 2014-2020 programming period has been under way for the sixth year now, the level of drawdown achieved so far has not been able to fully ensure relevant (and desirable) progress in the building and development of scientific infrastructure in Slovakia. To confirm the main hypothesis, we will also analyze the development of drawdown of the OP R&D in individual years of implementation in relation to the indicator of R&D expenditure as the % of GDP in the SR in the 2007 – 2017. To achieve the objective, the methods of analysis, synthesis, deduction and induction have been used.

2. R&D support in Slovakia

The area of R&D support in the SR in terms of the volume of funds is undersized in the long term. In 2011, total R&D expenditure was only 0.63% of GDP, with a EU15 average of 2.12% and an average of V4 countries of 1.27% (Eurostat, 2017). This is mainly due to the long-term low level of private R&D investment. Since 2005, the industry's share in financial R&D stimulation has declined from 54% to 35% and in 2010 it was only 0.27% of GDP.

By 2020, in line with the Europe 2020 strategy, SR wants to increase the share of R&D expenditure to at least 1.2% of GDP, so that the share of public and private resources is 1: 2. To achieve this, it will be necessary to increase private investment in R&D by strengthening research centers' cooperation with businesses, as well as consolidating and expanding the R&D infrastructure. However, according to current developments in R&D spending, these plans appear to be too ambitious, especially the increase in private sector share of R&D investments, which are very low in EU Member States in the long term and would require unprecedented growth in line with the goals set in the strategy, what is not a very realistic scenario (Gross & Roth, 2012).

One of the key documents in Slovakia that defines the R&D support system is The Smart Specialization Strategy, which was adopted in 2013 on national level. Since 2013, very limited progress has been made toward approving and implementing the Action plan for this strategy, as the main problem was to reach agreement on the areas of specializations and on the system of governance of R&D; both were approved by the government in 2016 and 2017.

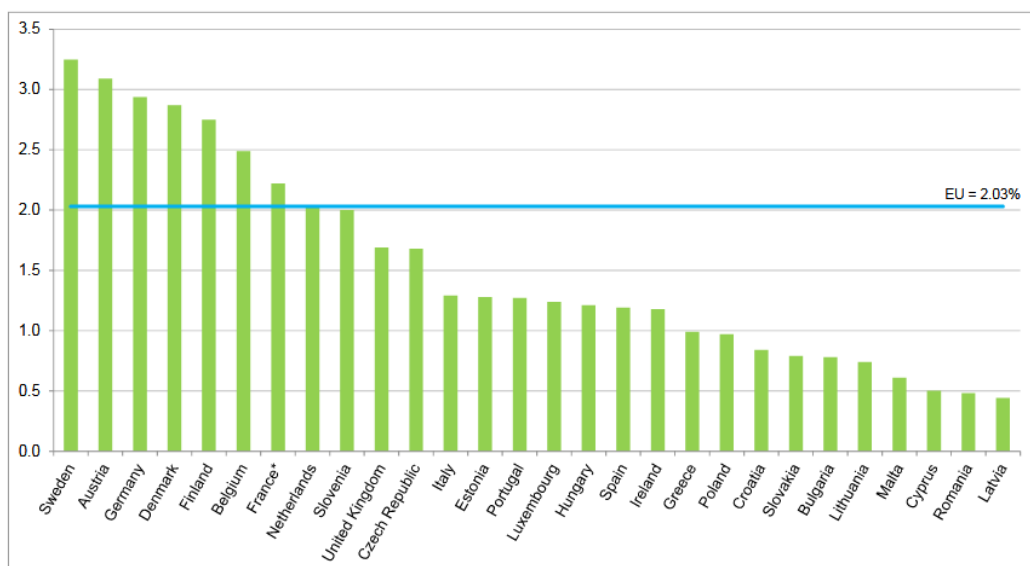
Table 1: R&D expenditure in 2006 compared to 2016

	R&D intensity (in % of GDP)		R&D expenditure (in mil. EUR)	
	2006	2016	2006	2016
EU average	1,76	2,03	216 330	302 220
V4 average	0,81	1,16	1 039	2 261
Czech republic	1,23	1,68	1 527	2 963
Hungary	0,98	1,21	900	1 327
Poland	0,55	0,97	1 513	4 112
Slovakia	0,48	0,79	217	641

Source: own preparation based on Eurostat (2017)

The R&D expenditure in Slovakia is among the lowest in the EU in long term. According to Eurostat, Slovakia allocated 0.79% of GDP to R&D in 2016. Thus, among the V4 countries, the Slovak level of these expenditures is the lowest. By comparison, the Czech Republic allocated 1.68% of GDP for R&D, in Hungary it was 1.21% of GDP and in Poland it was 0.97% of GDP. The European R&D expenditure target was set to 3% of GDP in line with the adopted Europe 2020 strategy.

Fig. 1: R&D intensity in EU member states in 2016 (in % of GDP)



Source: Eurostat (2017)

In 2016, according to Eurostat, the highest intensities of R&D expenditure were achieved in Sweden (3.25%) and Austria (3.09%). They are closely followed by Germany (2.94%), Denmark (2.87%) and Finland (2.75%). One of the reasons for this situation is that R&D funding from public sources prevails in Slovakia, with most of them coming from the EU budget. Sustainability of public funding will be problematic when EU funding for research infrastructure is reduced (Vokoun, 2016).

The priority of the Europe 2020 strategy is to achieve growth that is: smart - through more efficient investment in education, research and innovation; sustainable - through a low carbon economy; and inclusive - with a strong focus on job creation and poverty combating. The strategy sets five ambitious targets for employment, innovation, education, poverty combating and energy (European Commission, 2018).

In its Smart Growth Priority, Europe 2020 strategy aims to create a knowledge-based economy and innovation. It does so by creating favorable conditions for innovation, education and research so encouraging R&D and knowledge-intensive investment and moves towards higher value added activities. It can so help meet the major challenge for Member States and regions of increasing innovation capacity and R&D in businesses and strengthening their links with universities and research centers (European Commission, 2018).

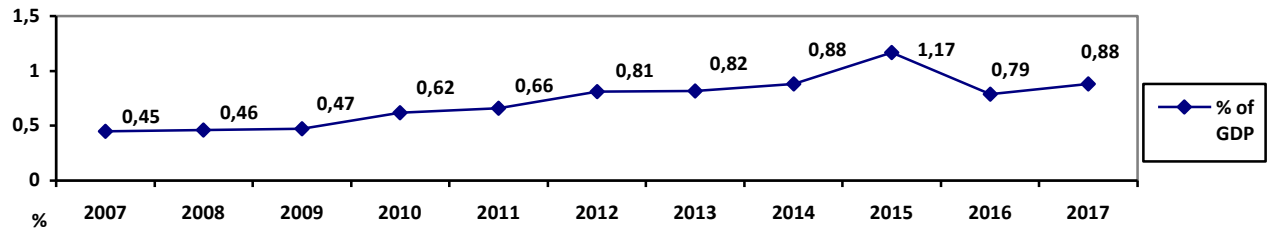
Although the European Commission has set some brave targets regarding the amount and structure of R&D expenditures (for example objective set in the Lisbon Strategy to invest 3% of GDP to R&D spending, 2/3 of which should be realized by private funding), in reality most of the Member States are struggling to achieve these objectives.

There are two specific groups of Member States, which are struggling to keep pace with the wealthier countries of Western and Northern Europe in long term regarding the amount of R&D spending and the structure of the expenditures. The first group includes the Mediterranean countries Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain and the second group includes the New Member States that have become full member of the EU in 2004 and 2007.

Based on the experience in the EU, we can say that there is a generally acknowledged fact that R&D expenditure rises exponentially with the level of development measured by GDP per capita. The wealthier a country or a region is, the more sources are spent on R&D.

The main challenges of the smart growth objective of the R&D strategy in Slovakia are the overall increase in research spending and the change in R&D funding structure. R&D intensity in Slovakia increased significantly from 2007 to 2015, from 0.45% to 1.17% of GDP (Eurostat, 2017). However, this result was still well below the target level, mainly due to the exceptionally low R&D expenditure of private enterprises (0.33% in 2014; Eurostat).

Fig. 2: Research and development expenditure in Slovakia (in % of GDP)



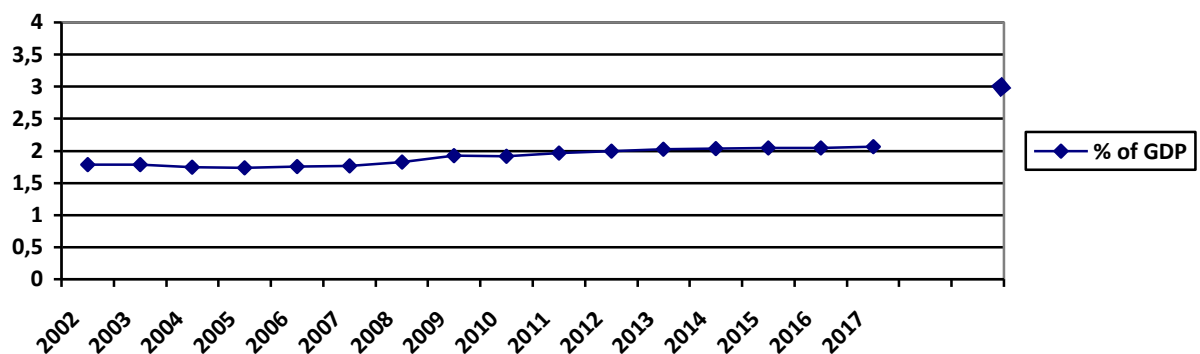
Source: own preparation based on Eurostat (2017)

R&D in the context of the Europe 2020 strategy is based on assumptions about the key role of knowledge in ensuring smart growth. According to the EC projections, in 2010-2060, technological and non-technological innovation should account for up to two thirds of overall economic growth. Research and innovation-driven economic growth is a prerequisite for the long-term sustainability of the public service system in healthcare, pensions and social services (European Commission, 2012).

As innovation performance is conditional on the country's economic maturity, further development of R&D and innovation also depends on the future economic growth and development of economic structures in Slovakia (Šikula, 2010). Insufficient expenditure on R&D in long term is also related to the so-called brain drain from Slovakia abroad.

In the context of the Europe 2020 strategy, support for basic and applied research and development creates a strong precondition for building a knowledge-based economy, contributing to employment growth and thus to the overall economic growth of the whole euro area.

Fig. 3: Percentage of R&D expenditures as % of GDP for the EU in 2002-2017 and Europe 2020 strategy target



Source: own preparation based on Eurostat (2018)

The Europe 2020 strategy aims to increase spending on R&D activities up to 3% of GDP across the EU, which, together with education, contributes to the "smart growth" of EU Member States (European Commission, 2018).

Despite the fact that the Europe 2020 strategy target of increasing spending on R&D activities up to 3% of GDP by 2020 is still very questionable, it is positive that this level has not decreased even during the economic crisis. On the contrary, it continues to increase, albeit at a minimum level (in 2016 and 2017, the EU average was 2.03%).

R&D&I infrastructure is a prerequisite for increasing the technological and innovation level of the economy while effectively transferring technology. Long-term under-financing of R&D infrastructure financing from the state budget in Slovakia has created a technological debt to R&D institutions. Therefore, after the accession of the SR to the EU in 2004, the renewal process of the scientific and research infrastructure was a substantial part of the implementation of the Structural Funds in Slovakia, thereby partially reducing this deficit.

Although the implementation of the Structural Funds in Slovakia started in 2004, the technological debt in R&D institutions wasn't significantly removed until the beginning of the implementation of the programming

period 2007-2013, when major construction and modernization of research infrastructure was launched, especially in universities and public R&D institutions.

3. R&D support in the programming period 2004-2006

Before 2007, there was no comprehensive system of support for R&D&I comparable to other EU countries in Slovakia. In the shortened programming period 2004-2006, which was the first period when the SR could draw EU Structural Funds, this area was only partially supported from these sources and R&D&I support wasn't formed in the coherent framework for funding.

In the shortened programming period 2004-2006, the SR had a National Development Plan that consisted of a number of sectoral operational programs, programming documents and community initiatives. From the perspective of research and innovation, the Sectoral Operational Program Industry and Services was the most important for the country, under which the priority "Growth of competitiveness of industry and services using the development of domestic growth potential" was addressed by promoting entrepreneurship, innovation and applied research.

This priority included several measures. The measure "Promotion of Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Applied Research" was the most important for the R&D&I support. Under this measure, 93 projects were submitted, of which 59 projects in the amount of 6.9 million EUR were approved and received a financial contribution.

The main objective of the projects was to ensure the growth of the competitiveness of the Slovak industry by supporting research and development, the acquisition of new innovative technologies, processes and products, and also to promote cooperation between universities and research institutes. The innovative environment has been promoted through industrial development and research, technology transfer, know-how, innovative products and processes. These projects were aimed at supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), small-scale projects with limited impact for the beneficiary itself, and thus no strategic investments were made in research infrastructure. The amount of financial support for projects was limited by the fact that it was set for SMEs, where projects are co-financed under the State aid scheme and with the lower level of intensity. According to the rules for projects financed under the state aid scheme, the amount of contribution is limited because state resources are used to provide assistance that gives organizations an advantage over others.

We do not consider the implementation of the programming period 2004-2006 to be particularly important in the area of R&D support in terms of the volume of funds that were implemented within this programming period as well as in terms of the contribution of the implemented projects to the strategic research and development infrastructure. The greatest benefit of the implementation of shortened programming period 2004-2006 is that it provided the necessary experience for the Managing Authorities and other institutions in Slovakia for the implementation of next programming periods.

4. R&D support in the programming period 2007-2013

In 2007 - 2013, the Operational Program Research and Development (OP R&D) financed by the EU Structural Funds was the dominant source of R&D&I funding in Slovakia. In particular, the OP R&D supported the construction of research infrastructure in all regions and in all sectors.

The OP R&D is a programming document on the basis of which support for R&D activities and infrastructure of universities was provided in 2007-2013.

The operational program is mainly aimed at modernization and increase of effectiveness of the support system for research and development and improvement of universities' infrastructure in such a way that they contribute to the economy competitiveness increase, regional disparities decrease, creation of new innovative high-tech SMEs, creation of new jobs and improvement of conditions of the educational process at universities.

Being the basic condition for further progress of R&D, the quality and standards of education provided at universities is related to the conditions of buildings and facilities, in which the educational process is delivered. The value and accessibility of education has long been affected by the lack of investment in the technical and internal facilities of schools. The consequence is an unsatisfactory technical state of a high number of buildings, moral and physical obsolescence of technical equipment, high operational costs and a lack of modern technology used in the educational process at universities (The Research Agency, 2018).

OP R&D measures in the area of building and renewing R&D infrastructure were aimed at monitoring the provision of employment (not only through direct projects financed from EU funds, but mainly by building up the innovation capacity of the SR) in order to strengthen the competitiveness of enterprises operating in Slovakia and developing new businesses with good competitive potential.

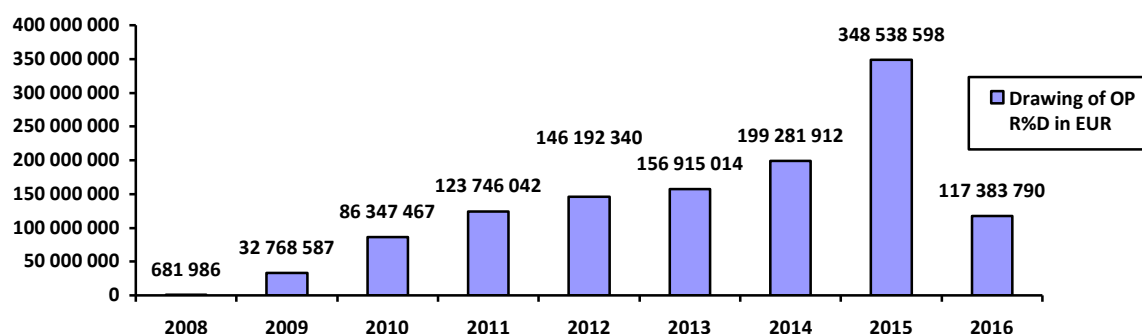
In Slovakia, the OP R&D was the primary source of R&D funding in 2007-2013. Before 2007, there were practically no major research centers in Slovakia and no real system of financing, respectively at least a system leading to the creation of such centers comparable to some other EU countries.

The Managing Authority for OP R&D in the programming period 2007-2013 is the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic. The Intermediate Body for the OP R&D in the programming period 2007-2013 is the Agency for Structural Funds of the EU - ASFEU, which was renamed The Research Agency in 2015.

In terms of R&D expenditure (one of the key indicators of national innovation development), the SR is characterized by a long-term under-funded R&D sector. Before the start of the 2007-2013 programming period, total R&D expenditure was around 0.5% of GDP, rising over the years. This increase was due to an increase in capital expenditure on equipment, which is mainly the result of drawing on Structural Funds for R&D. If we compare total R&D expenditures in other European economies, Slovakia is one of the lowest spending countries.

The OP R&D was implemented by 5 priority axes in the 2007-2013 programming period. The financial contribution for this operational program is EUR 1 209 415 373.

Fig. 4: Drawing of OP R&D in programming period 2007-2013 in EUR



Source: Ministry of finance of the SR (2018)

By the end of the programming period, overall 1412 grant applications in the total amount of EUR 3 662 137 885 were submitted in 47 calls, which were launched by Managing Authority and Intermediate Body.

Overall, 560 projects have been contracted in the total amount of EUR 1 617 895 284 in the programming period. Drawing of EU funds within OP R&D as at 31 December 2016 totalled EUR 1 211 855 749, while the share of EU funds in the total allocation reached the level of 100.20%.

In the 2007-2013 programming period, overall 491 projects (except the Technical Assistance projects) were supported by the OP R&D:

- 107 projects to support centers of excellence,
- 134 applied research projects for the public sector,
- 99 applied research projects for the private sector (of which 8 competence centers and 56 research and development centers),
- 72 universities infrastructure projects,
- 46 R&D infrastructure projects,
- 2 JEREMIE projects,
- 17 national projects,
- 14 university science park projects and research centers.

University science parks and research centers are considered to be the most significant investments in R&D infrastructure, both in terms of financial allocation and importance. University science parks are research institutes of the best Slovak universities, respectively Slovak Academy of Sciences, where top-quality applied research will be implemented and the transfer of knowledge from academia to economic and social practice through technology transfer (licensing, spin-off, or other forms of knowledge processing).

The university science park is a complex project that focuses on the systematic development of key scientific institutions; builds multi-purpose research buildings; creates space for the acceleration of ideas and incubation of

innovative companies through the implementation of applied research; it has a high-quality, efficient scientific management, based on good experience in reputable science parks, ensuring quality management and sustainability. Besides providing support of the R&D it also provides a development impulse to the region.

Research centers are less complex in nature compared to university science parks, in terms of territory development or scope. Research centers are mainly focused on supporting top-level laboratories built in a particular science area for the best research institutions to improve the quality and prestige of R&D in areas relevant to social and economic practice. They have high quality, efficient scientific management, based on good experience in reputable centers and ensuring the quality management and sustainability of the research center. They support the improvement of the interconnection of domestic and foreign research and help Slovak institutions to participate more actively in international R&D activities.

5. R&D support in the programming period 2014-2020

The Operational Program Research and Innovation (OP R&I) is a joint program document of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic and the Ministry of Economy of the Slovak Republic for the aid from the European Structural and Investment Funds in the program period 2014 - 2020 in the area focused on creating a stable environment favorable to innovation for all relevant actors and to help increasing the efficiency and performance of R&D&I system as an essential pillar to boost competitiveness, sustainable economic growth and employment (The Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic, 2018).

The OP R&I follow the OP R&D and the Operational Program Competitiveness and Economic Growth from the programming period 2007 – 2013.

The total allocation for OP R&I from EU sources is EUR 2 266 776 537 of which more than three quarters of all funds are intended to strengthen research, technological development and innovation, and the rest is allocated to support the enhancement of SMEs competitiveness.

Regarding the implementation of the OP R&I in current programming period, in our opinion it is not running well despite the fact that it is already under way for the sixth year now. As of 31 December 2018, only 9.56% of the allocation was spent within the R&I, which represents EUR 210 655 915 as the EU source. At the same time, it should be kept in mind that this drawdown figure of 9.56% is also shared by both the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Economy. In addition, according to Ministry of Finance of the SR, the Managing Authority has been unable to draw some of the funds that were expected to be spent in 2017 and 2018 on projects within the OP R&I. In particular, there was an automatic decommitment of EUR 27 million in 2017 and EUR 80 million in the 2018, which means these resources are definitely gone and cannot be spent in Slovakia anymore.

The Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the SR, which implements the priority axes 1 and 2 within the OP R&I, is responsible for the R&D support area itself. Regarding the drawing of these two priority axes, as of the 31 December 2018 only 7.34% and 5.02% respectively of the allocation has been spent. The priority axes 3 and 4, under the responsibility of the Ministry of Economy, which are aimed at supporting innovation and competitiveness of the SMEs, are drawn at the level of 14.04% and 13.86% respectively.

Based on the above mentioned data regarding the implementation of the OP R&I in the programming period 2014-2020, we came to the conclusion that in terms of the objective of our research, i.e. the impact of the implementation of operational programs on building, supporting and developing research infrastructure this programming period has not yet had a significant impact on the analyzed area, despite the fact that the implementation of the 2014-2020 programming period has been under way for the sixth year now.

The only projects that are being implemented in this programming period that we consider to provide a significant contribution to the system of Slovak research infrastructure so far are the two national projects of the Slovak Centre of Scientific and Technical Information (CVTI SR), namely the projects of Horizontal ICT Support and Central Infrastructure for Research and Development and also Research and Development Information System - access to databases for the needs of research institutions.

6. Results and discussion

The main objective of this article was to analyze the impact of the implementation of EU Structural Funds on building, supporting and developing research infrastructure within all three programming periods in the Slovak Republic. For this purpose, we analyzed a number of facts, in particular the amount of funds invested in R&D in individual programming periods, as well as the relevance and importance of implemented projects, the financial allocation of individual projects and the results achieved by projects.

We have also set the main hypothesis that the 2007-2013 programming period provided a key contribution to the building, support and development of R&D infrastructure in the SR.

In order to confirm the main hypothesis that the 2007-2013 programming period was the most beneficial for the building, support and development of research infrastructure in the SR, we have also analyzed the development of the OP R&D in individual years of implementation in relation to the R&D expenditure intensity as % of GDP in Slovakia in the period 2007 - 2017. The intensity of R&D expenditures in Slovakia increased significantly from 2007 to 2015, from 0.45% to 1.17% of GDP.

As we have already stated, in 2007 - 2013 programming period the OP R&D was the dominant source of R&D&I funding in Slovakia. If we compare the values of R&D expenditures in individual years in % of GDP (Fig. 2) with the development of OP R&D drawing (Fig. 4), we can see the lowest values of the period under review in both cases. In 2008 and 2009, the OP R&D was still in the process of starting the implementation, with the R&D expenditures at the lowest values of 0.45 and 0.46 respectively % of GDP.

Between 2010 and 2014, the R&D expenditures increased every year, as did the level of spending of OP R&D, while the peak in both indicators was reached in 2015, when the level of the R&D expenditures reached 1.17% of GDP and the OP R&D spent almost EUR 350 million, in both cases the highest values in the period under review. Consequently, the year 2016 saw a significant decline in both indicators, which, according to our analysis, was caused mainly by the fact that no new resources from the Structural Funds were allocated into the area of R&D support, only those from the gradual completion of OP R&D projects.

This analysis of selected indicators confirmed the main hypothesis that the OP R&D was the most beneficial in the area of building, supporting and developing research infrastructure in the SR in all three programming periods.

On the other hand, in 2016, the level of public investments dropped sharply to 0.79%, mainly due to gap of financing from the EU funds between two programming periods. This opens the discussion about sustainability of research infrastructure that was built from the EU funds, and also about the over-reliance of the R&D funding in Slovakia on the foreign sources, especially EU Structural Funds. This can cause significant problems in the near future, as the sources from the EU Structural funds will be limited in the next programming periods, mainly due to concentrating more sources on the new challenges, which the EU is dealing with today such as Brexit or the migration crisis.

Another critical point that needs to be discussed and addressed in near future is the efficiency and proper management of the EU funds distribution within the OP R&I in current programming period. As we have already mentioned in this paper, the amount of financial sources spent in this programming period is very low, as only 9.56% of the allocation of the OP R&I was spent as of 31 December 2018. After the cancelation of some calls in 2017 and some administrative inefficiencies detected in the evaluation process, The Managing Authority nor the Intermediate Body were not able to restart the implementation in an efficient way. Lot of time was lost in 2018 as the criteria for evaluation process were updated, and only a few calls since then were launched anew. In 2017, the automatic decommitment was EUR 27 million and in 2018 it was more that EUR 80 million. On the basis of the average effort and activity of the Managing Authority and Intermediate Body, the 2019 assumption is even more pessimistic. These are devastating losses for the R&D environment in Slovakia, as these resources are irretrievably gone, in accordance with the rules for implementing EU funds. At a time when it is already known that the EU budget will be significantly lower in the next programming period regarding the Structural Funds, these facts prove to be a historically wasted chance of providing the R&D environment with much needed sufficient financial support.

In addition to the inefficient distribution of resources from the EU Structural Funds, another dark event occurred in 2018 in the Slovak Science and Research Environment, where the trivial administrative reasons and the reluctance of competent authorities failed to carry out the process of transformation of the Slovak Academy of Sciences. The Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the SR rejected the original path of transformation, did not allow the registration of the SAS institutes in the register of the list of public research institutions and encouraged the Slovak Academy of Sciences to transform itself under a different law than it originally had and under substantially different conditions. This, in turn, was unacceptable for the Slovak Academy of Sciences, especially in the context of the belief that it has fulfilled all the conditions of transformation in accordance with the law. The transformation of the Slovak Academy of Sciences was expected to make the lives of scientists easier. Instead, the institution is now struggling in a legal vacuum. The tragic thing about this whole case is that the scientific community (that was supposed to benefit most from the transformation process) became a hostage of political struggles and administrative delays.

7. Conclusion

The cohesion policy of the EU is one its most important and most discussed policies. The main objective of the implementation of the EU Structural Funds is to strengthen economic, social and territorial solidarity in the EU, in particular by promoting growth and employment in regions whose development is lagging behind. Supporting R&D from EU Structural Funds is key to ensuring EU competitiveness and sustainable growth. The main objective of this article was to analyze the impact of the implementation of EU Structural Funds on building, supporting and developing research infrastructure within all three programming periods in the Slovak Republic. We have also set the main hypothesis that the 2007-2013 programming period provided a key contribution to the building, support and development of research infrastructure in the SR.

Based on the findings, we do not consider the implementation of the 2004-2006 programming period to be particularly relevant and beneficial for the analyzed area, in particular on the basis of the amount of funds invested, the number and nature of projects and the fact, that the period was shortened and the R&D support area did not have a comprehensive financial framework in this programming period.

On the other hand, the contribution of projects implemented in the 2007-2013 programming period within the OP R&D can be considered a breakthrough in many aspects for the R&D&I infrastructure. A separate support framework (OP R&D) was established for the area of R&D support, where EUR 1.209 billion was allocated. These funds have been successfully spent by the end of the programming period.

For the first time in the history of the SR, partnerships between individual research institutions have started to form, where top-level research teams have been established for each area - while the lack of crystallization of Slovak science into specific research teams that would be internationally attractive for partnerships equipped with at least basic infrastructure was one of the weakest aspects of the Slovak science and technology system. Better organization of research through the established research teams and more modern infrastructure has made Slovak research institutions, which have become an equal partner for top research institutions abroad, more attractive, and thus has been able to enter international R&D projects.

By setting up priorities and excellent scientific teams, Slovak universities and Slovak Academy of Sciences have been able, through projects, to start the process of building science parks and research centers of national significance. The teams that have implemented centers of excellence in the past formed the basic pillars of science parks and research centers. For the key industry sectors and economy of the SR, the creation of quality partnerships with industry in the form of industrial R&D centers and competence centers was supported through projects. The bottom-up system has identified the strong thematic lines of Slovak science and technology. Supported research centers have clearly demonstrated in which topics in Slovakia the accumulation of critical mass of researchers and infrastructure exists.

In the programming period 2007 - 2013, 14 strategic projects funded under the OP R&D were implemented to establish university science parks and research centers, which were intended to fill the gap in R&D infrastructure. We consider these projects to be the most important and relevant in terms of the analyzed area.

In order to ensure the further functioning of the projects mentioned above and fulfilment of their objectives, it is necessary to provide the financial resources necessary to ensure their sustainability. The OP R&I, which is implemented in the 2014-2020 programming period, has the financing of sustainability of these projects among eligible costs, so therefore it is one of the most obvious possibility how to deal with this problem. But even the OP R&I has limited sources of funding, therefore it will be necessary to ensure the sustainability of projects also from the state budget. Moreover, after analyzing the development of implementation of the OP R&I, we came to the conclusion that, despite its the high potential, this operational program has not yet had a significant impact on the analyzed area in the 2014-2020 programming period, despite the fact, that the implementation has been already under way for the sixth year now and its allocation exceeds EUR 2.2 billion.

Despite the declared importance of R&D&I for the sustainable competitiveness of the SR, the efficiency and performance of the research and innovation potential of the SR remains still one of the biggest challenges. The main problems of Slovak science and research have long been considered to be the low level of funding, the fragmentation of the management system and the unstable and less motivating support for science and research. Ensuring long-term, effective, predictable and stable state funding is essential for the successful development of science and research, as well as creating an environment to increase the share of private resources for R&D in comparison to public resources to a ratio 2:1 while keeping at least the current share of public resources in total R&D expenses.

At the same time, it is essential to reform the R&D&I system, including its management and funding, in order to increase the international competitiveness of the Slovak economy through support for education, research, development and innovation. To ensure employment growth and to improve the quality of life of

citizens, it is essential to create synergies between R&D and industry and to provide conditions for sustainable economic growth.

The fact remains that the EU Structural Funds make up the most significant part of R&D expenditure in Slovakia. Therefore, efforts must be concentrated on the effective redistribution and use of these funds.

At the same time, the efficient use of European Structural and Investment Funds to finance science, research and innovation is not possible without a significant reduction in the administrative burden of their absorption. The administration of the EU Structural Funds must not be a disproportionate burden for scientific teams benefiting from European support. At the same time, it is necessary for the efficient use of these resources in Slovakia in line with EC requirements to set up a sufficient, effective and transparent complementary system of project financing from the state budget and EU framework programs.

To make the most of the unrepeatable support from the EU funds is the historical challenge in order to drive a structural change of the Slovak economy towards growth based on increasing innovation capability and research and innovation excellence to promote sustainable growth in income, employment and standard of living. This should be our common responsibility for the prosperity of the SR and of the future generations.

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