

# **POLITICAL PARTIES AND NATIONALISM IN VISEGRAD COUNTRIES**

FILIP ČERNOCH, JAN HUSÁK, ONDREJ SCHÜTZ, MICHAL VÍT



INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF POLITICAL SCIENCE  
OF MASARYK UNIVERSITY

BRNO 2011

their social benefits. Roma were perceived as an alien element with no rights within the Slovak state. Similar sentiments were aimed at Hungarians, considered by LS – NS to be an even greater danger to the Slovak nation than Roma. LS – NS was concerned by the anti-Slovak chauvinism of the Hungarians. In their perception Hungarians were actively undermining Slovak statehood in order to change the borders between the two states. To counter both of these threats, LS – NS proposed the formation of a home defence militia which would serve as a defensive body for the nation.

In the international arena, the manifesto called for independence from foreign powers and multinational institutions – be it the European Union or transnational corporations. In these respect LS – NS sought to fight against the preferential treatment of foreign investors in Slovakia. Moreover the manifesto stated that it would act in the interests of the Slovak nation, regardless of the policies and opinions of the European Union.

## **Types of election manifestos produced by Slovak parties**

### *Nationalist type*

The first group of manifestos consists of documents which addressed members of the Slovak nation rather than Slovak citizens. The main recipient of the policies in these manifestos was the Slovak nation, and for this reason we call these manifestos nationalist. The nation is the central point of these documents and most of the policies proposed by them are justified and derived in order to serve the nation and its interests.

This nationalist approach was predominant in the manifestos of three examined parties: Slovak National Party, Slovak Popular Party and Popular Party-Our Slovakia. These three parties – SNS in both 2006 and 2010 – considered themselves to be the only true proponents of the national interests of the Slovak nation. In their worldview nations are basic, natural, primordial and eternal units into which mankind are divided. It should also be mentioned that these parties – in particular SLS – stress the transcendent and divine origin of na-

tions. Man is born into an objectively existing community – the nation. Since the nation is the basic political unit, it should also be the sovereign master in its own affairs. That is why the nation states exist. The existence of nation states is the natural consequence and expression of the existence of nations. Each nation is endowed with territory, language, culture and identity. These should be protected by the state. That is the reason d'être of its existence. The state should be the tool to cultivate and develop the nation; however members of the nation also have a moral commitment towards the nation. This commitment is not derived from the fact that community – state and nation – took care of its member. This commitment has rather the character of a moral commandment which is simply the consequence of the fact that one is its member.

Despite the fact that these parties are nationalist by nature (as is evidenced by the analysis of their manifestos) we should make clear a distinction between these parties and groups that believe in the superiority of some nations over others. The analyzed parties do not regard the nations of the world fitting in to a hierarchical order. Rather nations are naturally defined units and identities for man, but certainly not ranks. Nations are rather self-developing and it is down to them to rise above other nations. Keeping this in mind, it should however be mentioned that there is certainly not equality among nations. For example, for LS-NS, Roma people were mostly parasites. Thus we can conclude that while parties with nationalist manifestos do not consider certain nations to be created superior to others, they do tend to generalize differences between them. Thus SNS, SLS and LS-NS share the same ideological background – they think about nations as objective entities with distinctive identities and cultures, but what does it mean in the specific case of Slovak nation. Let us now deconstruct the definition of the Slovak nation and nationalism as it is seen by these parties and as it is portrayed in their manifestos.

For the nationalist approach in the manifestos of the Slovak parties, it is very usual to use three basic principles as their programmatic pillars. These three are national, social and Christian principles. These three also represents the values which should be the guide for every member of the Slovak nation. The national principle is applied by the above-mentioned parties in their cultural and educational

policies. All four manifestos called for designing education in order to strengthen patriotism and national pride. A stress on the Slovak language is also important for these manifestos, as if the language was the main defining feature of the nation and more importantly of national sovereignty. SNS and SLS emphasized that the Slovak language must be used in every corner of the Slovak Republic. In some way the usage of Hungarian in the south of the country constitutes a threat to the nation. The national approach is also identifiable in the definition of the national interest in the manifestos under examination. The national interest does not just entail the prosperity and security of the country and its citizens, but also the defence of the distinctive identity of the Slovak nation. This identity should be threatened by neither foreign forces nor domestic forces – particularly by minorities.

The national principle in the manifestos of the first type expresses itself in the approach towards foreign policy. The parties with nationalist manifestos stress the importance of cooperation and unity among Slavic countries respectively nations. In this respect there is an apparent bias towards Serbia and especially Russia, as it is the biggest Slavic nation and furthermore has both an imperial history and the status of major power in the international community. Also noticeable is some restraint in emphasizing cooperation with the Czech Republic and the Czech nation. For example, when listing Slavic nations in its 2010 manifesto, SNS mentioned the Czech Republic third from the end despite the fact that there are objective reasons for the country having the closest relations with the Czechs. At the same time, the first two mentioned nations were Serbia and Russia.

The social principle is oriented towards the community character of the nation. There should be no citizen in need. The social principle is not to be understood strictly as solidarity exclusively within the Slovak nation. Ethnic minorities are not excluded; however the social principle is to be applied in the conditions of secured national interests. For example, there is a clear bias against the employment of employees who speak only Hungarian. The social principle in the manifestos of the three parties also reaches its limits when dealing with the Roma minority and their social status. Without any restraint, LS-NS called the gypsies (as they address Roma people) parasites, and

in 2006 SNS wanted to control their population and accused them of exploiting the social security system.

Finally, Christianity is considered by SNS, SLS and LS-NS to be a fundamental pillar of Slovak national identity. Christian values are especially important for SLS. The core of the notion of this Christian tradition is the so-called heritage of the “Salonika brothers”, saints Cyril and Methodius. Devotion to Christian values is also apparent in the concern for European cultural heritage. Negatively expressed it can also take the form of hostility towards other cultural and religious traditions, principally Islam.

The similarities between the four manifestos and the three parties reach far beyond their divining of the concept of nation and their construction of the Slovak nation. Possessing the same assumptions about the transcendent nature of nations does not necessarily determine the same interpretation of history, international affairs and the contemporary world, however in the manifestos of SNS, SLS and LS-NS it is the case. All three parties share the common sentiment of the existence of a direct threat to the Slovak nation. In the view expressed by the four manifestos of the nationalist type, the distinctively Slovak national and Christian culture is in immediate danger. The most prominent source of this danger are, for sure, Hungarians. The Hungarian nation is portrayed as one which is tirelessly conspiring against the sovereignty of the Slovak Republic and, more specifically, against the Slovak nation. In the view of these manifestos Hungarians are nostalgic about their imperial history and they are not content with the breakdown of the Hungarian Kingdom. Moreover, according to the Slovak nationalists, they are still trying to reverse history in order to reunite the lost territories. The Hungarian government is working towards this goal together with the Hungarian diasporas in neighbouring countries. That is why the Hungarian minority and its representation in Slovakia are perceived as disloyal, and it needs to prove its loyalty. However, the preferred resolution of the problem posed by the existence of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia would be its full cultural assimilation.

Another threat being faced by the Slovak nation is represented by liberal and postmodern influences that, in the view of the manifestos of the first group, are destabilizing the value system – based upon

Christianity – of the Slovak nation. Among these unwelcome influences are materialism and consumerism, as well as the liberal agenda of gay and lesbian rights. Most of these are perceived as western products of destructive relativism which is destroying the solid value order provided by Christianity. Besides this moral threat to the nation there is another one which is imported from the west and is strengthened by globalization. SNS, SLS and LS-NS were all very concerned with the power of transnational corporations and their influence in the Slovak Republic. These companies were perceived as agents of foreign interest in the Slovak Republic. Thus, in the manifestos of the nationalist type, there is also a stress on the autochthony. Both these threats of relativism and international capital are present in the EU. That is why, while stressing the European identity of the Slovak nation, SNS, SLS and LS-NS are against European integration and the loss of sovereignty. These nationalist manifestos rather call for a Europe of sovereign nation states without central control from Brussels.

As is apparent from its description, the nationalist type of manifestos is defined through several key principles. First and foremost, the nationalist manifesto is centred on the concept of the nation as objective entity. It is addressed to the members of this nation. The state is the expression and tool of the nation which serves to defend its interests. The interests of the nation lie in its survival and in the survival of its distinctive identity. That is why while national minorities are respected they are of secondary concern to these manifestos, and should be of secondary interest also for policymakers and the state power. The Slovak identity is based on the Christian tradition and should be protected from the destructive influences of liberalism, globalization and relativism. The Slovak Republic should be sovereign and it should maintain its powers in order to ensure that the Slovak identity does not melt in the European pot. However, these similarities should not overshadow the substantive differences between three of the parties and their four manifestos. While without doubt they constitute a nationalist category, the manifestos do also differ. SLS, for example, is much more concerned with Christianity and protecting its values than the other two parties. LS-NS on the other hand is much more radical in its formulation than SNS and SLS, yet still operates within the same paradigm.

### *Cultural-nationalist type*

The next group of manifestos represents a considerable proportion of the Slovak population at least when we will consider results of the general elections of 2010. The parties and their manifestos which did not centre its political message around the concept of primordial exclusive and eternal nation but still emphasized high value of the national culture and preservation of its heritage are part of the second group. These parties were very sensitive to the external threats but they also stressed its pro European attitudes and respect for human rights and protection of minorities. We will refer to the approach embedded in the second group of manifestos as culturally – nationalistic. Both manifestos of the Popular Party – Movement for the Democratic Slovakia and manifesto for the 2010 elections of Direction – Social Democracy are part of the nationally – conservative type.

All documents in this category were using the concept of the Slovak nation and its interests often. However in contrast with the manifestos of the nationalistic group the definition of the nation was less rigid and more importantly membership to Slovak nation was of no relevance to the citizenship and to the relation among the citizen and the Slovak Republic. For LS – HZDS and Smer – SD notion of nation was important but it was not central term of their ideology. Moreover they defined nation in terms of the cultural heritage rather than some transcendental principles and primordial affiliations. To put it in other words it is culture which defines a nation not the other way round. Therefore membership in the constitutive nation of the Slovak Republic is in comparison with the nationalistic approach less exclusive. All the citizens are considered to be part of the Slovak nation in the very moment they are loyal to the Slovak Republic, they speak Slovak language and they embrace Slovak cultural and historical heritage.

For the manifestos of the second category it is symptomatic that they emphasize the strengthening of national pride in the members of the Slovak nation and also the allegiance and loyalty to the Slovak Republic amongst all of its citizens. Smer-SD and LS-HZDS wanted to achieve this goal through the nurturing and cultivation of the national culture. Also, the cultural-nationalist manifestos proposed

education aimed at strengthening patriotism among students of all levels of the school system with an appropriate history and literature curriculum. Smer-SD and ĽS-HZDS chose a similar approach regarding language policy. In their opinion all the citizens of the Slovak Republic must speak Slovak. All of these policies were designed to make sure that the Slovak Republic will preserve its Slovak character.

Despite these strongly assertive policies, the cultural-nationalist manifestos showed respect to the culture and traditions of the ethnic minorities living in Slovakia and considered them to be an integral part of the heritage of the whole country. Therefore as soon as the goal of protecting Slovak national interests was secured there was room for the support and nourishment of ethnic minorities and of their culture.

All three electoral documents falling into the cultural-nationalist group in many places emphasized tolerance and respect for minority rights and their freedoms, and at the same time they condemned racism and discrimination. A combination of these values with the cultural approach towards defining the nation described above is identifiable in the way both parties addressed the Roma minority and its social problems in their manifestos. They proposed policies aimed at "normalization" of the Roma population. Both parties were in favour of the establishment of special boarding schools for Roma pupils where they would be educated and raised in order to integrate into the Slovak population. These efforts do not mean that Smer-SD or ĽS-HZDS called for full cultural assimilation of the Roma population. The integration was meant primarily in terms of social and political issues – not cultural. However, if some Roma abandon their cultural heritage and they feel themselves to be Slovaks it will be fully acceptable for the cultural-nationalist approach to count them as members of the Slovak nation.

However, in contrast with the liberal values of tolerance and minority rights there is strong opposition expressed in all three manifestos to any kind of autonomy for the ethnic minorities. This concerned even cultural self-governance. Of course opposition towards the autonomy of the minorities has to be put into the wider context. Both parties were sensitive to every step of the Hungarian govern-

ment and Hungarian minority in Slovakia. They were strongly against any extra-territorial influence for Hungary in Slovakia. They certainly did not suggest, as did the nationalist manifestos, that the Hungarian nation conspires against Slovak sovereignty and territorial integrity, but they would not permit any strengthening of the autonomy of the Slovak Hungarians in fear of possible future demands which could go far beyond what is considered by Smer-SD and ĽS-HZDS to be in the interest of the Slovak nation. Consistent with this fear, both parties refused future recognition of the Kosovar independence which they saw as a dangerous precedent. In this respect ĽS-HZDS stress the importance of potent military power to secure the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the state. On the other hand Smer-SD proposed cooperation and new alliances to secure Slovak interests in the future.

This brings us to the other distinctive feature of the cultural-nationalist manifestos. A strong and independent international position was highly valued in all three documents of the second category. It was important not just to be a reliable and stable partner in the international community but the cultural-nationalist approach also emphasized a respectful and strong position which the Slovak Republic should enjoy.

In conclusion we should stress the main differences between the nationalist and cultural-nationalist approaches as they were identified in the manifestos of the Slovak parties. In both ĽS-HZDS manifestos and also in the 2010 manifesto of Smer-SD we can see a strong intent to serve and protect the national culture and interests. However, the nation is here defined in terms of the language, culture and values rather than ancestry and blood. Consequently, a member of the nation could be virtually anybody who speaks Slovak. The Slovak Republic is understood primarily as the nation state of the Slovaks but, through equal citizenship, ethnic minorities are also considered to be part of the state and they should enjoy the same rights as the members of the Slovak nation. The three documents forming the cultural-nationalist category view normality and order to be of the highest value and the focal point of political life. Slovakia should not be a state where there is no clear uniting understanding of its core identity, values and history. The nationalism of these manifestos is

evidenced by their devotion to the natural arrangement of the affairs in the state – there should be a constitutive nation which together with loyal national minorities runs the state as a proud member of the EU and the international community.

### *Liberal-sceptic type*

The third group of the election manifestos consists of the documents of very heterogeneous parties. Both manifestos of the Christian-Democratic Movement as well as the manifesto of the Freedom and Solidarity party, together with the 2006 election manifesto of Direction-Social Democracy, formed a group of liberal scepticism. In contrast with the two previous groups, the parties of this group and their manifestos barely refer to the nation and other issues connected with cultural differentiation among citizens. They did not differentiate between the majority and minority rights and cultural heritage. However, the parties belonging to this group stressed in their manifestos the independence of the country, the need for responsibility and scepticism when it comes to international cooperation. This tension between the liberal approaches towards issues of identities in combination with scepticism in foreign policy gives the name to this category.

The parties of the liberal-sceptic group do not explicitly tackle the concept of the nation. They do not consider ethnically defined nations to be of any importance in politics. Instead the four manifestos of this group addressed their messages to citizens of the Slovak Republic without regard to their mother tongue, cultural background or ancestry. The political program and policies they proposed are designed to serve the country and its population rather than any specifically defined group within its borders. Of course there are references to national culture or cultural heritage; however these are used specifically in connection with support for Slovak arts and cultural institutions. Moreover wherever there is a statement regarding Slovak national culture there is also a complementary passage describing support for minority culture and art.

In accordance with their rejection of the nationalist discourse and their embracing of a liberal and pragmatic approach, the liberal-

sceptic manifestos addressed the problems that Roma communities are facing. For example, SaS considered these problems to be a result of inadequate social policies in the past. These were coupled with the discrimination of the Roma population by the majority in everyday life. All three parties proposed measures which aim to integrate the Roma communities into Slovak society. This integration was understood in terms of social inclusion rather than cultural assimilation. In this respect all three parties are loyal to their liberal approach.

Overall, we can easily conclude that the manifestos of the liberal-sceptic approach tend to support human and minority rights and the values of tolerance and equality. At the same time, all three parties in this group stressed responsibility as another highly important value. All these values are considered to be part of the common European heritage and all three parties were in their respective manifestos stressing that Slovakia is part of the wider European community of countries which share this heritage.

However a strong allegiance to the European identity and values does not necessarily imply a positive attitude towards the European project. KDH with SaS and Smer-SD in 2006 were supporters of Slovakia's membership of the EU. All of them perceived it not just as an unavoidable and necessary step towards economic prosperity and international recognition but also as an act of historical justice because Slovakia is part of Europe. At the same time the liberal-sceptic manifestos were not uncritically enthusiastic about the EU. They unanimously criticized the EU's discriminatory practices. They were also reserved about further integration and the further transfer of powers from the states to Brussels. On this issue we should mention that this tendency was less present in the manifesto of Smer-SD than in the manifestos of the other two parties. In accordance with the above-mentioned is also the attitude taken by all three parties regarding EU enlargement. In general they strongly supported EU enlargement, but on the other hand equally strongly opposed the possible membership of Turkey. In this case we can see the limits of the liberal tolerance and openness of KDH, SaS and Smer-SD.

When considering how the liberal-sceptic parties viewed foreign policy issues and international relations, we have to conclude that

they were all concerned with matters of independent decision-making, autonomy in acting and lack of foreign influence. Beneath these milestones there is an apparent desire for the respectful treatment of Slovakia by other countries and acknowledgement of its status as a modern and developed European country. However, in contrast with the manifestos of the previous two groups, the liberal-sceptical idea of respectful treatment was based on a pragmatic rather than nationalist approach towards other countries. This is clearly manifested by the fact that none of the four manifestos in the category of the liberal-sceptical documents dedicated a significant part of their political message to the Slovak-Hungarian tensions and quarrels.

Despite all these similarities between the manifestos of KDĽ, SaS and Smer-SD, we should also mention the deep differences which divide these otherwise very similar approaches. We have already mentioned the more enthusiastic attitude of Smer-SD (expressed in its 2006 electoral manifesto) towards the EU and further integration. However there is another issue which divides the liberal-sceptical group. KDĽ as a Christian democratic party considered European and consequently Slovak culture and values to be Christian in origin. On the other hand, SaS took a rather extreme view on the issue of religion and its role in society and politics. However, while admitting that this difference has some relevant consequences for the definition of Slovak and European cultural heritage, we do not consider this difference to be of decisive importance. In other words, the fact that both parties differ on the issue of what are the roots of Slovak and European culture, and what role should religion and church assume in modern society, does not mean that their basic approach towards the concept of nation and ethnicity are not of the same kind.

### *Rightwing liberal type*

Three parties and their electoral documents from the fourth type of manifestos: These are the Slovak Democratic and Christian Union-Democratic Party, Alliance of a New Citizen and Most-Híd party. These three parties exhibit in their manifestos a great deal of openness not just towards all minorities and citizens of the country but

also towards the international community and the European project. The parties whose manifestos form the fourth group are considered to be centre-right in their political orientation, and that is why we will refer to them and their category as rightwing liberal.

At the beginning of the description of the main features of the rightwing liberal approach it would be useful to point out that this group is actually, in its views and policies, very similar to the previous one. Both the rightwing liberal and the liberal-sceptic groups are not stressing the concept of the nation and focus rather on the citizenry of the state. This, however, does not mean that rightwing liberal parties do not mention in some places of their manifestos national culture and the need for its cultivation, or even the existence of a national identity. However, these are understood as wide categories that, while being referred to as national, are rather understood as being defined by the territory of Slovakia not by the Slovak nation.

Rightwing liberal parties are generally liberal in their approach towards foreign and alien elements in society. They value the individual and its rights more than the unquestionable authority of the state. According to these parties the state should also refrain from encouraging its citizens to choose one particular set of values or way of life. On the contrary, the state serves and protects its citizens. It should prevent the discrimination of minorities and if anything then just facilitate their inclusion into Slovak society. The manifestos in this category are not fixed on the issues of Slovak language and history. There is no objective value in the usage of a majority language by all citizens and also there is no need for all citizens to be proud of Slovak history.

However, unlike the liberal-sceptic parties, rightwing liberal parties tend to be open to foreign influences. This feature is most prominent in the way these parties and their respective manifestos deal with the issue of European integration. In contrast to the group of liberal-sceptic documents, they tend to be more open-minded and one would say almost uncritical of the EU and its further integration. There is one important exception: the manifestos of SDKÚ-DS strongly oppose the harmonization of taxes in the EU.

### *Minority type*

The last identified group of manifestos in Slovakia consists of the electoral documents of the single party of the Hungarian minority. The Party of Hungarian Coalition is in a special situation in comparison with the other parties. SMK declares to be a party of the minority and its manifestos really are dedicated to the promotion of the interests of that specific electorate. Its orientation on ethnic minority voters is also the main reason SMK constitutes a separate category by itself. Its preoccupation with minority rights is on the one hand a typical sign of liberal tendencies but it cannot be fully interpreted as such in the specific case of SMK.

The manifestos of SMK are devoted to equality, tolerance and minority rights but these are also too often associated with the Hungarian minority and the region of southern Slovakia where most of the Hungarian minority lives. This aspect of the SMK manifestos could be interpreted as nation-centric. The policies and proposals contained in the SMK election documents are not just about implementing and protecting the rights of minorities and especially Hungarian minorities, but these are often set up to further promote the Hungarian language and culture. Hungarian identity and heritage were considered to be in peril in Slovakia and it was of great importance for SMK to ensure their survival. Assimilation of the Hungarians was seen as a great threat. For SMK this was not just a question of minority rights but rather in the interest of the Hungarian nation as a whole. It should be mentioned that this element of the political program was developed and emphasised in the 2010 manifesto while it was of secondary importance in SMK's electoral document of 2006.

Due to the subtle fear of assimilation and possible discrimination (or even assimilation), SMK policies were strongly focused on further European integration since the EU was seen as a guarantee of minority rights in the member states. Moreover, European policies aiming at strengthening subsidiary and regional governance were in harmony with SMK's goals. However, SMK saw the European dimension of its program also in terms of identity, not just policies. Hungarians, like Slovaks, were considered by SMK to be part of the wider community of European nations.

### **Conclusion**

In Slovakia, as anywhere else, one can find election manifestos which have a strong focus on the issues of ethnicity, preservation of national identity and relations with other nations, and those manifestos which do not touch on these issues or even do not mention the word nation at all. Between these two poles there are many parties and manifestos which combine both approaches.

Among five types of approaches identified in Slovakia one would futilely look for manifesto which expresses unconditional and full openness to the external influences and which would completely denounce community approach towards politics and public affairs. On the other hand parties which would define nations as prescribed categories are definitely not mainstream in Slovakia and only one of them has parliamentary representation. Most of the Slovak parliamentary parties – in their manifestos – define nation as cultural and political community. They differ primarily on the issue how to treat other cultural traditions or influences which are not familiar to Slovak cultural context. This is the case especially with Hungarian and Roma communities which are principal representatives of others in Slovakia. Also globalization and European integration are playing important role in the discourse between cultural-nationalist, liberal-sceptic, rightwing liberal and minority types.

In this respect we can say Slovak political spectrum is somehow similar to Czech one. Mainstream parties share similar approaches in their manifestos, while more extreme approaches – nationalist in both countries and post-modern in the Czech Republic – are suffering of low representation in legislative bodies. Difference is that while in the Czech Republic more visible and influential used to be parties of post-modern type in Slovakia there is strong nationalistic party in parliament.