

## INTRODUCTION TO THE ANALYSIS OF PROGRAM DOCUMENTS OF SELECTED SLOVAK POLITICAL PARTIES 2014 EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS

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Even though European Parliament elections are considered to be rather second-order, i.e. with low attraction for voters, the discussion within the pre-election campaign brought up a wide range of important topics from various areas of public life. However, it often includes a much larger agenda than any member of European Parliament can influence from his/her position; at the same time, it is not entirely rare that a substantial part of the election program of political parties is formulated in very general terms, without specific proposals or solutions. Despite of this, European Parliament elections provide us with a unique opportunity to reflect on the attitudes of major political parties in the country on key issues and to map their compliance and consistency during the whole election period.

The aim of the presented study is not the comprehensive analysis of program priorities of political parties; on the contrary, the focus is very narrow, concerning specific topics within foreign and security policy, in the context of recent European Parliament elections, which took place on May 24, 2014. Precisely these topics should be the basis for assessment of the expertise and qualification of political parties' representatives who shall work in European structures during the following term. The primary question, at the center of attention of this study, is the position of successful candidates, i.e. future members of European Parliament, on the most topical issues of foreign and security policy of the European Union, as well as their ideas for solutions on the European level from the position they will occupy over the following five years.

Besides the personal questions and relevant expertise of new EP members, important also because they reflect the importance the party attributes to foreign and security policy topics, our interest focused on four basic areas: questions of integration and enlargement of the European Union, security and defense policy, internal security (particularly extremism and radicalization) and regional cooperation. Election programs of political parties were evaluated and partly

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compared on the basis of selected profiling questions covering the following four areas.

### **Selection of political parties and the underlying methodology**

In an attempt to obtain high-quality and comparable data on the identified issues of foreign and security policy from all involved political parties entering the EP, this study is based primarily on responses provided by political parties in the questionnaire, that was distributed before the elections. Election programs, given their differing lengths, structure as well as level of detail, were used as complementary material and source of information, along with official statements of parties' representatives in the media, if relevant with regard to target questions.

The study includes parties, which have been successful in the European Parliament elections held on May 24, 2014. They are as follows: SMER-SD (SMER – Social Democracy, with 24.09% and four seats in EP), KDH (Christian Democratic Movement, with 13.21% and two seats in EP), SDKÚ-DS (Slovak Democratic and Christian Union – Democratic Party, with 7.75% and two seats in EP), OĽaNO (Ordinary People and Independent Personalities, with 7.46% and one seat in EP), NOVA (New Majority, with 6.83% and one seat in EP), SaS (Freedom and Solidarity, with 6.66% and one seat in EP), SMK (Party of the Hungarian Community, with 6.53% and one seat in EP) and Most-Híd (Bridge, with 5.83% and one seat in EP).<sup>1</sup> The order that parties in this material corresponds to the official results of European Parliament elections.

Questionnaires were distributed in the pre-election period among parties, which had the best chance to enter to EP according to pre-

election surveys.<sup>2</sup> The main aim was to find out about the real priorities and ambitions of political parties and their candidates and analyze them to present commitments and plans for the following parliamentary term of 2014-2019.

### **Topics and profiling questions**

We focused on eight profiling topics in relation to which we evaluated the positions of parties and their candidates.

The first priority question was about the position of members of European Parliament on the deepening of the integration and strengthening of institutions at the European level. SaS and NOVA were shown as clearly Eurosceptic parties, both emphasizing their disagreement with measures adopted on the European level, especially in the area of economics and the fight against the economic crisis (e.g. bailout fund). SDKÚ-DS shall also be classified as a party with a rather negative attitude to further integration and strengthening of the central EU level, especially through its rejection of harmonization in the area of tax and social policy. Same applies for SMK, which on the whole refuses the strengthening of European institutions at the expense of the national level. On the contrary, OĽaNO, Most-Híd and KDH (with the exception

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<sup>2</sup> In the selection of political parties we took as a basis the pre-election survey of the MVK agency from March 2014 (Source: <http://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/249499/eurovolby-2014-prieskumy/>). Questionnaires were distributed to political parties, which had their representative in the European Parliament, as well as parties, which were in a favorable position to be elected. The following parties met the conditions: SMER-SD, SDKÚ-DS, KDH, SaS, NOVA, SMK, Most-Híd, OĽaNO and SNS (Slovak National Party). All parties responded to the request to submit the questionnaire, with the exception of SNS, which in the end was not elected to the EP.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic.

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of culture-ethical topics) are rather in favor of further integration.

Another topical and not less important issue in relation to further direction of European Union is its further enlargement. This was also the case of significant disagreement among parties. While NOVA, SaS, Smer-SD, SMK or in case of Turkey also Most-Híd, are unambiguously against it due to the unpreparedness of the countries in question and the necessary institutional and organizational changes in European Union. Other parties did not exclude this possibility or even identified it as a crucial – especially in the case of Western Balkan countries (as was stated by SDKÚ-DS and OĽaNO), Ukraine (as stated by KDH and Most-Híd), and to the certain extent Turkey (e.g. in the form of privileged partnership, as stated by KDH).

On the contrary, when considering the further development of European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP), all parties agreed on the need for further deepening of the cooperation. In some cases, even the idea of the building of common army on the European level appeared (e.g. SaS, OĽaNO or Most-Híd).

In relation to ensuring the security and defense of the country, the orientation of the Slovak Republic on the foreign policy issues is of key importance -- in general, as well as specifically on the question of guarantees of security. The vast majority of parties unanimously agreed that The North Atlantic Treaty Organization should be the guarantor of safety (this according to Smer-SD, SDKÚ-DS, SaS, NOVA, OĽaNO and SMK). The only party that considers the European Union as the main guarantor of security of the Slovak Republic is Most-Híd. In the future, also Smer-SD acknowledges the increasingly significant

position of EU, which, according to the party, is the direction the EU should take.

Political parties also relatively rarely coincide on the question of involvement of the Armed Forces of SR in foreign missions, which showed to be the issue which significantly raises the doubts concerning the sufficient expertise and knowledge of realities in the assessment. The majority of parties consider the “current level of engagement” of Armed Forces of SR in foreign missions as sufficient, with the exception of SMK, which identified it rather as insufficient. In general, in official program priorities as well as political statements, elaboration of what is meant by “current level” is missing entirely. So is the case with regards to their position on the future of on-going operations where Slovak soldiers are involved.

On the contrary, differences may be identified with regard to the question of regional cooperation and priorities of the Slovak Republic in foreign policy. While the parties NOVA, SDKÚ-DS, KDH, OĽaNO and Most-Híd consider it a priority to further develop relations within the V4 group, striking is the skeptical attitude of SaS and Smer-SD towards the prioritization of this regional grouping. However, neighboring countries are not the only ones considered a priority, in the responses of political parties to the questionnaires – equally as important was identified the foreign policy orientation towards the Western Balkans (according to NOVA, Smer-SD), Germany (according to NOVA, KDH and OĽaNO) or USA, especially in economic terms (according to SDKÚ-DS and SaS). As a separate issue which is the source of contention on the Slovak political scene is the question of recognition of Kosovo. While NOVA, SDKÚ-DS, Smer-SD, KDH and OĽaNO agree with the official position of the Slovak Republic, i.e.

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with non-recognition of Kosovo, SaS takes the opposite view.

The last important topic we decided to include into the study in connection with the rise of right-wing extremist movements on a European-wide scale is the question of internal security. This goes hand-in-hand with the strengthening of extremist and radicalizing trends in the societies. The crucial point in this matter is first and foremost how this challenge is handled and whether the solutions should be adopted on the national or European level. While Smer-SD and SMK support the idea that the European Union should face this problem jointly, SaS, SDKÚ-DS and Most-Híd agree that the challenge should be resolved by the member states. The necessity to give priority to stemming this phenomenon is emphasized especially by NOVA, KDH as well as OĽaNO, which is the only party connecting the issue of extremism with the Roma issue.

The document (available only in Slovak) addresses all these issues in more detail with the ambition to analyze the program priorities and positions of political parties that have succeeded in the EP elections, elected for a 5-year term. At the same time, it aims to summarize the ambitions and promises of candidates and can serve as a reminder of what was said in the election campaign. It may therefore serve as a basis for assessing the extent of fulfillment and evolution of the positions for the following elections.

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