

Challenging Trends within Slovak Party System in the Context of 2016 Elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic¹

ONDŘEJ FILIPEC



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Abstract: *The 2016 Elections to the National Council in Slovakia are considered a political earthquake. Social Democrats lost 34 out of 83 seats, the Euro sceptic party SaS almost doubled its representation, the nationalistic Slovak National Party returned to the Parliament with 15 seats and three „newcomers“ entered the Parliament: the (neo) fascist Kotleba – ĽSNS, conservative We are Family (SME RODINA – Boris Kollár) and centrist #Network (#Sieť). Changes in composition raised questions about party system institutionalization and opened a debate about challenging trends within the Slovak party system including fragmentation, aggregation, high volatility, anti-systemness or alternation. Moreover, it again opened the issue of party newness and consolidation. This article deals with current trends in the context of the 2016 elections and tries to examine the current state of the Slovak Party system.*

Keywords: *Party system, Slovakia, Institutionalization, Consolidation, 2016 Elections, Fragmentation*

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Introduction

Unlike western democracies, political regimes in Central and Eastern Europe experienced a unique transformation of its political institutions after the fall of Communism. While these countries slowly approached democratic consolidation, new political parties emerged and started to play important role within the political system. Yet this process was slightly different in each country due to the variety of factors involved in this complex process. This article may be considered a case study dealing with institutional consolidation of the Slovak party system with a special focus on challenging trends. Trends are observed from the time Slovakia gained its independence in 1993 to the 2016 parliamentary elections, which are considered a political earthquake due to the loss of incumbent parties and the entrance of new parties.

The main aim of this article is to reveal and analyse ongoing trends within the Slovak party system and put them in the context of the 2016 general elections to the National Council. There is a principal research question whether the elections of 2016 established a completely new, less predictable period in the Slovak party system or whether this denotes a shift back to an already known set within the party system. In order to answer this question it is necessary to find the answer on several partial questions related to party system fragmentation, aggregation, the effective number of political parties or consolidation in relation to party 'newness'. This is possible only by analysing indexes that help characterize the Slovak party system. To what extent is the Slovak party system fragmented? What is the level of aggregation and the effective number of parties? How 'new' are the new political parties and do they contribute to the destabilization of the party system? The response to these questions in the context of the 2016 elections helps us understand the state of the Slovak party system. The main claim of this article is that the Slovak party system became less predictable after the 2016 elections, while it continues in strengthening its institutionalization.

For the purposes of this analysis, the structure of the article has been set up as follows. The first chapter deals with the concept of party system institutionalization or consolidation. It introduces a theory about party system consolidation and identifies key variables usually measured in order to determine how institutionalized the party system is. The chapter also presents some challenges in measuring institutionalization of party systems. The second and third chapters are empirical in their nature. The second chapter calculates selected indexes (Rae's index of party system fragmentation, Laakso-Taagepera's index of effective number of parties, Mayer's index of aggregation and Pedersen's index of total volatility). The third chapter deals with the challenging trends by analysing other variables, including the number of new political parties and their share, the age of the political parties or personal consolidation of the institution.

Surprisingly, there are only a few authors dealing with Slovak party system-institutionalization or consolidation. The contribution by Radoslav Štefančík (2012) is very valuable as he deals with the 2012 elections in the context of party system institutionalization. Štefančík uses the criteria defined by Basedau, Stroh and Erdmann (2006) and discusses institutionalization in four dimensions: position of the parties within society, party autonomy, organizational level and coherence (Štefančík 2012: 251). As pointed out by Štefančík, the Slovak party system was insufficiently institutionalized and there were limits in all four dimensions (Štefančík 2012: 266). Similarly, an important study has been done by Jozef Stískala (2012) who focused on stability and calculated several indexes (using concepts by Sarah Birch, Maurice Pedersen, Richard Rose or Neil Munro) in relation to the 2010 and 2012 elections. He discovered that the elections of 2010 and 2012 were not turning points in the case of volatility but after 2012 there was an especially new liberal entity which changed the political arena (Stískala 2012: 238). Trends have also been observed within the party system.

Several trends were presented by Petr Just and Jakub Charvát (2018) who focused on the 2016 elections in the context of the concept of 'critical elections', as well as on the effective number of parties, voting volatility, and classification of political parties according to their life cycle (Just – Charvát 2018: 38). Both authors also refer to certain inconsistencies in existing literature about the dynamics of the Slovak party system. They point out that Jakub Šedo (2007: 132) considered the system as 'relatively unstable', while on the contrary Ladislav Cabada, Vít Hloušek and Petr Jurek (2013: 88) considered the system 'relatively highly stable'. Both authors also pointed out that after 2002 there was a change in cleavages and thus it is likely that the Slovak party system entered a new phase (Just – Charvát 2018: 38). Dušan Leška characterized the system as multi-party though with a dominant party, which succeeded in gaining the support of voters and benefit from the socio-economic cleavage that emerged after the definite fall of Mečiarism² (see Leška 2013: 85). Petr Just and Jakub Charvát conclude that in many aspects the 2016 elections were critical for the Slovak party system. This article develops other aspects important for analysing party systems and extends the perspective as Just and Charvát focused on within the Slovak party system from 2012 onwards. Moreover, it will be later shown that in some characteristics the 2016 elections shifted the Slovak party system back in time to 2002 without, however, positive expectations for the future.

2 Within the Slovak community of political scientists the term 'Mečiarism' is often criticized as a journalistic concept. The core of the argument is that -isms are linked to some official ideology which was absent during Mečiar's years in the office of Prime Minister.

Measuring institutionalization of the party system

There is extensive research in the political science dealing with the institutionalization as institutions are considered to be relevant actors for decades. A special sub-category of research dedicated to political institutions is one related to party systems or political parties. It is important to note that there are various concepts and approaches which make the study of political parties and party systems a real challenge. There are three key challenges:

First, the word ‘institutionalization’ is sometimes confused with ‘consolidation’. In general, institutionalization refers to institutional establishment of a convention or norm, while consolidation may be described as a process of making a subject stronger, more solid or stable’. For example, as claimed by Alefe Abeje (2013: 316) ‘*institutionalization of a party system is indispensable for the success of democratic consolidation*’. However, party institutionalization does not constitute a sufficient condition for consolidation of democracy (Yardimci-Geyikçi 2015). Some political scientists talk about party system consolidation. For example, in his study of Central European party systems David M. Olsen (1998) talks about the beginning signs of consolidation of the party systems for which aggregate measures serve as an indicator, with special reference to effective number of parties (Olsen 1998: 463). Next to the ‘institutionalization’ or ‘consolidation’, there are other terms related to a party system. For example, Michal Klíma (1998) in relation to the Czech Republic observed several phases of transition from the single-party state system to a pluralist party system including ‘anti-party sentiment and proliferation of Parties’, he wrote also about ‘emergence and crystallization’, ‘formation and consolidation’ and ‘stabilization’ (Klíma 1998: 493). In other words, there are many terms with lack of clarity.

Second, while some researchers link institutionalization of the party system with political parties altogether (for example Michelle Kuenzi and Gina M. S. Lambright (2001), who deal with African countries or Scott Mainwaring and Timothy R. Scully (1995), who deal with Latin American parties) many researchers separate institutionalization of political parties from the institutionalization of the party system. This implies that there are two levels: the level of individual political parties and the level of the party system. The question is whether political parties with a low level of institutionalization may create an institutionalized system or the opposite: if the system may be institutionalized while some of the parties are not? It is logical to expect that a fragile political party with a low level of institutionalization is affecting the level of party system institutionalization.

Third, many researchers neglect the fact that a party system also operates within a certain environment (*polity*). Thus, there is a third level of political institution (or body) in which the party system operates: the parliament. The level of party system institutionalization directly affects the effectiveness and functions of the parliament, which has implications for the behaviour of the

parties. In other words, all three levels (party, party system and political institution) are linked and mutually dependent.

In this article, the term 'institutionalization' is understood similarly to the definition provided by Samuel Huntington who defined it as a '*process by which organizations and procedures acquire value and stability*' (Huntington 1968: 12). In this case, the value and stability of political parties is dealt with. The value of the political party may be defined by its power expressed by popular support, number of seats in the political body or simply just by its presence or existence. However, next to the measurable and empirical variables the value of the political parties may be influenced by personal attitudes and expectations. In other words, next to the institutionalist approach to measure power, there is also relevance of power understood through the constructivist perspective. Then there is the issue of stability. Again, the question is *what* stability? Is it stability of the party system as such, stability of its individual parts or stability of the political body in which the party system exists and operates? As all three levels are related and mutually dependent, it is worth it to focus on all three levels. Political institutions can rarely work without a stable party system³ and a party system cannot work without stable parties. In other words, a stable party system is such a system in which parties remain present, they do not dramatically change their position towards other parties and there is predictability about their behaviour. This means that stability is linked to the value as a dramatic increase of the value by one or more parties may lead to change of party position towards other parties. This is for example when a bi-party system turns into a party system with the dominant party.

However, there are other important variables in measuring institutionalization understood as stability of Party configuration. instance Steffan I. Lindberg (2007) focuses on eight variables (Lindberg 2007: 223–225):

1. The number of parties in the legislature;
2. The number of new parties;
3. The share (%) of new parties;
4. The number of parties voted out;
5. The share (%) of parties voted out;
6. The share (%) of seats in the legislature occupied by the largest party;
7. The share (%) of seats in the legislature held by the runner-up;
8. Legislative seat volatility.

From the above set of variables it is evident that party value and stability is the subject of permanent change, which is formally demonstrated and reflected during elections. Another important question is *how much change* means the

3 Yet there are exceptions in history where stability of the political institutions was managed due to personal continuity of deputies and members of the government (e.g. Italy).

de-institutionalization of the party system and how much change is acceptable? Measuring change and its impact on the party system is a similarly challenging task closely related to challenges of institutionalization (see Nwokora – Pelizzo 2017). In Central and Eastern Europe, where a transition from a non-democratic political system occurred, the situation is much more complicated as there is no point of reference for the ideal state of institutionalization. From this perspective the institutionalized party system is something like the ideal type in which political parties maintain their value and stability for a long period of time. This is impossible due to a lack of stable cleavages and voter's volatility, which is present from the early beginning in some party systems (Novagrockine 2001). The party systems in Eastern and Central Europe are 'unfrozen' and the trend is exactly the opposite: new parties with undefined ideologies which may be better labelled electoral projects based on marketing methods rather than classical political parties. In this way the party systems of Central and Eastern Europe are specific and differ from those in Western Europe where political parties enjoyed stable electoral support so that many authors considered them at least partially frozen (Wolinetz 2006). From the intra-state perspective, party systems develop much faster than other political institutions. As pointed out by Pippa Norris and Geoffrey Evans (1999) assessing British politics: 'party politics are in a state of constant flux, following the fortunes of the latest opinion poll or parliamentary division' (Norris – Evans 1999: XXVI).

The presence of new parties and electoral behaviour necessarily opens the issue of complexity. For this reason, some political scientists are going far beyond a focus on political parties as they assess also the influence of the electoral systems on the institutionalization. They deal with electoral volatility, fragmentation, party system openness, pluralism, party regulatory law and regulation finances, or historical influences (see Enyedi – Bértoa 2016; 2018; Fink-Hafner – Krašovec 2013; Manning 2005). The situation may be even more complicated if we consider other factors such as party identity, party communication or media presentation (see Pinterič – Žuborová 2014), all of which may influence how voters value the party. It is impossible to deal in complexity with the Slovak party system. Instead, the following article focuses on key characteristics which may be explored by indexes and their values in the longer period.

Trends presented by indexes

Contemporary comparative political science uses various indexes to provide some idea about the characteristic of the party system. It is important to note that every index may be criticised from the point of 'incomplexity' or mathematical logic. Each party system is unique and constantly developing. Fewer numbers may hardly express the complexity of living forms of organization or institutions. However, numbers allow us to transform some characteristics into

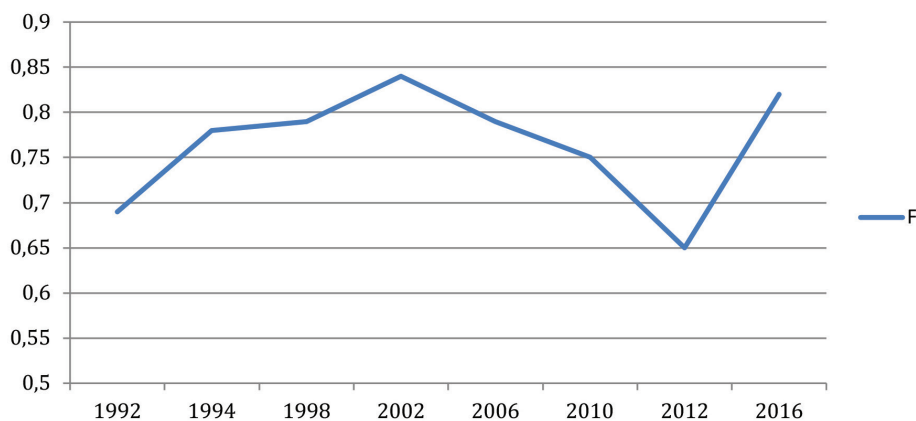
a measurable point of reference which might be compared among countries. Nevertheless, numbers as such must always be put into a deeper context of the individual party system.

Among most important indexes used in contemporary political science is the index of the party system fragmentation. This index, introduced by Douglas W. Rae, may be counted as follows: from the number 1 is deduced the sum of proportions which are counted as the percentage of mandates within a selected chamber multiplied by the other. It means that the index varies from 1 to 0 and represents the likelihood that two randomly selected deputies belong to different parties. In ideal cases, the value 1 describes a situation in which all elected members belong to the same party and the value 0 represents the almost impossible situation in which all members belong to different parties (Novák 1996: 413). In relation to this explanation Czech political scientist Miroslav Novák refers to Lijphart, who says that the fragmentation index can help us better imagine as it simply reflects our intuitive judgement (Novák 1996: 413). However, an important element within the index is the multiplication by the other. From the logic of multiplication by the other the index makes some (bigger) parties more relevant than other (smaller) parties. The index is counted according to this formula:

$$F = 1 - HH = 1 - \sum p_i^2$$

In chart 1 we observe that the 2016 elections in Slovakia increased party system fragmentation to a level similar to that of 2002. Unfortunately, the index alone will not tell us how healthy the party system is since it is hard to define a good value of the index because every party system is unique. However, the value is usually ranked between 0,5 – 0,7 (Pecháček 1999), values higher than 0,7 refer to multiparty systems and values between 0,5 to 0,67 are characteristic for bipartisan settings. A relatively high index in the Slovak case refers to a shift towards the atomization of the multi-party system. As for 2016 the number of parties present in the National Council increased from six to eight and their relative size was adjusted.

Figure 1: Rae's Index of Party System Fragmentation



Source: Author, based on electoral results.

Note: Results of 2012 are slightly deformed by Smer, who got up to 55 % of the mandates and during the 1992 elections almost one third of the votes were wasted.

The changing number of political parties present in the Parliament had an impact on the effective number of parties, which is another important index used within political science. The index presented by Laakso and Taagepera is similar to the index of fragmentation but instead of deducing the sum of proportions, which are counted as the percentage of mandates within a selected chamber multiplied by the other, the number 1 is divided by the sum of such proportions:

$$N = \frac{1}{HH} = \frac{1}{\sum p_i^2}$$

Laakso-Taagepera's index is one of the most used indexes within comparative political science (Chytilík 2007). As pointed out by Taagepera and Shugart (2003), it represents a number of hypothetically identical parties, which have the same effect on the fractionalization of the party system as does the effect of the real number of parties with a different size (Taagepera – Sugart 2003: 456). Since 2016 the number of effective parties in Slovakia increased from 3.5 to almost six (see chart 2), which might be interpreted as a positive development. However, as noted earlier, indexes just represent numbers which need interpretation. In the ideal conditions increasing the number of effective parties creates a higher likelihood of effective politics but this strongly depends on the ideology of the political parties as some parties present anti-democratic and anti-system elements. This is also the case of Slovakia and Kotleba's neo-fascist party, which might be labelled an anti-system party in the terms of criteria presented by Giovanni Capoccia and Giovanni Sartori. Ad absurdum, if the number

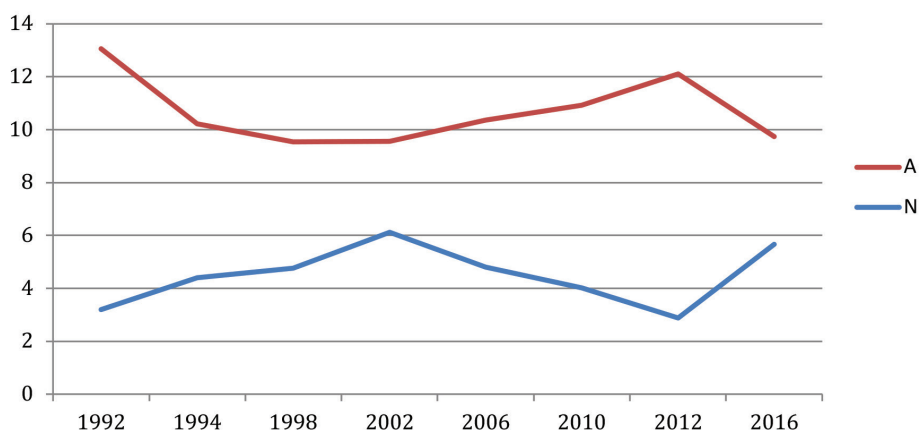
of effective parties is five and they belong to communist, fascist, Islamist (or other fundamental ideology) party blocs, then we can in no sense talk about a healthy party system. For this reason anti-system parties shall be reduced from the number of effective parties. This step, however, is not without problems as the presence of anti-system party in the party system changes the dynamics of party competition from extra-centric to in-centric and may stimulate positive cooperation among parties, which cannot be expressed by the index. In other words, the presence of an anti-system party in the party system creates pressure on remaining democratic parties to cooperate and leaves only blackmail potential to the bad newcomer, as defined by Giovanni Sartori.

Another important element within the party system related to an effective number of parties is the issue of the strongest party's position (as visible in chart 2 the aggregation index is reversibly mirroring the number of effective parties index). For this purpose L. Mayer introduced the Aggregation index, which measures the relative size of the strongest party (seats) in the parliament to the number of other parties (N) and is simply counted as follows:

$$A=SN$$

The higher value of the index, the higher distance between the leading party and the higher concentration of the party system. The index is counted as S (percentage of mandates of the strongest party within a body) divided by the number of political parties presented in a political body:

Figure 2: Laakso-Taagepera's Index of Effective Number of Parties (N) and Mayer's Index of Aggregation (A)



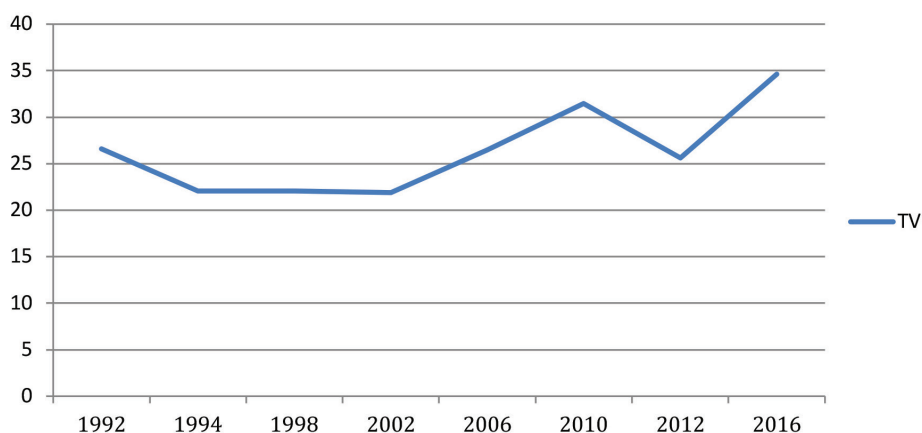
Source: Author, based on electoral results.

In the case of Slovakia the aggregation fell from about 12 to 10, which means that the winner of the previous elections lost its relative influence within the

Parliament. However, strength of the party is not only defined by the number of seats, but also by other formal and informal aspects (such as position within government, access to functions, negotiation skills, relation with other parties etc.). In this sense the index value is dependent on the performance of the leading party, which in Slovakia is Smer – social democracy. Despite Smer being the long term winner of four elections since 2006, the party may suffer from internal (domestic) and external problems. For example, we can talk about changes in popular support after the murder of the Slovak journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancée Martina Kušnírová, which resulted in the resignation of key party figures including the prime minister, Robert Fico. As the external challenge we can talk about general decline of Social Democracy in Europe, which has been materialized elsewhere in the form of decreased popular support and which is linked to the tendencies described by Tony Judt more than a decade ago (Judt 2011).

In general, people are losing trust in traditional political parties with a consolidated ideology based on cleavages (Rokkan – Lipset 1967). This trend may also be observed in Slovakia and may be expressed by the index of volatility presented by Mogens Pedersen in 1979. His index is based on the percentage gains of the parties present in the party system. The index is equal to the net percentage of voters who changed their votes for a different party and ranges from 0 to 100. While 0 represents a situation without changes, 100 represents an earthquake scenario where all parties have disappeared and have been replaced by new parties. In other words, a volatility index represents the change among voters and may be calculated as summing the absolute values of all gains and losses divided by the number of parties present. As present in chart 3, during the 2016 elections the volatility was jumping close to 35 %, which is a relatively high number (see Vincenzo – Chiaramonte – Soare 2018).

Figure 3: Pedersen's Index of Total Volatility



Source: Author, based on electoral results.

To brief, the Slovak party system is more fragmented, the position of the leading party (aggregation) is lower and the parties experienced an increased volatility of voters. The only potentially positive element is the increased number of effective parties, however, it shall be noted that the presence of an anti-system party in the party system is another feature of an unhealthy party system. Considering all factors together, the Slovak party system is in its worst condition since its emergence. Unfortunately, there are also other disturbing elements which cannot be revealed by indexes, but rather by a deeper analysis of individual party characteristics or focusing on the personal element of political parties – the party representatives themselves.

Trends presented by variables

As noted earlier, the issue of consolidation and stability is closely related to new political parties. It is then a question of what is a new political party? Surprisingly, one of the first concepts they do focus on is not time but rather new issues. Simply said, a new party is such a party which brings new issues or new conflicts of dimension into the political arena (see Harmel 1985: 405). This attitude, however, requires a precise definition of what is understood as a new issue as the border between existing and new may be sometimes problematic. Other authors adopt more complex views and look at changes in party name, ideological change, changes in electoral base, legal status or attitudes to policies (Barnea and Rahat 2010: 306) or even a personal basis (Emanuele and Chiaramonte 2016: 3). For example when measuring party newness Krystyna Litton looks at changes within the programme, leadership and name plus combinations of such changes on one axis and institutional changes on the another (Litton 2014: 720). Also, Daniel Šárovec is working with two axes based on Lucardie's (2000) and Sikk's (2012) typology, assessing ideological motivations and relationships to established parties (Šárovec 2018: 85). Some authors, such as Allan Sikk and Philipp Köker (2017), are proposing composite indexes to measure party newness.

Despite this, approaches are various and highlight different aspects; most of them working within a time perspective and focusing on institutional aspects. This attitude is observed within this contribution. While institutional issues such as change of name, change of the party statute, date of registration or date of dissolution are easy to observe from the register, there shall be a principal question answered regarding how to count time: how to count the age of political parties within party system consolidation? There are several important milestones in the yearly life of political parties.

Option one is to measure the age from when the party was officially established. This time is remarkable by some party congress where the existence of the party was officially declared or might be the same as the date indicated

in the decision of competent authorities to register the party. This is also the case of Slovakia where, according to law, parties are created when registered (§ 6(1) of the Act no. 85/2005 Coll.). However, measuring the age of political parties since formal establishment may be problematic as the party may exist out of the parliament without any serious influence and activity. Parties simply may be in a state of hibernation. Moreover, when 'awakened' and entering into the parliament then the average age of the party's age will jump significantly without its members having serious practical experience.

Option two is to measure the age from when the party enters the parliament, which is an important moment for every political party. However, in many cases before succeeding into primary elections parties are often successful in local, regional or even elections to the European Parliament before entering national parliaments. For this reason by using this option researchers avoid relevance and experience of the party on the different levels of politics. Moreover, the vast majority of the registered political parties usually never enter parliament or even succeed on a regional level.

Option three is somewhere in between, as the age might be measured from when the party registered for their first elections. This may happen a) regardless of the body or b) with regard to a specific institution. Nevertheless, this option is related to a party's specific character as the aim of the political parties is to seek power and participate in the elections. However, even here parties are facing similar problems. While some take elections seriously and have a fully professional campaign, others may have a very indifferent attitude. In this sense a date of establishment, a date of registration or even party intention and presence on the local level may have different relevance when considering party newness.

Unfortunately, there also other issues that present problems, such as when to measure the age of political parties as parties change their name, parties merge with other parties, creates joint lists or split. As mentioned by Harmel and Robertson, new parties may occur as the consequence of a merger, split, natural creation or by reorganization of former parties (Harmel and Robertson 1985: 509). Sometimes parties are outside the parliament for a long period, fight for its survival, get resurrected and then again enter into the parliament. Sometimes parties are exposed with significant personal changes in membership structure or political programme. What if 50 % of the members split and create a new party? Shall the age start completely from the beginning or shall it continue? And what if the party changes its name or is re-established, for example, as a result of an Administrative Court decision for violating democratic standards in the case of far-right/left wing parties? For example, the contemporary party Kotleba (People's Party Our Slovakia) entered into the National Council for the first time after the elections of 2016, which took place on 5 March and its deputies started to execute the mandate on 23 March. However, the party

was active in local politics before March 2016, as the party secured one seat in November 2013 during the elections to self-governing regions and thus played a relevant role in local politics. Moreover, the roots of the party are much longer. At the beginning there was the Civic Association called Slovak Togetherness (*Slovenská pospolitosť*) which had existed since 1996 and briefly as the Slovak Togetherness – National Party (*Slovenská pospolitosť – Národná strana*) which was dissolved by the Slovak Supreme Court due to its non-compliance with the Constitution. On 20 October 2000 a new party was registered – The party of Wine Friends (*Strana priateľov vína*), which in May 2009 changed its name to the People's Party of Social Solidarity (*Ľudová strana sociálnej solidarity*) and in February 2010 to the People's Party Our Slovakia (*Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko*) until 9 November 2015 when the party adopted its current name Kotleba – People's Party Our Slovakia (Kotleba – *Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko*). From its beginning, the party of Wine Friends was full of radicals; however, it was still not the party as transformed by Kotleba. According to formal rules, the party shall not be considered new in 2016 due to almost two decades of existence. However, according to the Slovak register it is impossible to identify the moment when the party was transformed close to its contemporary form.

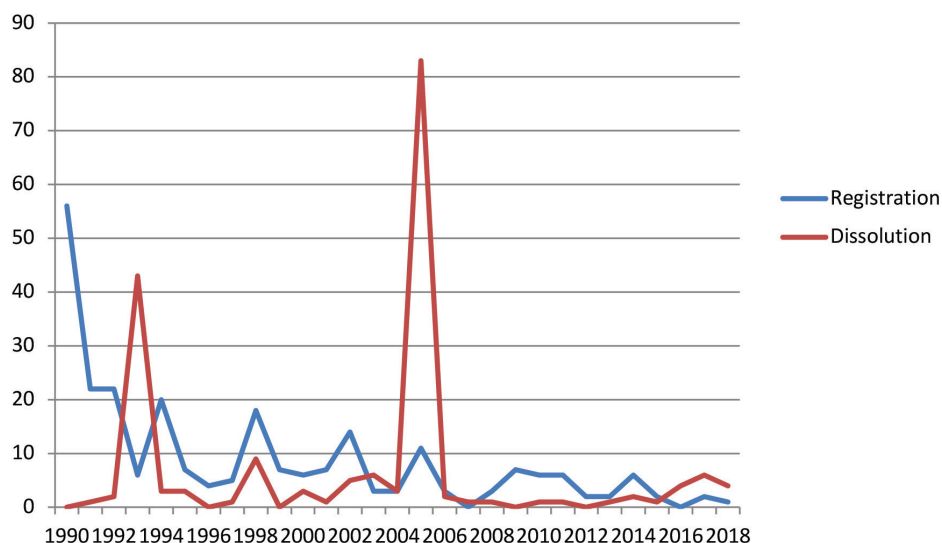
As the genealogy of Kotleba shows, there were several changes in names thus they are not a suitable indicator of party newness. Moreover, some parties are using different names than that of what is registered. The case of Kotleba also showed that a party might be relevant on the local level before entering the national arena in the parliament. Thus, the best criteria of how to measure the newness of the party, as later used in this article, is according to its legal entity. For this purpose the official date of registration by a competent authority is important (in the case of Slovakia it is the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic). When parties are making pre-election coalition then the age shall be measured as the average age of parties in the coalition.

Nevertheless, there is another related question: how long might a new party be considered new? One approach suggests that it might be considered new if one electoral cycle has not passed. For example, if there are elections to the parliament in 2012 and the party is established in 2013, then the party might be considered new also in 2016 if we consider a four-year term of the parliament's regular cycle. Another approach may be to consider a party new until it succeeds to gain seats in a public body for the first time. However, this second approach means that the party is rather 'new in the parliament' as opposed to 'new as such'. In order to avoid confusion it is better to follow the first approach.

Measuring party newness in Slovakia is a very challenging task due to data availability and gaps within the law. It is possible to bypass the law and not register a new political party. Instead, one of the older, already registered parties may be used, followed by status change and change of name. For this reason

date of registration is not decisive and each party shall be treated individually, which is almost impossible. The Slovak register of political parties contains 253 political subjects registered, out of which 59 are active, 95 are in the process of dissolving and 99 have been deleted. Since its registration between 1990 and 1. 2. 2019, all 253 parties have made 209 changes in statutes, adopted 40 new statutes and together made 238 changes in names.⁴ Some of them made repeated changes and changed the statute several times per year, or made many changes in statute due to the long existence of the party. For example, the Party of the Hungarian Community (SMK) made 17 changes, the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) made 15 changes and the Slovak National Party (SNS) made 13 changes of the statute. The party New Parliament adopted 4 new statutes and changed its name twice. The changes are presented in charts 4 and 5.

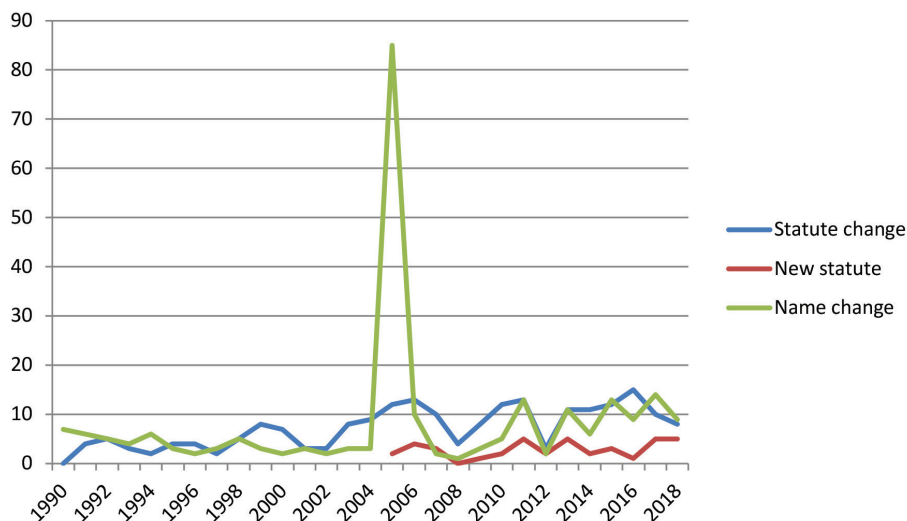
Figure 4: Registration and Dissolution of Political Parties in Slovakia



Source: Author, based on the Ministry of Interior.

⁴ When entering the process of dissolution a party name is changed automatically with adding after the name – ‘in dissolution’. This approach, however, has only come into use more recently, which is why data are inconsistent and also why change of name is problematic indicator.

Figure 5: Statute, New Statute and Name Change of Political Parties in Slovakia



Source: Author, based on the Ministry of Interior.

Due to data inconsistency, it is very difficult to derive conclusions. However, from chart 4 it is evident that after the fall of Communism there were more than 50 new parties registered and later incorporated into the online register. The majority of them did not survive the creation of independent Slovakia and thus were deleted in 1993. The establishment of an independent state was another impetus for the registration of new political parties, almost of the same importance as 1998, which in Slovakia is associated with fall of the Mečiar's government. Most of the political parties were dissolved in 2005 due to the adaption of a new law (Act no. 85/2005 Coll. on political parties and political movements which has been updated 13 times. In 2005 a total of 83 political parties were dissolved, out of which 79 were due to § 34(4), which set a deadline for political parties to comply with the requirement to deliver to the Ministry of Interior data about party seats and statutory body. The obvious purpose of § 34(4) was to clean out the inactive parties. Since 1990 there have also been, however, other reasons for dissolving parties. For example, the radical *Slovenská pospolitost' – národná strana* of Marian Kotleba was dissolved after the decision of the Supreme Court of the Slovak Republic (§ 17) and 9 political parties were dissolved due to failure to submit an annual report (§ 30). In 17 cases, which is the second highest reason, parties were dissolved on a voluntary basis. In chart 5 it is evident than in the last five years changes in statutes are much more frequent than in the 1990s,

which may be a sign of lesser consolidation, but also caused by other factors such as legislative changes. For example, this is evident in the case of law for the establishment of new political parties. A previous requirement of 1,000 signatures was extended to 10,000 in 2005 which encouraged some leaders to 'retake' an already registered party.

Nevertheless, the date of registration is the only date with some relevance that might be used for analysing all political parties in the register. On the 5th and 6th of June 1992 there were the last elections to the Slovak National Council (*Slovenská národná rada*), which resulted in the success of five political parties: Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (*Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko*; HZDS), The Party of the Democratic Left (*Strana demokratickej ľavice*; SDL), The Christian Democratic Movement (*Kresťanskodemokratické hnutie*; KDH), The Slovak National Party (*Slovenská národná strana*; SNS) and the Hungarian Coalition composed of the Coexistence (*Maďarské kresťanskodemokratické hnutie Együttélés-Spolužitie-Wspólnota-Soužití*; COEX; in Slovakia better known as MKM-EGY), registered on 1 March 1990 (see Kopeček 2003), and The Hungarian Christian Democratic Movement (*Magyar Kereszténydemokrata Mozgalom, Maďarské kresťanskodemokratické hnutie*), registered on 19 March 1990. Among the five political parties only HZDS may be considered a new political party as HZDS was registered on 3 May 1991, just 13 months before the elections took place. The remaining four parties were established before the 1990 elections to the Slovak National Council, which took place in June. During the 1992 elections, parties had an average age of 23,4 months and KDH (which was registered on 23. 2. 1990) become the oldest successful party (the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic 2019; Kopeček 2000). The low average age of political parties is not surprising as the elections of 1992 are considered to be the beginning of the party system in Slovakia (see for example Leška 2013: 74).

Since 1 January 1993 the National Council of the Slovak Republic (*Národná rada Slovenskej republiky*) was established and between 30 September and 1 October 1994 the elections took place. Before the elections HZDS made a coalition with the Peasants' Party of Slovakia (*Roľnícka strana Slovenska*; RSS), which was established on 10. 10. 1990. Also the Hungarian Coalition (*Magyar Koalíció, Maďarská koalícia*; MK) was created from several parties established during 1990/1991 including the Hungarian Christandemocratic Movement (*Magyar Kereszténydemokrata Mozgalom – Maďarské kresťanskodemokratické hnutie*), MKM-EGY and Hungarian Civic Party (*Magyar Polgári Párt – Maďarská občianska strana*). Another coalition was Common Choice (*Spoločná voľba*), composed from the Party of the Democratic Left (*Strana demokratickej ľavice*; SDL), The Social Democratic Party of Slovakia (*Sociálnodemokratická strana Slovenska*), the Farmers' Movement (*Hnutie poľnohospodárov Slovenskej republiky*) and the Slovak Green Party (*Strana zelených na Slovensku*), which scored second (Plešivčák 2013: 177). Also in this coalition, parties were established between

1990 and 1991 and thus can not be considered as new. Among those successful old parties were also present KDH and SNS (Puskášová 2009: 91).

If there are some new parties during 1994 elections it is certainly the Democratic Union of Slovakia (*Demokratická únia Slovenska*; DEÚS), registered on 18 March 1994 and the Union of Workers of Slovakia (*Združenie robotníkov Slovenska*; ZRS) registered on 26 April 1994. As for 1994 the average age of the parties present in the parliament was 36,9 months or slightly more than 3 years.

Another election took place four years later. The elections of 1998 not only changed the course of Slovak politics set by Vladimír Mečiar and HZDS (see Hloušek – Kopeček 2003: 19) but also resulted almost in doubling the average age of political parties present in the parliament. This is mainly due to presence of well-established political parties such as HZDS, SDĽ, SNS and SMK. There was also The Party of the Hungarian Coalition (*Strana maďarskej koalície, Magyar Koalíció Pártja*; SMK-MKP), which is not completely new as it was created from the parties of Hungarian Coalition as a result of changes within electoral law establishing 5 % threshold for each party within coalition, while Hungarian Christiantdemocratic Movement, Hungarian Civic Party and MKM-EGY later ceased to exist. Later, in September 2012 the Party of the Hungarian Coalition (Magyar Koalíció Pártja) changed its name to the Party of the Hungarian Community (Magyar Közösség Pártja). According to the register, the party just changed its name without changing registration and for this reason can be considered as the follower of the older parties (and thus counted as the average of merged subjects).

A similar problem is with the Slovak Democratic Coalition (*Slovenská demokratická koalícia*, SDK), which is from certain perspective new, because it was registered on 19 March 1998. However, the party acts as purposefully established subject to overcome obstacles caused by electoral law amendment. The party is not new, as it was established by five already existing opposition parties: Democratic Union of Slovakia, KDH, Democratic Party⁵, Social Democratic party of Slovakia and the Green Party under the leadership of Mukuláš Dzurinda from KDH. The parties were established in between 1989 and 1994, with an average age of all subjects 7,6 years. Moreover, SDK was created by 150 people who were members of their „mother“ parties. It implies that the only successful party, which may be considered as new, is the Party of Civic Understanding (*Strana občianskeho porozumenia*, SOP), registered on 19 February 1998. Despite new, the average age of political parties present in the national parliament rose from 6 to 8 years.

Another election took place in 2002. Next to HZDS, SMK, KDH and KSS (Communist Party of Slovakia, *Komunistická strana Slovenska*, KSS), which was

5 Most probably, there is a mistake within Slovak register as it states that the party has been established on 1. 1. 1000. In fact, the party was renewed in December 1989.

registered already on 19 March 1991, there were three successful new political parties: The Slovak Democratic and Christian Union – Democratic Party (*Slovenská demokratická a kresťanská únia*; SDKÚ and since 2006 when merged with the Democratic party also *Slovenská demokratická a kresťanská únia – Demokratická strana*; SDKÚ – DS),⁶ was registered on 18 February 2000. On 8 November 1999 there was registered also SMER (since June 2003 named as „*SMER (tretia cesta)*” and later since 2005 with contemporary name *Smer – sociálna demokracia*, Smer – SD), and the Alliance of the New Citizen (*Aliancia Nového Občana*; ANO), registered on 14 May 2001. Despite three new actors the average age of political parties rose to 8,15 years. Nevertheless, it is important to note that SNS failed to enter parliament which was another factor pressing the average age of successful parties down. The reason was that SNS shortly split as former president Anna Malíková prevented supporters of controversial leader Ján Slota to take positions on a candidate list. As a result Slota established „True Slovak National Party“ (*Pravá Slovenská národná strana*) which existed shortly between 2001 and 2005 (when again merged with SNS). Due to split SNS lost many potential votes.

During the June 2006 elections there were no new political parties among those successful as only *Smer – sociálna demokracia*, SNS (which returned into the parliament), SMK, HZDS and two Christian democratic parties SDKÚ and KDH made it to the parliament (Štefančík 2008: 62). As a result the average age of parties rose to 13,2 years, setting maximum average age of the Slovak party system.

Following the June 2010 elections there were two new political parties in the parliament which reduced the average age, moreover HZDS went out from the parliament which contributed to decrease of the average age. Among new political parties were Freedom and Solidarity (*Sloboda a solidarita*; SaS), registered on 27 February 2009 and Most-Híd (the bridge), registered on 3 July 2009. However, even in the case of Most-Híd the „newness“ can be questioned, as the party has been created after many its members left SMK, including its president Béla Bugár. However, there is no legal predecessor and that is why according to register may be considered as new and as a result the average age of political parties dropped to 10,7 years.

The average dropped also in after the following elections in March 2012 to 8,9 years. While Direction – Social Democracy, KDH, Most-Híd, SDKÚ-DS and SaS continued their presence, SNS after six years for the second time failed to enter the parliament which contributed to average age drop. Moreover, there was a new coming Ordinary People (in full Ordinary People and Independent Personalities; *Obyčajní Ľudia a nezávislé osobnosti*, OĽaNO), registered on 11

6 However, many members of the SDKÚ were until 2002 members of the SDK so full „newness“ may be also questioned.

November 2011. However, newness in this case might be also questioned on the ground that party was new, but some of its members were during previous elections elected to the parliament on the candidate list of SaS. On the other side they often demonstrated loyalty different to SaS. These factors contributed to the drop in average age of political parties present in the parliament by 4,3 years, which is more than one electoral cycle.

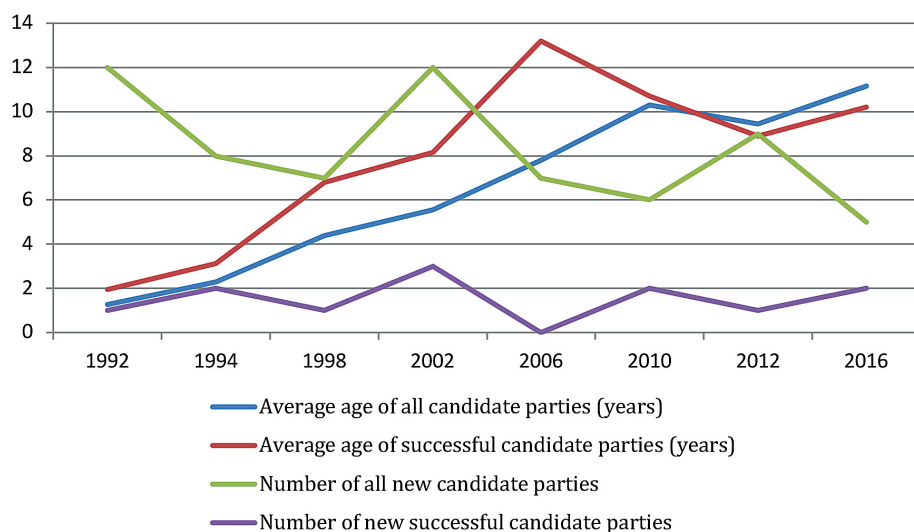
The last elections in March 2016 brought to the parliament three „newcomers“ (Garaj 2018: 149). However, the „newness“ shall not be questioned only in the case of one of them. It is the case of the party named as #Network (*#Sieť*), which was registered on 12 July 2014 under a different name – the Slovak Conservative Party (*Slovenská konzervatívna strana*; SKS). On the other side the already mentioned Kotleba – People’s Party Our Slovakia was also a newcomer to the parliament, but not new as such due to registration made on 20 October 2000. Despite new in the parliament it became third oldest party after Smer-SD and SNS. Very tricky is dealing with the third newcomer party We are Family – Boris Kollár (*SME RODINA – Boris Kollár*) which according to rules relying on registration cannot be considered as new (it was registered already on 6 July 2011). However, the movement itself was established in November 2015 with completely different content than its formal predecessor. The reason of difference in date and content is that Slovak law allows changing name of the party without new registration. As a result the current party leader Boris Kollár acquired registration of an already existing party: the Party of Citizens of Slovakia (*Strana občanov Slovenska*), registered in July 2011, and just changed its name on 30 November 2015 just 3 months before the elections. It was purposeful step to avoid formal requirements for new party registration which might be time demanding. For this reason in this particular example date of registration shall not be binding as it is completely different party and for this reason shall be considered as „new“. As a result the average age of political parties presented in the parliament increased from 8,9 years in 2012 to 10,2 years in 2016.⁷ Based on all 253 entries into Slovak party register we can say, that as of 2019 the average age of all parties in the register is 8,4 years.⁸ The development of party age average is present in the chart 6.

From the graph 6 there are evident several trends in the Slovak party system. First, until 2012 the average age of successful parties was higher than that of all candidate parties which might be explained as the tendency to vote for established subjects. This was most visible in 2006 where the distance between both averages is highest. This situation however changed with the 2012 elections and continued in 2016. Nevertheless, the difference in age average is minimal.

7 In the Czech Republic the average age of political parties after 2017 elections was approx.16 years.

8 Counted as the average from the difference between year of party registration and party dissolution in the case of dissolved parties and difference between year of party registration and 2019 in the case of active parties.

Figure 6: Number of New successful parties and Average Age of successful Parties in Years



Source: Author, based on party registrations.

Second, from the long term perspective the number of new candidate parties is slightly decreasing with only little impact on success of new candidates. In 2016 the number of new candidate parties was lowest in history, while the average of successful new candidates was kept at two. Third, there is visible negative correlation between number of new parties (both successful and all) and the average age of the political parties. Despite negative influence of new political parties on the average age, the number is increasing which may indicate increasing consolidation of the party system. Moreover, as pointed by Bardovič, the changes are not only of formal significance but are observable also in the party behavior. Political parties in Slovakia are more pragmatic than in recent years and that there is close party association with their leaders and that parties are more tied to the political system as a such (Bardovič 2016: 108)

As the graph shows, there were 12 parties running for elections in 1992, which may be considered new, because they were registered between 9 June 1990 when last elections took place and 6 June 1992 when 1992 elections took place. The relative high number is caused by the birth of democracy. Also later during 1994 elections there were 8 out of 17 running parties which may be labelled as new and situation continued also in 1998 and 2002. Relatively high number of new parties in this period is caused by democratic consolidation. Despite the line in chart 6 has „up and down“ tendency, however, instead of using absolute numbers it is worth to count in relative numbers. Then the tendency is de-creas-

ing over time. As of 1992 new political parties counted for 52 % and the share decreased to 47 % in 1994 and 1998, to just 35 % in 2012 or 22 in 2016 which is well visible from the table 1. In other words, with increasing time there is lesser proportion of new political parties, which may be interpreted as a sign of increasing consolidation or increasing political passivity. On the other side, there is a second long term trend, that on average there are two successful political parties among new. In combination of both factors we can expect, that there is increased predictability of the environment which allow to new political parties recognize the moment for establishing new political party. This development is summarized in the table 1.

Table 1: Parties development and wasted votes

Year	Parties total	New parties	Share of new parties among parties (no.)	Wasted votes (total)	Wasted votes (new parties)	Effective votes (new parties)	Average age of candidate parties (all)
1992	23	12	52 %	23,8 %	12,4 %	37,3 %	1,3
1994	17	8	47 %	13 %	4,1 %	15,9 %	2,3
1998	17	7	41 %	5,8 %	1,1 %	8 %	4,4
2002	25	12	48 %	18,2 %	7,9 %	36,6 %	5,6
2006	21	7	33 %	12 %	4,7%	0 %	7,8
2010	18	6	33 %	14,9 %	1,3 %	20,3 %	10,3
2012	26	9	35 %	19,4 %	3,4 %	8,6 %	9,4
2016	23	5	22 %	13,3 %	3,9%	12,2 %	11,2
Average	21,3	8,3	38,9 %	15,1 %	4,8 %	17,4 %	x

Source: The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic.

The wasted votes of new political parties is ranging between 12,4 % in 1992 and 1,1 % in 1998 with similar explanation. We can claim that on average new political parties are responsible for one third of wasted votes in Slovakia, with considerable exceptions in individual years (most significantly in 2010). However, in almost all years (with exception of 2006) new political parties were much more effective in changing votes into the seats. On average the effective votes are 3,5 times higher than the share of wasted votes. This means that some new political parties are very effective in transferring votes into mandates while other are extremely ineffective.

Some indexes presented in the previous chapter showed that regarding fragmentation, the aggregation or the effective number the current Slovak party

system is in similar condition as in 2002. Decreasing number of new political parties running for elections together with increasing average age of political parties running for elections and those who are successful and present in the National Council we can claim, that Slovak party system shows some features of progressing consolidation. However, the average age or number of new parties is rather short in providing characteristic of the party system. It is evident, that the Slovak party system changed significantly in terms of political ideologies. As visible from the comparison of tables 1 and 2, the Slovak party system evolved rapidly in terms of ideology represented.

Table 2: Composition of the National Council in 2002 (21 September).

Party	Share of seats	Registration/ Newness	Ideology
Movement for a Democratic Slovakia	24 %	3. 5. 1991 (existing)	National and Social Conservatism Populism
Slovak Democratic and Christian Union	18 %	18. 2. 2000 (new)	Liberalism Christian Democracy
Smer	16,67 %	8. 11. 1999 (new)	Social Democracy Left-wing nationalism (right-wing populism)
Party of the Hungarian Coalition	13,33 %	19. 3. 1990 (existing)	Minority interests (Autonomism) Christian Democracy Conservatism
Christian Democratic Movement	10 %	23. 2. 1990 (existing)	Christian Democracy Social Conservatism
Alliance of the New Citizen	10 %	14. 5. 2001 (new)	Liberalism
Communist Party of Slovakia	7,33 %	19. 3. 1991 (existing)	Communism Marxism-Leninism

Source: Own elaboration based on electoral results.

Note: As pointed by Marušiak (2006) it is hard to classify Smer passed many positions towards programme: from not affiliating to any ideology but „rationalism and pragmatism“, via „third way“ to „social democracy“ (see Marušiak 2006).

Table 3: Composition of the National Council in 2016 (5 March)

Party	Share of seats	Registration/ Newness	Ideology
Direction – Social Democracy	32,66 %	8. 11. 1999 (existing)	Social Democracy Left-wing nationalism
Freedom and Solidarity	14 %	27. 2. 2009 (existing)	Liberalism Libertarianism
OLANO-NOVA	12,66 %	11. 11. 2011 (existing)	Conservatism Christian Democracy
Slovak National Party	9,66 %	7. 3. 1990 (existing)	Nationalism National and social conservatism Right-wing populism
Strana priateľov vína, later Kotleba – People's Party Our Slovakia	9,33 %	20. 10. 2000 (existing)	Neo-fascism National and social conservatism Anti-ism
We Are Family	7,33 %	6. 7. 2011; 30. 11. 2015 (new)	Populism
Most–Híd	7,33 %	3. 7. 2009 (existing)	Minority interests Liberal conservatism
Network	6,66 %	12. 6. 2014 (new)	Conservatism Economic liberalism

Source: Own elaboration based on electoral results.

Note: We Are Family shall be counted as new despite much older registration as the old registration was used to bypass legal requirements to establish new party.

In the terms of radical elements and anti-system parties the Slovak party system changed from radical left to radical right. The presence of Communist Party of Slovakia in the party system after 2002 was short. However, the party was composed mainly by anti-reformist politicians who were against transformation to party of democratic left under the leadership of Jozef Ševc, the son-in-law of the Vasil Biľak – Czechoslovak hard-line „normalizator“ from the conservative wing of the Communist party of Czechoslovakia, which was reinstalled after 1968 invasion. After 2016 radical elements are presented by anti-system neo-fascist Kotleba – People's Party Our Slovakia, which is more than 2 % successful than Communists in 2002. In both periods of the party system there is a party representing Hungarian minority. However, while Party of the Hungarian Coalition had more than 13 % of votes, Most–Híd in 2016 had just 7 % despite its attempt to address also non-Hungarian voters (such as Ruthenians), and a more liberal attitude than the Party of the Hungarian Coalition and charismatic leader Béla Bugár.

Generally, there is less Christian democracy which after 2016 is presented only by relatively the weak OĽANO-NOVA⁹ and in 2002 was represented by Slovak Democratic and Christian Union and Christian Democratic Movement having together more than 28 % of votes (KDH later in 2016 closely failed to enter the Parliament). And despite Freedom and Solidarity in 2016 gaining second place during elections with 14 % of votes, there is also less liberalism represented. The decline in representation of these ideologies is balanced by the increase of nationalism, conservatism and populism which is reflected also *vis-à-vis* the European Union and Slovak foreign policy.

Conclusion

The main aim of this article was to reveal and analyze ongoing trends within Slovak party system in the context of 2016 general elections to the National Council. Whether elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic in 2016 established a completely new, less predictable period of Slovak party system or whether this denotes a shift back to an already known set of the party system. For searching the answer author was focusing on various indexes used for assessing the changes within party system and revealing challenging trends.

In the terms of party system fragmentation measured by index introduced by Douglas W. Rae, the Slovak party system after the 2016 elections went closer to the maximum fragmentation experienced in 2002. The result is more visible as it rose from minimal fragmentation approx. 0,65 in 2012 to almost 0,83 in 2016. In other words, fragmentation increased but to the values which are characteristic for a multi-party system. On the other side 2016 elections led to an increase of the number of effective parties measured by the Laakso-Taagepera's index. Also this index increased significantly from 2,5 in 2012 to almost 6, which is approx. same value as in 2002. Moreover, Mayer's index of aggregation dropped in the same period from 12 to less than 10 which is another feature similar to 2002. These characteristic provide by indexes implies that the Slovak party system „returned in time“ back to 2002. However, this is very reductionist conclusion. As expressed by Pedersen's index of total volatility since 2002 total volatility increased from approx. 22 to almost 35 in 2016. In other words, the Slovak party system experienced in 2016 its highest volatility in history.

Measuring the impact of „new“ political parties on the Slovak party system is very challenging task due to inconsistent data within Slovak party register and gaps in law which allows to „retake“ already registered party without registration. Moreover, as indicated in the theoretical overview in the first section, assessing party system requires deeper knowledge of realities and sometimes

9 OĽANO (Obyčajní ľudia a nezávislé osobnosti) made in June 2015 coalition with NOVA, a movement registered already on 25. 10. 2012 under the name „*Nová väčšina*“ (New Majority), associated mainly with Daniel Lipšič.

arbitrary decision about the value of intervening variables (party membership, party leadership, name, programme etc.). For this reason, assessment of any party system is challenge which might be complicated by legal gaps.

However, still it is the only way how to acquire data about registration, changes in names, changes in statutes etc. After assessing data from register it can be concluded that Slovak party system is increasingly consolidated. Average number of parties running for elections in the long term perspective dropped from 12 in 2002 to just 5 in 2016 while the number of new successful parties is still around two per election. In general, new political parties are successful in making votes effective as the ratio between wasted votes and effective votes is on average 4,8 to 17,4. Despite new political parties have negative impact on average age of political parties there is long-term increasing tendency within Slovak party system. Both average age of parties present in the parliament and average age of the parties running for elections is up to 10 years, which is more than two institutional cycles. For comparison, average age of all parties present in the register (including that already non-existent now) is 8,4 years.

Despite increasing consolidation regarding the age of political subjects into the system there is limited space for optimism. Compared to 2002, the current Slovak party system is slightly unhealthier due to stronger presence of anti-system opposition which changed from the radical left (*Communist Party of Slovakia*) to radical right (*Kotleba – People's Party Our Slovakia*). The success of Kotleba contributed to the destabilization of the party and unlocking its potential for unsatisfied voters. For this reason it will be interesting to continue analyzing the challenging trends within the Slovak party system.

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Ondřej Filipec, Ph.D. is an Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Trnava, Slovakia. His specialized research interests cover mainly security issues with special focus on migration and terrorism. As a part of the VEGA project he also deals with extremism in Slovakia and various aspects of Slovak party system. He holds, Ph.D. in political science from Department of Politics and European Studies, Faculty of Arts, Palacky University in Olomouc. Next to academia Ondřej gained experience in various international organizations including the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the European Commission.