

# Migration Discourse in Slovak Politics. Context and Content of Migration in Political Discourse: European Values versus Campaign Rhetoric

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## Abstract

The migration crisis has not only influenced the societies of Europe, their governments, and decisions taken by them but also affected the work of media. As soon as the migration crisis began to escalate in Europe, the old continent has continuously tried to cope with the influx of refugees from the war-threatened Middle East; not only individual statements of politicians and influential individuals but also communication flows themselves, which have created content and expanded context within networks, have become the center of interest. We can assume that in the previous months (especially in the case of the Slovak Republic), political and media discourses influenced societal and individual opinions and attitudes toward the migration crisis. The main aim of this article is to compare the various contents in the Slovak printed media in the context of the migration crisis. The dominant focus will be on analyzing media messages in the analyzed period in the context of creating political (media-based and electoral) discourse on the refugee crisis. We assume that over time, the main political discourse changed, and that the rhetoric of the main political actors also changed over time. The reason for this shift was the national election in March 2016.

## Keywords

political discourse; migration; refugee crisis; media; Slovak Republic

## Introduction

One of the main ways that politicians can influence a wider scope of people and reach a larger number of prospective voters is through words that are, much of the time, directed through the media. Words, phrases, and different sets of keywords are considered some of the strongest tools available to politicians as

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a means of securing new people to vote for them and to retain the loyal voters who have voted for them on previous occasions. Some discourses are at times very repetitive and have been this way for a very long time; some of them have been this way for decades. These discourses are used largely by all political parties to get their voters because they know that people will react positively to them. The most powerful instrument that politicians have at their disposal is their ability to create rhetoric, which is part of the consensus among their targeted voters; succinctly speaking, the power of words is of the utmost importance in political discourse. Politicians want to be in a position of power and their way of achieving this is to reach prospective voters through media in various forms. This is used in an intelligent and precise manner at times of campaigning and the period leading up to elections. What is more powerful than the media at a time of priority to a politician, or as equally important to their agenda and party program?

Political discourses create an institutional framework directly between the political parties and the voters. Although there have been many attempts to apply a general definition of political discourse, it can be said that this definition is both absent and undefined; in other words, this definition is still missing. As an example, we can use the following definition of Baranov and Kazakevič (1991), who at that time explained the definition of political discourses to be a complex summary of all speech acts used in political discussions, rules of public policy, proven political tradition, and experiences.

Van Dijk (1997), however, has been more exact in his definition of “what is political discourse”? He has clearly implied that more complicit issues are apparent in the context of political discourse because of the viewpoints of the total number of participants within its scope. In politics, there are far more things to consider than just the group of politicians who are dominant in the realm of politics. Things to consider include factors such as the masses (citizens and the public generally as a whole society), voters, people who are part of groups and members of dissident organizations, individual or public organizations and institutions, demonstrators, and so on. All of the aforementioned constituents could undoubtedly be added to and included in the political processes and procedures, and this is also why they can be said to be actively involved in political discourses (Van Dijk 1997, 12–13).

The topics that are communicated to the society in general are those that are carried and presented in some way by politicians, who can be seen as actors of the society in portraying messages to the society as a whole. These messages are effective, are concise, and leave a lasting and deep impression on the target recipient. These would leave the target with a very clear and precise

understanding of the total context and meaning; in other words, they convey a message that is without political jargon and is something of a political rhetoric that people can relate to and understand.

Political discourses play an important role in both political and societal systems, especially during the campaign period. Politicians often use a wide range of themes that are related to any segment of society (as large as possible) just to be elected once again. Themes such as good governance, anticorruption agenda, social care, employment, and health are very popular at the national level of the political arena, especially when it comes to their reelection or holding onto power. These themes have been dominant in Slovakia throughout the past two parliamentary elections, but now, the situation has changed dramatically due to the migration crisis that has hit the old continent.

The migration crisis hit the European continent massively. The political discourses that were visible in this period are divided into two “extreme” camps: the European societies and the political elites. The Slovak Republic was not an exception in this environment; on the contrary, the Slovak political elites took the migration discourses to another level compared to other countries. Slovak political elites, 1 year before the parliamentary election, completely polarized society with the migration crisis and the question on refugees. The main purpose of this article is to analyze media articles in the print media and search for the context and form of discourse (political, mediatized, and electoral) within the migration crisis.

We expressly state that the political discourse visible from May 2015 was changing context and form in relation with the political and societal situation visible in Slovakia. We assume that the political discourse in the analyzed months changed to an electoral discourse. This discourse was predominantly created and occupied in the media sphere by one party, namely, the governmental party “Smer-SD” (Direction-Social Democracy [SD]). As mentioned earlier, the changes in the discourse were visible not only in form, but also in context, e.g., it changed from a common phrase, “it’s not our problem, it’s the responsibility of the EU”, to a more political phrase, “migrant is a threat, and presents a danger – risk for our country”.

In the article, direct attention is placed on the print media because, with one message, the print media is able to spread completely different views on its object (subject) of attention. In other words, the title, image, and text are amenable to completely different interpretations by the interpreter and the presenter. The main intent behind this method and the analyzed print media is the manner in which individuals speak and write; their aim is to deliver a certain image to the public, to create an open window to the emotional

world. However, the selected print media also operates on the Internet, which also ensures and secures it a solid number of online readers. We analyzed only those articles that had in their context the term “migration crisis” or the articles related to “refugees” (qualitative analysis). Thus, we found 420 media messages in print during the analyzed period (May 2015, with the first media message on migration; and March 2016, the month of the parliamentary election). We were also able to see the intensity of the amount of “migration” discourse at the beginning of the analyzed period and at the end of it. The degree of progression is visible from the comparison of the amount of the messages (Table 1). This could have been influenced by the dates coinciding with the parliamentary election in March 2016. In our article, we elected to begin on the day when the first article was published on the migration (refugees) crisis, including the words migrants or refugees, and the selection does not end immediately after the election on March 5, 2016, but we also analyze messages produced after this date, to include the coalition talks. Fairclough (2006), e.g., argues that a useful selection strategy is to focus on moments of crisis, because we are able to analyze assumptions that are not normal and dominant in the discourse.

The central focus of our analysis (including the titles of articles and the body of the articles) comprised three key questions about reporting:

- a) Which political party (leader) is the most cited?
- b) What are the terms from the political elites that describe migrants who are coming to the EU (Slovakia)?
- c) Where was (according to Fairclough, 2006) the moment of crisis, when the discourse was displayed beyond a “normal” assumption?

The purpose of this article is not only to capture the media coverage of migration issues but also to be able to conclude the moment of crisis when the political discourse became an electoral discourse.

The main aim of article was to focus on the press context in selected newspapers that combine simultaneously a high readership and a range of (different) political views. Considering this, we selected two newspapers from Slovakia, *SME* (liberal, right wing oriented) and *Pravda* (center-left oriented). As already mentioned, 420 messages were analyzed.

### **Migration Discourse in the Slovak Republic**

The migration crisis that hit Europe at the beginning of the year 2015 significantly influenced not only the inner view on the functionality and efficiency of the European Union, but it also changed the mood and the

position of European societies in the national states, including the view on the overall concept of solidarity and cohesion of European nations. It influenced the political elites operating not only at the national level but also at the international level, as well as the respective societies.

In a similar manner, these moods and views began to be monitored in the media, and they created both negative and positive camps on the question of refugees. The media polarized not only the European societies but also the political elites. We must say that the Slovak Republic was not unaffected either in the political or societal sphere in relation to the refugee crisis. On the contrary, the year before the parliamentary election, the migration crisis became the dominant discourse, not only as a political discourse but also as an electoral discourse. It changed during the period to an electoral discourse and completely changed the “mask” of this Slovak nation; we have been witnesses of this change, as evidenced by the results of the election that took place on March 5, 2016.

Before we proceed to the analysis of our research in the print media, we need to keep in mind that the political discourse in relation to migration and migrants was not a new phenomenon in the Slovak Republic. The theme of the migration crisis was presented already longer than we noticed, but never as hyped as in recent months. This fact could be closely related to the preelection mood in Slovak society. Various studies had confirmed that this discourse was visible and has been carried out for much longer time (Koščová 2012, 57–62; Androvičová 2015, 1–21). Migration was in the past related and categorized into safety-related topics. As Koščová notes, in the past, many politicians were trying to shift the migration discourse into the social category, but they were unsuccessful. In recent years, the political migration discourse predominantly has been occupied by conservative political parties, namely, by leaders of the Christian-democratic movement (*Kresťanskodemokratické hnutie*, KDH), and the discourse was personalized by two main party leaders at that time, who also gained ministerial seats – Daniel Lipšic and Vladimír Palko (Koščová 2012, 35–36). These discourses – visible in the past – also differed in comparative perspective to the current migration discourse. The main shift is observed by the position of this discourse; in the past, this discourse was related to the cultural and societal questions. Migrants were displayed as individuals with different attitudes and opinions based on religion, culture, and identity. They were linked with the cultural and identity threat. Of course, political elites tended to shift the migration discourse to the position of security threat but were not so successful. This was completely changed by the migration crisis that hit

Europe at the beginning of 2015 and was related to the terrorist attacks in previous periods.

Another significant feature that was visible in the analyses and presentation of this specific discourse was the absence of any kind of positive presentation of refugees and the refugee crisis in the political sphere (currently, with the exception of President Andrej Kiska).

We can assume through the studies on migration discourse and through our research that the migration discourse was only presented negatively, and the framework was related to the safety issues and individual statements of political actors calling for control and security. For example, previously, in 2004, the Minister of Interior described the rising number of migrants as a great “problem” for Slovakia, as well as a “cultural and security risk” for our country. In recent years, we met with views that were more radical on the migration issue, whereby the increasing number of migrants was associated with risk of increase in violent activities in the country. In recent years, we have seen a link between migration and terrorism, e.g., the Minister of Interior Robert Kaliňák noted that the lower number of migrants in the Slovak Republic leads to a lower risk of terrorist attacks.

Our analysis found that stories on migrants and the migration crisis have a rising level of coverage in the press, including the period when the official campaign before the parliamentary election started. As seen in Table 1, the average number of analyzed messages through the analyzed period was 2.4 per day, which we consider a significant and shaping number. Moreover, the number of days (178) that this topic was analyzed is significant because throughout this time, the articles including the topic of refugees or migration crisis were numerous, which shows us the importance of this theme for both media and the politicians.

Our analysis also found that the migration theme was very active during the “summer holidays”, which in the Slovak press is well known as the “cucumber season”. The highest number of reports on the analyzed terms was in the month of September, when it started to be displayed as a security threat. Despite the fact that in November, when there were terrorist attacks in France, the media coverage was on the lowest level, after September, the coverage reached its peak. We would like to assume this was the “crisis moment”, when the assumptions on these themes were displayed far beyond the normal discourses (in addition, we also assume that this was the moment when the political discourse shifted to the level of electoral discourse, whereby migrants were seen as terrorists and rapists, which is beyond the security threat of the traditional discourse in the Slovak political sphere displayed in the past).

Table 1: General view on the analysis of print media in relation to the “migration (refugee) crisis” in Slovak Republic in the period May 2015–March 2016

| Month        | Number of days analyzed in the context of the visibility of “migration (refugee) crisis” | Visibility of media messages on migration (refugee) crisis | The average number of messages within the analyzed days | Representation of the theme of “migration (refugee) crisis” throughout the month |
|--------------|--|--|---|--|
| May          | 5  | 11   | 2.2   | 16%  |
| June         | 11   | 17   | 1.5   | 36%  |
| July         | 15   | 29   | 1.9   | 48%  |
| August       | 14   | 27   | 1.9   | 45%  |
| September    | 21   | 89   | 4.2   | 70%  |
| October      | 18   | 54   | 3   | 58%  |
| November     | 10   | 30   | 3   | 33%  |
| December     | 13   | 22   | 1.7   | 42%  |
| January      | 23   | 43   | 1.87  | 72%  |
| February     | 24   | 48   | 2   | 60%  |
| March        | 24   | 50   | 2.1   | 62%  |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>178</b>   | <b>420</b>   | <b>2.4</b>  |  |

Source: authors' own research.

For the first time in the history of independence, an extremist party that glorified the clerical–fascist Slovak state’s actions in the early twentieth century came into the parliament.

The fact that the migration crisis was one of the most mediatized events in the past few months demonstrates that the analyses of the Slovak print media showed an increasing pattern from the beginning of the research. A similar view on the dominance of the migration discourse was only marked by MEMO 98, which stated that despite several themes that resonated within media monitoring, the issue of refugees and migration crisis was the most mediatized theme from all angles. The report also states that under this theme

were dominant aspects, mainly threat and need for protection. These aspects were, according to the media monitoring, mainly nourished by politicians, and the media served only to lift the political discourse of the leaders, especially of the governing party Direction-SD and its leader and Prime Minister Robert Fico (Graph 1).

Political discourse, which was visible at the beginning of May 2015, was transformed, as we believed, into the electoral discourse after the first public opinion polls in September, when 56% of respondents rejected the admission of refugees. In the middle of October, e.g., the ruling party Direction-SD changed its main electoral slogan from “We are working for Slovakia” to a new one “We are protecting Slovakia”. After this shift, other public opinion surveys followed in October and November, which only confirmed the increasing refusal to receive refugees: 62% of respondents rejected the admission of refugees.

During the qualitative analysis of the print media in the Slovak Republic, we have indeed focused only on those articles most read, but we will also use the data of monitoring of Slovak media, which included all relevant media monitored within the official campaigning period, including not only the frequency but also the representation pattern of the various topics, the main political parties, and the main representatives of executive and legislative power in Slovak television and radio media.

Before we proceed to the analysis of the political discourse that has gradually changed in the context of the time, as well as the societal and political moods, there is a need to summarize the collected qualitative results of the present research. The center of attention was not only the printed media, but also the television; in particular, the migration theme, which was the most dominant theme in the official campaign period. The visibility of the migration discourse increased throughout 2015, and the peak level was reached in September and then again at the end of the official electoral campaign. Similar conclusions are visible also in the media monitoring of MEMO 98, which states that the issue of refugees was presented mainly through “its impact on the functioning of the European Union and Schengen Area”. The theme of migration crises, in addition to election themes, received the largest coverage. In other words, “each of these areas collectively gained more than 100 minutes of broadcasting time during 3 months of media monitoring”.

Based on the research results, we are also able to quantify them using the software “Wordle” to create a diagram of the most frequent words (Scheme 1) utilized in the headlines during the reporting period on the questions of migration (*migrácia*), migration crisis (*migračná kríza*), refugees (*utečenci*),



and refugee crisis (*utečenecká kríza*). Words that were visible on the main titles were very closely connected to the monitored topic, and the journalists were using the most common terms and various synonymous headlines that were related to the refugees in several ways. However, the analysis also showed that in the diagram were also present political subjects and leaders who were in the center of this discourse and who created it, such as the political party Direction-SD and current Prime Minister Robert Fico.

*Scheme 1: The most frequent words in the media titles during the analyzed period.*



*Source: authors' own research, Wordle software.*

Visible in the main titles was also the President Andrej Kiska, who actively presented and promoted the arrival of migrants in Slovakia and tried to create an image of positive perceptions toward refugees. He was, in this monitored period, the only one political representative in opposition to the ruling party, because his presentation of the topic was mainly positive. Other political subjects were not able to create a relevant reference on this migration theme. At the end, the polarization of society was resting on the shoulders of two representatives– the Prime Minister and the President of the Republic.

This could be the main reason why when quantifying the articles visible in the printed media, the term “help” was the most visible in a positive mood, because President Andrej Kiska used this term in every speech he gave during the monitored period. Furthermore, other terms that have been used in the articles in print media were words such as “Slovakia” and “home”, which just evoke a nationalistic tone, promoting the justifications and negative approach toward the migrants.

In the terms of the so-called evolutionary development of political discourse, which changed to an electoral discourse, we can notice that the words describing terms such as migrants, migration crisis, refugees, and refugee crisis had changed over time and had developed and formed new name associations with them.

As already mentioned several times earlier, the migration discourse emerged in May 2015, when Slovak politicians at the governmental level began with criticism of the position of the European Union and its main actors in relation to the migration themes. The most frequent phrases that were visible throughout the months of May, June, and July were associated with a dismissive attitude to the quotas for refugees to individual nation states, such as, e.g., “quotas are not the solution ¼.”, which became the most used phrase in the context of print media (compare Table 2). The dominant discourse in this period was associated with a dismissive attitude to quotas and European institutions among the people in the Slovak Republic. We can assume that the neutral expression “Slovakia is not responsible” only proved that Slovak society perceives the EU decision as something that is happening far away and which does not concern them personally.

The changing perceptions toward the refugees and the problems with their integration and reception began to be visible in August; then, the discourse started to become modified and economic problems started to be associated with the migration topic. In August, the governing politicians began to present the migration crisis in association with economic advantages. The migrants who entered Europe were portrayed as being attracted by the economic advantages of Europe. The Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic characterized migrants during this month several times as economic migrants and called them economic speculators trying to abuse the social system of European countries in which they applied for asylum.

*Table 2: The most frequent phrases of Slovak politicians connected to refugee crisis*

| Month | Phrase  | Dominant discourse          |
|-------|---|-----------------------------|
| May   | “Quotas are not the solution, solution is in the countries of migrants’ origin” | Slovakia is not responsible |
| June  | “Moral duty”  | Slovakia is not responsible |
|       | “Compulsory solidarity”   |                             |
|       | “By adopting quotas, we make contracts/agreements with traffickers”             |                             |
|       | “Quotas are not the solution, solution is in the countries of migrants’ origin” |                             |

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| Month     | Phrase   | Dominant discourse                               |
|-----------|--|--|
| July      | “We can choose the migrants”   | Slovakia is not responsible                      |
|           | “Quotas are not the solution, solution is in the countries of migrants’ origin”  |  |
| August    | “Quotas are not the solution, solution is in the countries of migrants’ origin”  | Refugees – economic migrants                     |
|           | “Failure of EU”  |  |
|           | “Migrants – economic speculators”  | Slovakia is not responsible                      |
| September | “Border protection”  | Migrants – security risk                         |
|           | “Refugees are security risk”   | Refugees – economic migrants- different religion |
|           | “Green signal to traffickers”  |  |
|           | “Impossible to integrate someone with completely different religion and traditions”  |  |
|           | “I can just hardly imagine that the Muslims could integrate in Slovakia.... ”  |  |
|           | “Could be harassing someone, who can find 5,000 euros to pay the traffickers?”   |  |
|           | “Look how many young men who came to seek for work are there, there are around 90% of them”  |  |
|           | “Absolute majority of the refugees are economic migrants”  |  |
| October   | “Mechanism the biggest danger for the EU”  | Refugees – security risk                         |
| November  | “To protect Slovakia”  | Refugees – Muslims – terrorists – security risk  |
|           | “We are monitoring every Muslim”   |  |
|           | “Two attackers came with refugees”   |  |
|           | “Security of the country”  |  |
| December  | “We could take 800 Muslims, but we do not have any mosques in Slovakia, so how could we integrate them, if they would not like it here?” | Migrants - different                             |
|           | “I consider quotas to be nonsensical and not possible to implement, they are fiasco. They are only on the paper.”                        |  |

| Month    | Phrase   | Dominant discourse                                      |
|----------|--|---|
| January  | “I feel sorry that the public officials who are responsible for the security of Slovak citizens underestimate the security aspect of the migration crisis.”  | Migrants – sexual harassment – danger                   |
|          | “Big security risk”  |   |
|          | “Different cultural habits and different religion”   |   |
|          | “When someone does bombard a regime and the result is chaos, it cannot force the whole Europe to subsidize.”   |   |
|          | “I consider quotas to be nonsensical and not possible to implement, they are a fiasco. They are only on the paper.”  |   |
|          | “Every Muslim who is on the territory of Slovak Republic is being monitored.”  |   |
|          | “There is a significant indication about the origin of the attackers. Some can call them immigrants, some can say migrants.”   |   |
|          | “I would not like to mention that in front of Bratislava train station, thousands of migrants vulgarly bother Slovak women.”   |   |
|          | “We do not want that, in Slovakia, something would happen like in Germany, that someone would be bothering our women in public areas.”   |   |
| February | “Until I am the Prime Minister, no migrants will come to Slovakia on the basis of mandatory quotas.”   | Security – rejection of quotas (inefficiency of quotas) |
|          | “Security of this state is for me priority number one.”  |   |
|          | “Slovakia not only rejects mandatory and temporary quotas, but also on voluntarily basis, the government doesn’t make any decision that could lead to the creation of a coherent Muslim community in Slovakia...These events are supposed to be an answer to those who stated that migrants with different religions could be easily integrated. They cannot; it is simply not happening.” |   |
|          | “We are against the nonsensical and inefficient quotas.”   |   |
| March    | “Refugees don’t exist anymore.”  |   |
|          | “Coalition stopped being interested in the refugees.”  |   |

Source: authors own research.

In September, in addition to the economic problems related to the migrant's question, another very strong (and also a long-term "old" question) arose. The media started to cover the issues of safety and security hazards associated with uncontrolled migration in Europe. Dominant themes were closely linked with security issues mainly focused on border protection and criticism of the existing system, which according to government policymakers gave a "green light to smugglers".

In addition to security-related media coverage, migration began to have another context. The media coverage was related to the inability to integrate the migrants because of their cultural and religious differences. In other words, otherness becomes another of the dominant discourses that resonated in print media in that period. Similar sentiments were discernible in the month of October, when they were connecting migrants with security risks.

The melting point of these changes in the media sphere was the month of November, when the attacks in Paris set off arguments that migrants were not only a security risk but also potential terrorists. Rumors abounded about statements of the Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic, concerning the fact that Slovakia is monitoring every Muslim, which earned the criticism of the Muslim religious community and several nonprofit organizations.

In December, no major changes that would have touched the direction of migration policy occurred at the European level. The media mostly mediatized the common themes that were visible in the previous months related to the security risks and found a "shift" in the relation between migrants and terrorist attacks. We must notice that the quotas were also moving back to the "media-based sphere" and were the second most visible media theme in this month.

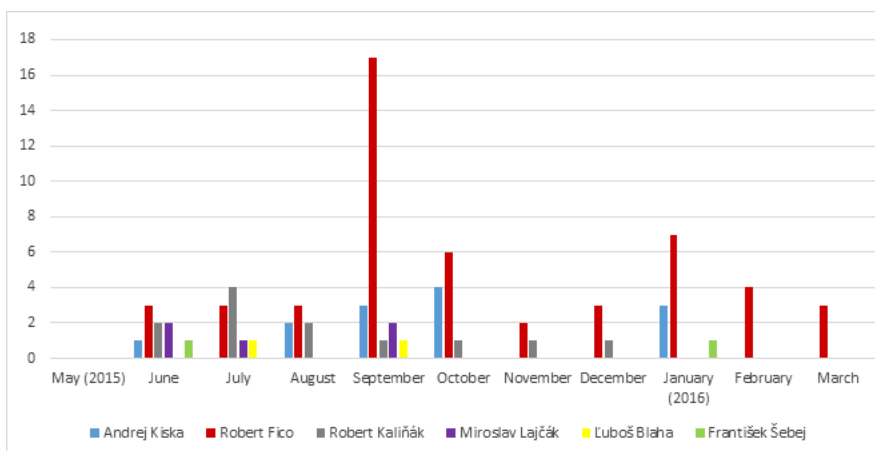
Changes came in January in the media coverage associated with the events on New Year's Eve (multiple theft and rape cases). In connection with these events, we can assume that this began to change the media coverage of the migration crisis and the political discourse, which was applied on a new level – electoral discourse. The media began to present a view that has long resonated in society, and that it was in fact Germany, led by Chancellor Angela Merkel, which was the main trigger for the uncontrolled migration. The reason was simple: Slovak media perceived legal actions and statements of the German Chancellor as the causes that "invited" migrants to Europe. Slovak politicians, especially Robert Fico, made clear statements, which were highlighted in media: "there is a clear insinuation of origin of attackers. Anyone can mention refugee, migrant, immigrant, or terrorist ..."; or "I would hate to explain that thousands of migrants will harass Slovak women in a vulgar manner" (SME, 2016). These were directly contributing to this shift in the discourse,

where again, the political discourse was led by the threats and security risks in Slovakia.

Despite the fact that in February, the migration discourse was decreasing, the media coverage of this topic continued to be evident. The priority and dominance of this theme was mainly influenced by the ongoing election campaign. Despite the fact that all relevant political parties built up their position on the migration theme, the political elites, especially the ruling party Direction-SD, constantly stressed the need for border protection and the protection of Slovak society. Statements about the safety, “stubbornness”, and “fearlessness” from the ruling party, in its relentless quest to confront the “Brussels diktat”, to the question of rejection of mandatory quotas were also very dominant.

The impact of the discourse comes also from the person who is presenting it; in the case of the migration discourse in The Slovak Republic also, we have a well-known winner from the beginning. The current Prime Minister and party leader Robert Fico was the most cited politician in the migration crisis in the media for the whole analyzed time period. The second most cited politician was also the member of the government and a member of the party Direction-SD, namely, Robert Kaliňák (Minister of Interior). The analysis of the printed media showed that the most cited politicians were from the current governmental party Direction-SD (Robert Fico, Robert Kaliňák, Miroslav Lajčák, and Ľuboš Blaha).

Graph 1: The most cited Slovak politicians in the migration discourse



Source: authors own research, data based on media monitoring of printed media (May 2015–March 2016).

The negative mood was not only visible in the titles and bodies of the analyzed articles that were presented by the political elites in Slovakia, but even the visualization was dominantly negative. The visualization and the textual representation of migrants in the media coverage consisted of associating migrants with negative problems and themes, as well as showing migration as a security threat or as leading to violence or crime. There was also a visible difference, and it was represented by the two most popular politicians in the country: the President, who was using the term refugees, and the Prime Minister, who was using the term migrants only with negative associations.

There are two marginal views of migrants: one connects them only with negative associations (violence, drugs, intolerance, security threat, and so on), and the other view focuses on the positive images of migrants. Van Dijk notes that these “positive characteristics are systematically denied, ignored and underplayed” (Van Dijk 2008, 62).

In Slovakia, migrants are associated with security threat, and the images displayed in the analyzed media copied the same pattern. In relation to the visualization of the migration theme, Prime Minister Robert Fico was displayed as the guardian of security, among all the police officers.

The visualization of the President Andrej Kiska, who – as already mentioned – used the term refugees, was seen to be completely different. He was also displayed as a guardian, but of the other camp.

*Images 1 and 2: Slovak political elites (Prime Minister in the left panel; President in the right panel)*



*Source: analysis of the printed media (SME).*

According to the semiotic theory, pictures (sign) can be broken into two parts. One part is describing what is literally pictured, and the other relates to that with which it is associated. Migration and migrants in the analyzed media were framed as threats. The picture of the Prime Minister as the security

guardian surrounded by police uniforms was the connotation of relieving crime and protecting the Slovak public. Positive visualizations of migrants in the analyzed media was associated with children and youth, and President Kiska was the only politician standing on the side of migrants.

As already mentioned earlier, for our analysis of the print media, we chose two newspapers, namely, the *SME* (liberal, right wing oriented) and *Pravda* (center-left oriented). This selection was not only based on the popularity of these print media among the readers but also by the fact that they are both differently oriented on the political scope. Following an analysis of the discourse, Van Dijk states that there is also importance in the power and ideology. If we looked at the other popular media in Europe, there is a significant difference between the articles of the right wing- and left wing-orientated media. In the UK, there is a hard line between the *Daily Mirror* and the *Guardian* (using more humanitarian themes and sources, sympathetic toward migrants) on the one hand and the right wing press such as the *Daily Mail* and *The Sun*, which use the anti-refugee approach (Berry et al. 2015, 29–49). There are, of course, more examples for this phenomenon that the right-leaning media such as Italian *Il Giornale*, German *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Czech *Mladá fronta Dnes*, or the Polish *Rzeczpospolita* are using for the negative coverage of migration, especially in connection with the domestic consequences. On the other side are the left-leaning newspapers, such as German *die Tageszeitung* or Italian *La Repubblica*, which carry a more pro-refugee coverage (European Journalism Observatory [EJO] 2015). Unfortunately, in the case of Slovakia, the differences are not very significant between the ideologically divided media. The *Pravda* and *SME* were offering, during the whole analyzed period, very similar articles about migrants and refugees despite their ideological differences. In the peak of the discourse development, which was in September 2015, the main headline pages of these two media outlets were almost the same. For example, on September 23, the main page of *SME* had the heading: “Slovakia wants to reverse quotas”; on the main page of *Pravda*, the heading was “Slovakia is forced to take quotas”, which we can see offers to the reader exactly the same message. The question of why is the case of Slovakia different from the other European media, which are divided into ones offering more negative views of migration and the ones offering more positive views is answered by the framework in which the discourse was developing. With a change from the political discourse to a clearly electoral discourse, and with the majority of politicians highlighting the negative sides of migration, the media was not really left with a very wide or big scope to operate in.



## Conclusion

In the condition of the media field, the migration crisis provoked very mixed feelings and moods not only in the society but also in the political sphere. It was the governing party, Direction-SD, which formed the dominant political discourse, which was later transformed into an electoral discourse. We must notice that these specific discourses, which were formed during the analyzed period, were copying the main trends of the research and study on the migration discourse. Based on the research of the printed media, which included themes such as refugees, migrants, refugee crisis, and migration crisis, we can conclude that more than one discourse was visible during the analyzed period; moreover, in this case, we can also observe that not one of this discourse was so influential that it was able to hold for more than a short period.

We can also certainly agree with the notion that in the analyzed period, the securitization of the migration discourse was visible in the communication of the political elites. Especially at the end of the reporting period, political elites (especially the governing party) started to present the “cultural differences” of the migrants in the media. “Cultural differences” were thus seen as a classification system through which the threat of the unknown was highlighted. As several authors found, this classification system through “cultural differences”, which was seen in the examples of media messages in Slovak printed media, was seen as a criterion for exclusion. In other words, the authors in their study showed that this will give rise to the birth of a new kind of racism, whereby exclusion is associated and understood through racist discourse.

We can only agree with Baker (1981), who emphasizes that the current racism no longer occurs, or at least is not, based on biological superiority, but that this “new racism” is based on presenting the ongoing natural and inevitable reality in the context of cultural diversity. Barker then added that: “We may all share a common human nature, but apart of that very shared nature is the natural tendency to form bounded social units and to differentiate ourselves from outsiders” (Barker 1981, 128).

A similar line can be traced in shaping the discourse in the Slovak Republic. The political elites (especially the governing party) presented not only “otherness” but also the inability of integration of migrants because of their cultural and religious differences. Their statements also slipped into intolerance toward joining (integrating) migrants because of the threat of terrorism; the migrants were also seen as sex offenders. Migrants, particularly the Muslim minority, were presented as the community that is intolerant and that is incapable of integration on the basis of its cultural and religious differences. A famous statement that was presented not only in the Slovak media, but also

in foreign media, was the statement of former Prime Minister and Chairman of Direction-SD Robert Fico that the government will seek to ensure that in Slovakia there would be no coherent Muslim community.

The main shift in the migration discourse could be narrowed down to September 2015. We can not only observe the growing number of articles related to the migration crisis but also the association of migrants with the security threat. Migrants were, from this moment, portrayed not only as a threat but also as rapists, intolerant religious fundamentalists, and terrorists. These frames were holding until the parliamentary election and then were completely covered by the current situation and the shaping of the new coalition government. The electoral discourse disappeared, but the migration (and political) discourse is still visible in the political, societal, and media spheres, but not under such spotlight.

In conclusion, we can observe that the migration/refugee crisis was mediatized in a negative way (with the exception of President Andrej Kiska), which resonated with the public opinion of voters, based on information that was obtained from the exit polls. We could argue how much the topic under discussion was constantly revisited and debated in the media in the run-up to the elections and how much of this was a benefiting factor in helping the governing party Direction-SD to win, since it was the main initiator of the never-ending discussion about migrants. We can also argue whether this topic opened the door to parliament for the not-so-typical parties such as the “Sme Rodina” (We are family) and “ĽS - Naše Slovensko” (People’s Party – Our Slovakia). In the case of the first-mentioned party, the leader of that party is a very famous public figure in the media, who started his “political career” with hostile quotes about migrants on social networks. In the second case, it is an antisystem party, and the party leader and its members have been for a long time presenting themselves with anti-immigration and anti-Roma rhetoric. That is why we could say that this theme of migration was perfectly and concisely used in the Slovak media environment for creating the antimigration moods, which corresponded with the electoral campaigns and agendas of the political parties. This precondition is confirmed by the fact that after the parliamentary elections, which were held on March 5, 2016, there were no longer headlines in the news like “migration danger”, “migration differences”, or “migration terrorism”. Instead, there were other headlines printed, which precisely showed what happened in the Slovak political scene after the elections. The headlines that were being put out in the media after the elections were “Coalition stopped being interested in migrants” and “Refugees no longer exist”.

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