

Ethno-politics in Slovakia: explanation for the persistent success of the ethnic card in voter mobilization

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Submitted to

Central European University

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In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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Budapest , Hungary

2010

ABSTRACT

The presented paper attempts to identify the main factors which allow for the utilization of the ethno-politics, namely the Hungarian card, by the contemporary Slovak political elites for the purposes of political mobilization. Performing the socio-historical analysis on the formation of the modern Slovak national identity, the author argues that it has been initially defined by the elites in exclusive terms of ethnicity. This subsequently determines its present understanding, and permits the governmental elites to oscillate between civic and ethnic conception of nationalism.

The paper classifies the Slovak governments according to the type of nationalism pursued, and further claims that the Fico government(2006-2010) tried to shift the public opinion towards the ethnic collective nationalism. It demonstrates how the Fico government tried to gain popular support and mobilize the Slovak voters by the constant attempts to re-interpret the national history and myths. The main hypothesis claims that what enabled them to do so, was the exploitation and invigoration of the ethnic core of the national identity.

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INTRODUCTION

After the creation of an independent state entity in 1993, the Slovak national identity underwent a major process of re-creation accompanied with the re-interpretation of the history and myths. Although exhibiting elements of the ethnic understanding of the nation, it was anticipated that after the incorporation of the country into the euro-Atlantic structures, the active promotion of multiculturalism and the implementation of internationally binding legislative tools against the ethnicity-based discrimination, will cause the diminishing of the ethnic nationalism that will transform itself into a more civic form. However, it turned out that the Slovaks found it problematic to re-define their underdeveloped and ambiguous national identity in the new external environment, thus providing a fertile soil for the forces of national populism and the partial revival of the right-wing nationalism promoting the very ethnic-based ideology of state. The globalization processes have not caused a significant heterogenization of the national identity, which remained the area of the dominant nation-forming group. The national populist parties were thus able to utilize the unstable socio-political environment, in which the only unchanging pillar was the ethnicity of the dominant nation forming group(Mesežnikov 2009).

The presented work aims to explore the success of the utilization of the ‘ethnic card’ by the contemporary Slovak political elites for the purposes of political mobilization. Performing a socio-political analysis, it will try to explain the continuous appeal of ethnicity for the Slovak voters. The main aim is to answer the following questions:

- I. Which factors allowed the national populists forces to successfully deploy the ethnic card in Slovakia during the 2006-2010 period?
- II. How was Fico government(2006-2010) utilizing the *ethnic* elements, national myths and the *ethnic* card to achieve political mobilization and support ?

By critically analyzing the events after 1989, I will first show the very ethnic and exclusive foundations of the new socio-political identity emerging after the establishment of the autonomous Slovak Republic. I will use Hroch's suggestion(1996) to initially reject the 'defrosting' of the nationalism by the Soviet regime thesis, and although acknowledging the connection to the antecedent types of collective cultural and political identities (Smith 2009), I will argue for qualitatively novel wave of Slovak nationalism occurring after the fall of socialism. It will be classified by the author as *collective, ethnic type of nationalism*(Greenfeld 1995)

After validating this initial claim, I will proceed towards classifying the types of nationalisms pursued by the governmental elites. Subsequently, the second hypothesis will be tested, arguing that after the eight-years period(1998-2006) of a rather positive approach towards the ethnic diversity from the acting political elites, the Fico government(2006-2010) again steered the wheel towards the *ethnic collectivist nationalism*. The author will demonstrate that the incumbent government has been re-enforcing the ethnic understanding of the national identity by the implementation of specific policies and by numerous attempts to re-interpret the national history and myths(Hosking and Schöpflin 1997). Claiming the phenomenon became mostly relevant for the electoral politics, making the ethnic card a significant tool of political mobilization of the Slovak voters, I will demonstrate its utilization in the most recent presidential elections.

Although it is out of the scope of this paper, it can be further assumed that the governmental activities and its utilization of the ethno-politics, such as the Hungarian card in the electoral campaigns, have led to the shift of the mass attitudes towards the acceptance of

nationalistic discourse. The increased frequency of occurrence of ethnic-related incidents¹, involving the use of physical violence, shows that the national populism has been successfully penetrating the Slovak society in the past years; *ethnicity* it has been winning its 'daily plebiscite' (Renan 1996) on the nature of the identity.

The presented research will largely rely on the findings of two recent publications by Grigorij Mesežnikov and Ol'ga Gyarfášová (2008; 2009) from the Institute for Public Affairs (IVO) who have analyzed the phenomenon of national populism and the right-wing nationalism in the contemporary Slovak politics. However, they both only briefly discuss the factors contributing to the present shape of the national identity with regard of the utilization of the ethnic dimension, and do not perform theoretical analyses of the deployment and re-interpretation of the national history and myths. Here, I will draw on the existing literature in the nationalism studies, such as the classics of Anthony D. Smith, Ernst Gellner, Benedict Anderson and Adrian Hastings, and the publications addressing specifically the national mythology issues, namely those of John Armstrong, Michael Billig, George Schöpflin and Geoffrey Hosking.

The first chapter will define and clarify the basic conceptual terms used throughout the paper. Due to the absence of a single comprehensive theory of nationalism, and the conceptual ambiguity concerning the terms of nation and national identity, I will first justify my decision to use a combined modernist approach with *ethnoscymbolism* (Smith 2008) as the explanatory theory for the Slovak nationalism. Subsequently, I will provide and advocate the following typology of nationalism: a.) exclusionary, ethnic nationalism and b.) civic, inclusionary nationalism. The distinction is crucial for classifying the nature, or the

¹ According to the statistics of the official authorities, the number of the ethnic-related crimes has been constantly rising. In 2004 it was 79; 121 in 2005; 188 in 2006; 155 in 2007; 213 in 2008. [SNSLP: Number of Reports on Displays of Extremism Increased Last Year, SITA news agency, June 2, 2009]

prevalence of the specific form of nationalism, in the governmental approach. The very last part will clarify the function and taxonomy of myths and show their impact on the formation and the definition of the national identity. With the initial assumption of myths being the tools of cultural reproduction(Bourdieu 1993) and means of standardization(Elias 1991) for the interpretation of the national history, the third subchapter provides a theoretical background and the ‘taxonomy’ of national myths present in Central and Eastern Europe(Hosking and Schöpflin 1997). The concept will be utilized in the final chapter, which discusses the governmental attempts to redefine the Slovak myths and national identity, for the interpretation of the actions and political discourse of the incumbent governmental elites.

The second chapter is going to examine the major landmarks of historical formation of the modern Slovak national identity with the aim of identifying the impact of the events and myths on the contemporary perception of the national identity. Its main purpose is to clarify the “role of the past in the creation of the present”(Smith 1999: 180) in the history of Slovak nation-state formation and to show how the past development enabled the ethnic nationalism to penetrate the contemporary society. Supported by Greenfield’s conclusion about the distinctive nature of the types of nationalisms found in Europe, I will demonstrate how the contemporary elites grounded the new Slovak national identity in the concept of the ethnic collectivist nationalism(1995) as opposed to its more democratic, civic and individualistic forms. By content analyses of the constitutional documents, I will further show that the dominant position of the state-forming majority group was officially and legally approved, thus initially excluding the existing ethnic minorities from their participation on the formation of the political identity. I will argue that the process was initiated and further

re-enforced by the political discourse and actions of the nationalistic and national-populist governmental elites².

The final chapter will identify and discuss the three main political actors with the order of their appearance on the Slovak political scene, starting with the LS-HZDS – Ludova Strana-Hnutie za Demokraticke Slovensko [*People's Party - Movement for a Democratic Slovakia*], the SNS – Slovenska Narodna Strana [*Slovak National Party*] and finally, the SMER–Socialna demokracia [*SMER-Social Democracy*]. After the electoral victory of SMER in 2006, the three selected subjects entered the coalition and will be referred to as the ‘Fico government’ throughout this paper. Due to the little relevance of the party manifestos, the legislative activities and the discourse of the elites will be analyzed to assess these actors’ position on the issues relevant to national identity, specifically the minority-related matters, the language and education politics and the bilateral relations with the neighboring Hungary. The chapter will generally examine how the above mentioned governmental subjects were utilizing the ethnic elements of the Slovak national identity during the electoral period of 2006-2010 as the tool of political mobilization. It will try to validate the claim that all the governmental actors, SMER, SNS, and LS-HZDS were, at least to some extent, trying to re-interpret the historical myths and symbols to re-define the national identity under the cover of fostering the Slovak patriotism. The chapter will discuss the impact of the new ‘mythomorphs’ on the educational, cultural and language policies, the utilization of the so-called Hungarian card in the electoral politics, and the most recent attempts to implement the US model of ‘flagging the nation’³ (Billig, 1995) by adopting the controversial *law on patriotism*.

² Namely the LS-HZDS–Ludova Strana-Hnutie za Demokraticke Slovensko [*People's Party - Movement for a Democratic Slovakia*]. Slovakia under two Meciar’s governments(1992-94, 1994-1998) was often internationally criticized, regarded as undemocratic and not respecting the minority rights.

Although Slovakia is a multiethnic state with several minorities, the Hungarian minority has always been a crucial element of the re-definition of the majority group identity (Mannova 2009) as it has always served as a reference point of the schmittian *us-them* distinction. As the salient nationalistic attitudes have projected themselves mainly in the relationship with the mentioned minority, I will solely focus on the high-intensity regime of the Hungarian ace, and initially exclude other *ethnies*, namely the Romani minority. As it will be argued, the Fico government has been trying to reinforce the exclusive form of nationalism by re-creating the perception of ‘threat’ coming both from the ethnic Hungarian minority, and the neighboring state of Hungary.

Finally, the work will propose some possible consequences of the governmental politics: firstly, the polarization of the Slovak society on the spectrum of ‘good-bad’ national patriot, which has been repeatedly articulated in the political discourse of the prime minister Fico (Mesežnikov and Gyarfášová 2008); secondly, the raising salience of the nationalistic attitudes among the majority society projecting themselves in further incensement of the ethnic animosity; and finally, the possible alienation and satiety of the national identity, most recently demonstrated in the number of protests and initiatives by the independent media, civil society and youth.

The paper is mainly utilizing qualitative methods of research, primarily the content and discourse analyses of various documents and sources. First, it tries to identify and classify the nature of nationalisms pursued by the Slovak governmental constellations from 1993 onwards, namely the cabinets of: the Meciar I (1992-1994), Meciar II (1994-1998), Dzurinda I (1998-2002), Dzurinda II (2002-2006), and Fico (2006-2010). Initially, the party manifestos of the governmental parties are examined to assess their declared position on the nationalist spectrum. However, as on the Slovak political scene the manifestos themselves

have only very limited relevance, the actual position on the nationalist spectrum is being identified by examining the following available sources: proposed legislative initiatives, party support of the proposals connected with the national identity issues, policy proposals and their implementations, official statements by the elites in mass-media, the myths articulated by the elites, and finally, the foreign policy course towards Hungary. The five Slovak governments since 1993 are then classified to the following proposed categories, according to the type of nationalism pursued: a.) *collective, ethnic type of nationalism* - monolithic totalitarianism, deploying exclusive concept of ethnically defined nation and advocating unitary populism reflected in the protectionist policies; b.) *collective, civic type of nationalism* - liberal pluralism, deploying rather democratic, inclusive concept of a civic nation based on the ideas of open society.

I. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

1.1 THE CONCEPT OF NATION AND NATIONALISM

The numerous theories within the contemporary field of nationalism studies could be classified into three categories according to their socio-historical tenets. Differing on the genesis of the nation, these are the following: *primordialism and socio-biological theories, modernization theories and evolutionary theories*(Llobera 2003: 200). Moreover, depending on the initial understanding of the concept of nation *per se*, four main paradigms can be identified. These are: a.) *primordialism*, which literally advocates the “naturalness of nations”(Smith 2000: 64), and seeks the psychological and emotional appeal of nationalism in genetic kinship, race, family and tribal ties, customs, religion, language and territory(see

van den Berghe 1995, Geertz 1973, 1997, Grosby 2002; 2006, Shils 1957); b.) *perennialism* or *neo-perennialism* rather emphasizing the idea of conceptual continuity by merging the “antiquity of nations”(Smith 2000: 64)⁴ with the socio-dynamic changes brought by the modernization period in the 18th century (see Smith 1999; 2000, Reynolds 1984, Hastings 1997, Greenfeld 1995, Llobera 2003); c.) *modernism* with its instrumentalist view on nationalism(see Hastings 1997, Hobsbawm 1990, Gellner 1983, Özkirimli 2000) that is creating the ‘imagined’ national communities(Anderson 2006); and finally d.) the *ethno-symbolism*(2000; 2008, 2009) being the most novel approach coined by Anthony D. Smith who seeks to point out the ethnic, cultural and political commons of the modern nations with the ethnic and ethno-religious communities that he sees as the origins of many nations(2008: 29).

Generally, the version of nationalism advocated by the primordialist and partly by the perennialists, can be labeled as the deeply-rooted nationalism. It manifests itself in the forms of *ethno-nationalism* or *cultural nationalism* that emerges as a consequence of the ethnic, historical and emotional factors. This form of nationalisms can exist without the demands for autonomy or self-determination. Only after these are articulated through the societal elites and further steps are taken to achieve the establishment of an autonomous and sovereign territorial unit, the nationalism gains its political dimension. As flatly promulgated by the primordialists and the perennialists, the political birth of a nation is preceded by several stages that the self-aware ethnic groups must undergo.

However, the primordialist camp has been rightly criticized due to its overly strong reliance on the subjective sources of collective cultural identities - perception, cognition, and belief (Smith 2000: 21). The ignorance of the external dynamics of social processes

⁴ The perennialist struggle to prove that the origins of the collective identity and quasi-national attachment can be traced back to earlier periods of medieval ages, such as the 16th (Greenfeld 1992) or even as early as the 10th century (Reynolds 1984).

accompanying the formation of the nations, and the subsequent failure to explain the formation and evolution of the nations can be seen as the major conceptual flaw of the approach. Nations are bound to “a particular, and historically recent, period”, and therefore have to be analyzed with regard to this boundless (Hobsbawm 1990: 9). Despite claiming the ancient-origins of the national attachments, perennialists acknowledge the importance of the political elites for the nationalisms (see Hastings 1997). As Reynolds eloquently put it, the “feelings of community could [alone] neither create, nor divide the kingdoms on their own” (1984: 302).

Leaning towards the modernist perspective, the understanding of the term nation in this paper will largely stem from Benedict Anderson’s concept of ‘imagined political communities’ (2006), enriched by Ernest Renan’s presumption about the possession of a common rich legacy of memories (1996) of its members. Having been influenced by the sociological explanations of Weber, Durkheim or Marx (Spencer and Wollman 2008: 33), the *modernists* prompt for the proper understanding of nationalism and national identity as a consequence of modernity, and its accompanying economic, social and political processes⁵.

However, to explain the pervasive role of the ethnicity in contemporary form of Slovak nationalism and the strong imprint of the *ethnonym* - the ethnic self-consciousness (Gellner 1983, Smith 2008) on the national identity, I will utilize Anthony D. Smith’s theory which seeks to point out the ethnic, cultural and political commons of the modern nations with the ethnic and ethno-religious communities (2008: 29).

Smith soundly amends the modernist approach by correcting for the failure to incorporate the ‘inherent ethnocentrism’ (2008: 16). His theoretical approach labeled *ethno-symbolism* (2000) rightly assumes that the modernists attempt to stretch the general concept

⁵ Pioneered by functionalist Ernest Gellner, who connected the rise of nationalism with the mobilization of the nationalist elites and intelligentsia (1983), the modernists paradigm ascribes the transformational processes of urbanization, industrialization and print-capitalism the causal role in the nation formation (Connor 1990; 1994; 2004, Gellner 1964; 1973; 1983, Breuilly 1993; 1996; 2005, Hobsbawm 1990, Kedourie 1971).

of a nation to the whole historical community is void because it only represents a specific subtype of a generic nation, namely its civic-territorial form(13-18). With this initial assumption, the modernists tend to downplay the role of ethnic ties and identities(29) that are necessarily present in the contemporary nationalisms. Smith thus prompts for the correct universal general analytic category of a nation which can be only done by analyzing the continuous and flux connection of the past, present and the future. He finally concludes that the present linkages with the earlier *ethnies* were done by the discovery and appropriation of ethnic history, mainly in the periods of national awakening, when the intellectual elites and leaders created (imagined) the national community by choosing the “local dialects, customs, folklore, music, or poetry”(Smith 2008: 20-23).

Although I must agree with Hastings that the general concept of nation has to embrace “far more self-conscious community than an ethnicity”(1997:2), I find no serious objection to Smith’s definition of nation as a “named and self-defined human community whose members cultivate shared myths, memories, symbols, values, and traditions, reside in and identify with a historic homeland, create and disseminate a distinctive public culture, and observe shared customs and common laws”(2008: 19). On the contrary, I tend to perceive the idea of the interconnected ethnic and ‘constructed (imagined)’ elements as being rather compatible with the *modernist* view. After all, Smith himself admits that the nations might be described as “imagined, willed, and felt communities(22)”.

Crucially important feature of the modernist view is its instrumentalism which properly understands nationalisms as strategic tools of political mobilization(Hastings 1997, Renan 1996, Hobsbawm 1990, Özkirimli 2000). There is not inherent nature to any nation: “Nations as a natural, God-given way of classifying men, as an inherent...political destiny,

are a myth...”(Gellner 2006: 47). Both the nation and the national identity are flux entities which are being formed, created and interpreted by the ruling political leadership⁶.

In lines with Smith’s ethnocentrism, this paper will perceive the 18th and 19th century Slovak nationalism as “an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining the autonomy, unity, and identity on behalf of a population, some of whose members deem it to constitute an actual or potential nation”(Smith 2008: 15). Furthermore, accepting the modernist paradigm, it will be presumed that the Slovak nationalism must have appeared before the Slovak nation *per se* and so it can only be recognized and interpreted retrospectively(Hobsbawn 1990). As noted by Hobsbawn, “[n]ations do not make states and nationalisms but the other way round”(10).

1.2 TYPOLOGY OF NATIONALISMS

The classic theories of nationalism, slightly tinged by normative elements, distinguish between two types of nationalisms according to the very understanding of concept of the nation-formation. The *French concept*, found predominantly in Western Europe, is traditionally associated with the ‘good’ civic nationalism or patriotism, and it derives the national membership from *ius soli*. On the contrary, the so called *German model* of nation-building that operates with the romantic and cultural understanding of the nation granting nationality on the bases of *ius sanguinis*, is supposed to be characteristic for the Central and Eastern European nations and gave birth to the normatively worse, ethnic forms of nationalism.

⁶ Gellner, himself, ascribed the crucial role to the ‘high culture’(140) which “pervades the whole society, defines it and needs to be sustained by that polity”(18). He suggested the cultural homogeneity and the need of standardized communication as the necessary social and economic condition for modern industrial societies. Benedict Anderson replaced the industrialism with the idea of print-capitalism which has made it possible for the modern waves of nationalisms to ‘imagine’ the “both inherently limited and sovereign”(2006: 6) national communities.

The conceptual base for the above stated dichotomy is the theoretical distinction of *voluntarist* and *organic* nation. The more voluntaristic Western nationalism understands the nation as an expression of a contractual political association (Smith 2008: 6), reflecting the civil-political approach historically promoted by the strong bourgeoisie. The organic Central and Eastern European nationalism inevitably tends to see the nation as a spiritual principle (Renan 1996) where the members are ‘bound together by a myth of common origins, and shared historical culture’ (Smith 2008: 6).

According to Held, in the non-Western type the nation was perceived as a “political unit centering around irrational, pre-civilized folk concept” (55) based on collectivity rights as opposed to the Western rather rational concepts of citizenship and individual freedoms. The non-Western nationalism lacked the “roots in socio-political reality” (Snyder 2003: 55). Thus, while in the Western Europe, the idea of nation was more connected to the political reality and the nation was understood as the political union of citizens, in the Eastern parts of Europe, we have observed mostly non-political elements. It often “grew in protest and in conflict against the existing state pattern and found its expression in cultural field” (54). While the Western world started to build on the *state-nation* concept that allowed for the development of the nations within the political entity, in central and Eastern Europe, the contrary concept of *nation-state* was deployed, strictly connecting the cultural-political entity with ethnicity and nationality (Pflanze 1966).

As opposed to the Western-type of nationalism, which had its roots in the civil liberty and rational cosmopolitanism, the historically younger ethnic nationalism emphasizes the real or presumed genealogical ties, vernacular culture including indigenous language, religion and customs, nativist history with the nation-centric view and interpretation of the history and popular mobilization (Smith 2008: 17). Contrasted to the Western forms of nationalism, the

non-Western one incorporated more myths and idealized future with the perception of a mission of certain nation.

The above described dichotomy and its relation to national identity was profoundly addressed by Kohn's analyses and comparison of the socio-political environments in which the Western and non-Western nationalisms evolved. According to his conclusions, the concept of *subjective-political* and *objective-cultural* nation (Kohn 1953, Brubaker 1992, Greenfield 1995) is further reflected in: a.) the idea of inclusive, open and democratic national identity based on the idea of civic community, that is willing to accept the cultural diversity; and b.) the ethnically closed type of national identity, which stems from the kinship based on (presumed) genetic ties based on the common ancestry, culture, language and history, and tends to be exclusive toward alien elements.

Kohn argued that the West has embraced the 'legal and rational concept of citizenship, and individual rights', while the non-Western world turned to collective rights based on the ethnicity and race origins(Kohn cited in Snyder 2003: 55) which allowed for the extensive 'utilization of the history for the national needs'(57). The ethnically closed concept of nation thus became characteristic for its historical and biological determinism and the attempts of the revival of the former conflicts (Kohn 1953).

Kohn's dichotomy is often projected in the various forms of open civic, inclusionary and closed, ethnic exclusionary nationalism which can be found in contemporary Europe. However, rejecting the geographical determinism, Liah Greenfeld managed to define the differences on the basis of the position of societies on the symbolic map(1995: 21). This placement subsequently determines the "perception of a nation's status relative to other nations" and sets the nature of nationalism on the civic-ethnic spectrum(21). According to her study, these types of nationalism can be classified into three major categories.

The first and the chronologically oldest one is the *individualist nationalism* with civic elements, stemming from the British tradition of Tudors, which defines the nation as “social compact of free and equal individuals”(21). It can be mostly found in the Western societies, however it is quite rare. More spread is the *collectivist nationalism* taking the nation as some kind of “a collective individual” superior to the interests of its comprising elements and having authoritarian and non-equalitarian features, favoring the “political culture of populist democracy or socialism”(19). However, when enriched by the civic criteria of national membership, the *collectivist civic nationalism* acknowledges the freedom of the individuals. On the contrary, when based on the ethnicity criterion, the individual is being classified on the basis of his membership in an ethnic group(nationality) rather than being perceived as a citizen of the state. This type of nationalism, the so-called “anti-Western” nationalism originated in Russia and represents the historically youngest form. It adds the negative element of ethnicity as the criteria of national membership, and is to be mainly found in post-soviet countries. *Collectivist, ethnic type of nationalism* sees nationality as genetically determined, entirely independent of the individual volition, thus making it an inherent and non-acquirable category. The freedom of the individual in this type of nationalism is denied consistently, or rather it is redefined as inner freedom or as recognized necessity” (1995:20).

On one hand, it is admittedly true that most of the empirical cases of nationalisms comprise of a mixture of civic and ethnic, or individualistic and collectivist elements, therefore one must ‘set aside the simplistic distinctions and evolutionary trends to uncover the deeper sources of popular attachment to collective cultural identities’(Smith 2000: 21). On the other hand, for the purpose of this paper, there is a need and possibility to distinguish the prevalence of certain elements. Following Greenfeld’s typology, the second chapter is going to identify the nature of nationalisms pursued by the Slovak governmental elites in different time periods starting from 1993. It will initially start from the assumption that the

modern Slovak nationalism, as present in the 20th century, can be classified as *ethnic collectivist nationalism*, enforced by the exclusive nature of the Slovak national identity.

1.3 NATIONAL IDENTITY AND MYTHS

According to the social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1986), there are different levels of identities which do exist and manifest themselves in different social interactions. Assuming the multiplicity of socio-political identities, which are to be formed through the perceived membership in social groups (Hogg and Vaughan 2002), each individual has different levels of self, ranging from family membership, local groups, regions, nations to supranational communities.

The national attachment must not exclude, nor be always superior to the other circles of identity (Hobsbawm, 1990). However, as a consequence of the preponderant doctrine of nationalism, the national sameness had overridden the local and ethnic difference (Handler 1988:6), destroyed heterogeneity and plural cultural traditions and replaced it with one collective historical-cultural identity (Gellner 1983; 1996). Habermas defines the national identity as “an intellectual construct supposing the appropriation of cultural heritage that was filtered by historiography and reflection. It originates in the consciousness of an educated civic audience and is being spread through the channels of modern mass-communication” (1992). The psychological importance of the national identity is captured in Billig’s work: “Having a national identity also involves being situated physically, legally, socially, as well as emotionally: typically, it means being situated within a homeland, which itself is situated within the world of nations. And, only if people believe that they have national identities, will such homelands, and the world of national homelands, be reproduced.” (1995: 8)

Nationality and national identity are not fixed or indelible, objectively ascertainable properties; they are rather variable across time and context of elicitation (Brubaker 1996: 56). Their inevitable cultural source is the historically determined set of beliefs about the formation and evolution of the national entity expressed through the national myths. These means of standardization and of storage of information (Elias 1991) act as effective tools of cultural reproduction (Bourdieu 1993) during and after the formation of the nations. “Myth is one of the ways in which collectivities – in this context especially nations – establish and determine the foundations of their own being, their own systems of morality and values.” (Schöpflin 1997: 19). Myth can be seen as an cognitive ‘instrument of self-definition’ attributing certain qualities to certain groups, ‘an instrument of identity transfer’ (Armstrong 1982: 130) that has the ability to superimpose⁷ a new identity to the older ones (Schöpflin 1997: 22). In this process of creation (or re-creation) of national identities, myths mitigate the communication gaps by ‘establishing the illusion of community’ by providing a simplified representation of the complexity of the reality (Cassirer 1946: 5).

It is important to initially understand that myths do not serve the function of description of the historical events, they rather tell the participants how to understand and interpret these events – they offer the „perceptions rather than historically validated truths” (Schöpflin 1997: 19), allowing the very content to overshadow the actual historical accuracy. The power of myths lies in their intellectual and cognitive monopoly which is crucial for every community for establishing the coherence among its members. It is also a device which sets the system of morality and values in the society (Schöpflin 1997: 19).

For the modern nations, myths represent the ‘political religion of the people’ (Smith 2008: 40) which uses the national symbols, anthems and ceremonies for its sacred rituals. As

⁷ During the periods of the national awakening and consolidation, the myths were deployed to overcome the differences and cultural and linguistic heterogeneity of the to-be nation, such as with the French nation-building example.

Schöpflin noted, the national myths are ‘encoded in rituals, liturgies and symbols’(1997: 81) and it is assumed that only the pure reference to the symbol can recall the myth among the ‘members of the community without need to return to the ritual’(Kertzer 1988: 20). Similarly, the national rituals as the ‘voluntarily performance[s] of appropriately patterned behavior to symbolically affect or participate in the serious life’(Marvin and Ingle 1999) allow the ‘mythomoteurs’(Hastings 1997) to re-articulate the myths through the so called ‘ceremonial politics’(Dayan and Katz 1992). The modern nation has thus become a community of shared symbols that is being daily ‘flagged’(Billig 1995) to assure the continuous allegiance of its members. The national flag serves the function of the *durkhamian* totem object(Marvin and Ingle 1999: 18) in this civil religion.

Anthony Smith’s analyses on myths suggests that myths are mainly reflecting the following dimensions of nationhood: community, territory, history and destiny(2008:40) which are primarily addressed through the myth of origins and the myth of ethnic election. While the former one includes the myth of creation, foundation or common ancestry(Connor 1990), the latter one refers to a specific aim or quest of the chosen ethnic entity. Prevalent features present in national mythology are the ‘territORIZATION of identity’(Armstrong 1982) and the creation of the ‘ethnoscapes’(Smith 2008:43) representing the connection of *ethnies* and landscapes. The naturalization and sanctification of the national territory then leads to the notion of people rooted in their historic homelands(Grosby 2002).

More light on the taxonomy of myths was shed by Hosking and Schöpflin’s profound analyses in their book *Myth & Nationhood*(1997), where the authors identify myths that are usually found in Central and Eastern Europe. These are namely: a.) myth of territory connected with the autochthonous inhabitants and sacralization of the territory; b.) the myth of redemption stemming from the Christian understanding of suffering pinpointing the ‘shared history of sorrow’ and the redemption for the powerlessness; c.) the myth of unjust

treatment is similar, history of unjust oppression; d.) the myth of election applying the religious notion of a chosen group having a certain mission to accomplish; e.) the myth of military valour connected with past actions against tyranny and oppression; f.) the myths of rebirth and renewal stemming from Christian palingenesis and Parousia; and additionally, g.) myths of foundation, i.) the myth of ethno-genesis and antiquity, and j.) myths of kinship and shared descent. (28-35)

It is almost exclusively the political elites who control the myths standardization process(Schöpflin, 1997:22-24) through the utilization of mass communication media. These 'keep the totem systems alive, effective and ever-present' by promoting the mechanic solidarity through 'commanding attention universally and simultaneously' and subsequently bring about the sense of membership and lead to the strengthening of the organic solidarity(Dayan and Katz, 1992). The role of the communication channels in this process is crucial because the myth must resonate among the public, and further induce some kind of feedback on the individual level to produce the desired bonds of solidarity(Schöpflin 1997, Boyer 2003). Many authors acknowledge the central role of myth in politics (Schöpflin, Cassirer, Armstrong, Kertzer, Smith), especially for the electoral mobilization purposes(Kertzer 1988) where the myth makes the transmission of the desired message to the public much easier. Thus the electoral success of the political entities depends on their ability to effectively use the political rituals and symbols in the electoral rhetoric when addressing their 'community of shared symbols'(Kertzer 1988: 21). At this point, the importance of 'who controls the myths'(Schöpflin 1997: 22-24) must be regarded as vital.

The conclusions about the vital role of myth in the contemporary political discourse aimed at electoral mobilization are further strengthened by Smith's observation about the "continuing power of myths, symbols and memories of ethnic chosenness, golden ages and

historic homelands [being] largely responsible for the mass appeal of ethnic nationalism in the aftermath of the Cold War and the demise of the Soviet empire”(1999:19).

It has been argued that the role of myth and its perpetual reproduction and re-creation is crucial for the construction and re-construction of the national identity. Myth *per se* can be seen as an cognitive ‘instrument of self-definition’ attributing certain qualities to certain groups, or as ‘instrument of identity transfer’(Armstrong 1982: 130) that has the ability to superimpose a new identity to the older ones(Schöpflin 1997). National myths represent a double-edged sword. On one hand, they have the power to mitigate the communication gaps between the ethnics by ‘establishing the illusion of community’(Cassirer 1946:5); on the other, they can cut-off the selected groups from the identity formation by excluding them from the conceptualized myth of citizenship.

II. THE HISTORICAL LEGACY AND THE ETHNIC FOUNDATION OF THE STATE

2.1 THE FORMATION OF THE MODERN SLOVAK NATION

The Slovak Republic is an ethnically and religiously heterogeneous country which has retained its heterogeneity as a consequence of the specific historical and social developments of the 19th and 20th century. Its ethnic heterogeneity, in particular, makes it different from the neighboring countries, where the assimilation and expatriation of the national minorities were executed more ‘successfully’ and thus, to the great extent, solved the ethnic question by the homogenization of the society, i.e. the Czech Republic. The multiethnic character of the state and the deformed social development of the Slovak society during the modernization period

of the past two centuries (Zajac 1996: 48) has thus resulted in the need of the constant reassurance of the collective identity by construction of the cultural memory.

Compared to the constitutive nations of the neighboring Central European post-Soviet countries, the modern Slovak nation belongs to the group of the ‘new European nations’, which began to form only in the 19th century. The Slovak national identity was not only re-born in the 19th century, it was literally born during that period. It was only in this period; when the Austro-Hungarian lieges started to perceive themselves as having a national identity rather than identifying themselves according through the ties to their local landlords or the Austro-Hungarian monarchy.

The first official demarcation of the Slovak territory only occurred in 1840, however, the Slovak *ethnoscape* (Smith 2008: 43) had been identified and promulgated earlier by the national awakeners to make the people feel rooted in their homeland. Great deal of importance was put on the ‘territORIZATION of identity’ (Armstrong 1982) emphasizing the immemorial nature of the ancient Slovak territory which ceased to exist in the late 9th century, has not practically existed during the whole period of the Middle Ages, and only re-appeared in 17th century. During the period of the Slovak national awakening⁸, when the first ethnographic and historical research on Slovak national identity was made, a massive naturalization and sanctification (Grosby 2002) of the sights and venues of historical importance became projected in the contemporary literature, folk songs and political agenda; the nation experiences the birth of the vernacular literature, the renewed interest in folk-traditions, art and architecture. For the purposes of spreading the national edification the first schools were established, the military service was introduced and finally, the national press started to operate to help to *imagine* the nation among the masses.

⁸ The Slovak national awakening, triggered by the Enlightenment movement in Europe, represented the period of the formation of the modern Slovak nation, lasted from the 1870’s until the 1848/49 revolution. It comprised of three phases, the 1780-1820, the 1820-1835 and finally the 1835-1848.

It must be noted though, that neither Slovaks, nor the Hungarians had been the autochthonous peoples of the territory where they have later established their nation-states, still the western Slavic tribes had inhabited the Carpathian basin some centuries before the arrival of the nomadic Magyar tribes. The historical reason of the downfall of the old Slavic power-structures of Great Moravia and their gradual incorporation into the nascent Hungarian monarchy is still ambiguous; however, it was most probably the lack of political organization and military strength that resulted in the present territory of Slovakia becoming a part of multiethnic state entity. Disregarding the real historical causes, it is inevitable to acknowledge the significant period of almost thousand years, during which the ethnically diverse Slovaks and Hungarians had assimilated, and the language and cultural elements mutually penetrated both *ethnies*.

Nevertheless, the myths created by the national intelligentsia during the period of the Slovak national awakening enabled the exclusion of certain events and historical truths from public consciousness(Schöpflin 1997: 26). The elimination of the common shared history from the collective memory of the nation was concisely demonstrated in the text of the new national anthem that induced the myth of the redemption stressing the shared history of sorrow and the redemption for powerlessness⁹. Similarly, the myth of unjust treatment and oppression was projected into the contemporary political discourse when the period of common monarchy was referred to as ‘the 1000 year yoke’.

When the *pan-slavism* started to shape the national identity in the beginning of the 19th century, resulting in the first requirements for autonomy, the problem of the territorial demarcation appeared. It had become very difficult to delimit the borders because the proposed state territory included two major ethnic territories, the Slovak and the Hungarian one. It can be claimed that due to the negative mythological depiction of the common shared

⁹ The revolutionary text of the anthem composed is specifically aimed against the Hungarian oppression.

history, the Slovak nation disregarded the significant ethnic ties and intertwined identities¹⁰, turned its back to Hungary, and formed a joint political union with a culturally more distant nation, the Czechs.¹¹

The preponderant concept of *pan-Slavism* advocating the similarity and the bond of the Slavic tribes, strictly excluded the external Hungarian identity and strongly opposed the mixed Slovak-Hungarian dual-identity (Piscova and Buncak 2000: 300). While the Moravians, the Ruthenians and other *ethnies* were at least partially included, there was no place for Hungarian elements in the construction of the Slovak national identity. Thus the traditional schmittian *us-them* distinction and exclusionary attitudes towards the former Hungarian co-nationals stem from these ideological origins underpinning the modern Slovak national identity.

2.2 THE LEGACY OF THE FIRST STATE ENTITIES

After the end of First World War, as a consequence of the demise and of the Habsburg power-structures, and due to the success of the joint Czecho-Slovak diplomatic efforts and the lobby of the influential diaspora in the US, an independent state entity was assigned to the Slovaks for the first time in their modern history. According to the Hungarian view, generally manifested as the ‘Trianon syndrome’, the Slovak secession was not justified, nor legitimate.¹²

¹⁰ The contemporary documentation about the Slovak ethnic territory says that the Slovaks had been widely spreading and the Hungarians started to adopt their customs and traditions, and after the generational change, these themselves completely assimilate with the Slovaks.

¹¹ In 1918, the representatives of the Slovak League and Czech National Association in the US decided to sign the Pittsburgh agreement about the union of Czechs and Slovaks in an independent state, with the presence of T.G.Masaryk, the Chairman of the Czecho-Slovak National Council

¹² This perception has been shaping the mutual relationships since then, and still resonates on the Hungarian political scene, mainly among the far-right nationalist subjects and their stance towards the Hungarian minority in Slovakia.

It was only during the post-war times, when the fully autonomist concept of the Slovak national identity consolidated, totally excluding the elements of the common shared past. The ancient nature of the *ethnonym* was embedded in the myth of foundation, tracking the roots of the territorial possession to the old Slavic quasi-state entities, such as the Empire of the Frank merchant Samo (7th century). The myth of the old history of ethno-genesis stressed the pre-Hungarian ‘golden times’ of Great Moravia and the Principality of Nitra(9th century). The period within the common state was officially regarded as an interruption, not being labeled other than by the term ‘1000 year yoke’. The myth of ethno-genesis was logically supplemented by the myth of rebirth and renewal of the Slovak nation and national identity in the 19th century. The Byzantine mission of Constantine the Philosopher and Methodius¹³ was translated into the myth of election and historical chosenness, and was to further emphasize religious consecration and advancement of the old Slavic tribes as opposed to the barbaric old Magyars. Paradoxically, emphasizing the tradition of Christianity pointed out the historical distinction of Slovaks both from the Orthodox part of the Slavs, and from the rather Protestant Czech nation. To mitigate the cultural gap, the contemporary political elites defined the autonomist concept of ‘Slavicism’ rather in humanistic terms, possessing the republican and democratic values - as opposed to the state and religious absolutism of the former dissolved Austro-Hungarian monarchy.

The pan-Slavic ideology lead to the oppressive ‘Czechoslovak nationalism that culminated in national cleansing from ‘nationally unreliable’ Germans and Hungarians(Piscova and Buncak 2000). During the period of 1945-48, within the framework of the so called ‘internal measures’, the members of the Hungarian minority were deprived of their citizenship and basic political rights and sent to the working sites to Czech Republic.

¹³ Byzantine mission of Constantine the Philosopher and Methodius, from the approval of the Slavonic translation of the Bible and liturgical books by pope Hadrian II, and from the sending of Methodius as an Archbishop to Nitra in 870 A. D

The fusion of the ethnic borders with the state borders was to further be achieved by the 'mutual exchange of population' in 1946, when thousands of inhabitants were forcefully re-located from Slovakia to Hungary, and vice versa.

During the Second World War, the myth of military valor connected with past actions against tyranny and oppression can be identified in the Slovak National Uprising in 1944 that represented a revolutionary act against one's own national fascist government collaborating with Nazi Germany. It represents the first attempt of rejection of ethnic understanding of the Slovak national identity. Still, the autonomist concept of the national identity further developed only after 1968 when experiencing the years of dissatisfaction with the dominant role of the Czech nation in the common state-entity, and later on under the asymmetric federalism. The tensions came to the peak after the fall of the Soviet regime in 1989, when the Czech and Slovak political elites decided to abandon the common republic and opt out for separate states. The establishment of the autonomous Slovak Republic eliminated the possible ethnic conflict between the Slovaks and the Czechs (Zajac 1999), directing the schmittian definition of *them* even more to the Hungarian minority.

2.3 *THE CZECHOSLOVAK SEPARATION AND THE POST-1993 DEVELOPMENT*

The tradition of utilization of the issues of ethno-national character such as the ethnic identity or language can be traced back to the period of the split of Czechoslovakia in 1993, when both successor countries, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, took a very different approach toward the re-definition of their national identities. Paradoxically, while the more ethnically homogenous Czech nation decided to embrace the principles of the collective civic nationalism (Breuilly 1993, Greenfield 1995), the newly formed Slovak republic returned to its

very roots of the 19th century nationalism - the ethnic conception of a nation - despite a significant share of population being of a different ethnic origin. The consequence of the emancipation and the political development after 1993 has been profound for the homogenization of the national identity. Instead of weakening the ethnic dimension and its transformation to civic and patriotic forms, Slovakia experienced the activation of national and national populist parties. As Annie Coombes soundly noted, the changing definitions of *community* and *nation*, and the new public histories usually occur during the periods of political transition(2003:1), and so after the creation of the independent autonomous Slovak Republic in 1993 a major re-articulation of the national identity occurred. During the transitional period, diverse interest groups pushed for ethnicization of the non-ethnic problems as a mobilization strategy (Podoba 2000). As a consequence, Slovak Republic experienced increased levels of ethnic tensions, worsening of the bilateral relations with neighboring Hungary, and the damage on its international reputation.

The Slovak nation whose ‘political ambitions were frustrated for centuries’ was naturally prone to extremist nationalist ideologies also due to the very lack of democratic past(Auer 2004: 131). The pro-nationalist Mečiar cabinet(1993-1998), internationally recognized as a non-democratic regime not observing the rights of the minorities, initially redefined the Slovak nationality as an ethnically based concept(Mesežnikov 2008). The newly formed state “has negatively distinguished itself from other postcommunist, newly independent states”(OSCE report 1997) also because of the demoralization of the Slovak society and the post-soviet elites, the lack of experience with own state-entity and multiculturalism, and finally, the isolation of the international democratic (Western) environment. The period of the two Meciar’s governments (1993-1998) under the rule of Movement for Democratic Slovakia(HZDS) was characterized by the “lack of respect for the democratic opposition, repeated attempts at obstruction of the free media, large-scale

corruption in economic policies, and recurrent instigation of ethnocentric nationalism.¹⁴”(Auer 2004: 131) However, at this point, it must be noted that the political scene was divided on the interethnic issues, and the opposition rather advocated the policies of ethnic tolerance.

Selective approach to the historical past was clearly observable with the first two Mečiar governments(1993-1998), i.e. in the form of rejection of the responsibility for the forceful re-slovakization or glorification of semi-fasistsic past leaders of the First Republic. The political elites tried to override the responsibility and collective guilt by constantly stressing the 'myth of suffering' of the Slovaks(Schöpflin 1997) under the rule of Hungarians and favored the non-acknowledgement of the common historical legacy returning to the revolutionary rhetoric of national awakeners of the 19th century. The '1000-year yoke' concept was symbolically embedded into the Preamble of the new Slovak Constitution which refers to the historical period of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy as the „centuries of struggle for our national existence and statehood” (The Slovak Constitution, 1993).

Instead of accepting the multicultural perspective of history, which would rightly acknowledge the importance and integrity of the Central European and the Austro-Hungarian history for the formation of the Slovak national identity, the political elites supported and actively pursued various initiatives which caused the mythopoeic reading of the past. The profound expatriation of the shared history only strengthened the inferiority complex already present in the Slovak society. Without a past that would acknowledge the common achievements within the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, the Slovak nation became a nation of farmers and builders, and the myth of unjust treatment and oppression was deployed(Schöpflin 1997) to exculpate for the unpleasant phenomenon. The innocent victims concept depicted the Slovaks as a community bearing the shared history of sorrow seeking a

¹⁴ This features are, to some extent, observable with the current Fico government(2006-2010)

redemption for the powerlessness, and the final creation of the Slovak Republic in 1993 was seen as the long awaited historical necessity. Identifying the neighboring Hungary as the oppressor and the deliberate non-differentiation between the foreign Hungarians and the Hungarian minority living in the Slovak Republic, led to the animistic perception the largest ethnic minority living in the territory of Southern Slovakia. As the new mythicized language was devised specifically for intra-community communication, it intensified and mobilized the negative emotions of the side of the Slovak majority (Schöpflin 1997: 24-27) and subsequently led to further separation. The two Meciar governments (1993-1998) actively supported the cutting off of the Hungarian minority from the identity formation by excluding them from the conceptualized myth of the new Slovak citizenship.

Since the very creation of the autonomous state, the Slovak society has been oscillating between the civic and ethnic understanding of the national identity, represented by the classical conflict of the monolithic and pluralistic conception. While the former saw the nation as a collective individual that has to be defended, the latter one stressed the heterogeneity of the individuals that form the dynamic national entity (Zajac 1996). After 1993, it were mainly the socio-historical factors that allowed the nationally oriented political elites to establish strong enough resonance among the public and to exclude the ethnic others – the Hungarians, to screen out certain undesired memories, and to establish support and solidarity (Schöpflin 1997: 22) in the emerging Slovak society.

As observed by Mesežnikov, a significant factor contributing to the acceptance of the national populism and etatist ideology had been the instability of the past political regimes, ranging from monarchist semi-authoritarianism to pluralistic democracy, fascist totalitarianism, limited national democracy, communist totalitarianism and a rotation of liberal and non-liberal democracy regimes between 1990 and 2006 (2009). In the course of only one century, the Slovaks formed part of five constitutional entities, namely the Austro-

Hungarian Empire, the first Czechoslovak Republic, the first Slovak State, the second Czechoslovak Republic and the modern Slovak Republic. This instability of the state entities and re-drawing of the borders led to increased protectionist approach with regard to the national sovereignty and territorial integrity. As a consequence, every attempt from the Hungarian minority to achieve some form of cultural, educational or linguistic powers automatically triggered negative emotions, and was constantly interpreted and delivered to the majority community through the lens of ‘separatism’ – a popular view particularly promoted by the radical political forces such as the Slovak National Party.

As a consequence of all the above stated factors, the Slovak republic was initially established as a country with a dominant titular ethnic entity and a religious denomination despite comprising of a variety of ethnic minorities. When examining the opening lines of the new Constitution of 1993, the preamble explicitly stresses the ethnic affiliation of the nation-forming group: “We, the Slovak People...[t]ogether with members of national minorities and ethnic groups living in the Slovak Republic...”(The Slovak Constitution, 1993). This initial proclamation further enforced by the actions of political elites anchored the titular position of the ethnic Slovaks as the ultimate source of the national identity. The historical reference emphasizing the struggle for our national existence only includes ‘us’, the Slovak people, not the members of national minorities and ethnic groups who were also living in the territory of the present state and sharing the ‘shared history of sorrow’(Schöpflin 1997). Such foundational ethno-nationalist definition(Dimitrijevic, 2004) has led to the perception of duality of the ownership of the state between the titular nation and ‘the others’. As already stated in the previous chapter, the renewed Slovak myths after 1993, articulated by the contemporary political elites, became the tool of further exclusion of the 'others', particularly the Hungarian minority and the Roma people, from the next formation of the national identity. Due to the monarchic legacy, the religious affiliation in Slovakia did not provide a

sufficient cross-cutting cleavage for the ethnicity (or rather the linguistic division) such as the successful case of Switzerland. However, nor was the religious cleavage overlapping ethnicity to cause extreme separation and violent conflict as in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

During the eight-years of the two Dzurinda governments(1998-2002, 2002-2006) embracing Hungarian minority party(SMK - Strana maďarskej koalície[Party of Hungarian Coalition]), a positive approach towards the ethnic diversity was observable. Even though, the inter-ethnic situation could not be described as firmly settled, the approach and political discourse of the governing elites promoted rather the civic interpretation of the national identity, putting much emphasis to the democratic values and multiculturalism.

2.4 TYPOLOGY OF THE NATIONALISMS PURSUED BY THE GOVERNMENTAL ELITES

The following classification of the Slovak governments dating from 1993 onwards, namely the cabinets of: Meciar I (1992-1994), Meciar II (1994-1998), Dzurinda I (1998-2002), Dzurinda II (2002-2006), and Fico (2006-2010), has been done by combining the declared and the actual position of the parties present in the governmental coalition. I have performed the content analysis of the party manifestos to assess their declared position on the nationalist spectrum, and examined the sources such as the proposed legislative initiatives, party support of the proposals connected with the national identity issues, policy proposals and their implementations, official statements by the elites in mass-media, the myths articulated by the elites, and finally, the foreign policy course towards Hungary, to assess their actual position on the nationalist spectrum.

The five Slovak governments since 1993 have been classified according to the type of nationalism they have overall pursued to two categories proposed by Liah Greenfield(1995):

a.) *collective, ethnic type of nationalism* - monolithic totalitarianism, deploying exclusive

concept of ethnically defined nation and advocating unitary populism reflected in the protectionist policies

- b.) *collective, civic type of nationalism* - liberal pluralism, deploying rather democratic, inclusive concept of a civic nation based on the ideas of open society

GOVERNMENT	PERIOD	TYPE OF NATIONALISM PURSUED
MECIAR I	(1992-1994)	Collective, ethnic type
MECIAR II	(1994-1998)	Collective, ethnic type
DZURINDA I	(1998 - 2002)	Collective, civic type
DZURINDA II	(2002 - 2006)	Collective, civic type
FICO	(2006 - 2010)	Collective, ethnic type

Table I. : Classification of the Slovak governments according to the type of nationalism pursued

III. THE FICO GOVERNMENT(2006-2010): BACK TO ETHNIC NATIONALISM

This chapter will discuss and critically evaluate the position of the three main actors of the Fico government(2006-2010), namely the SMER – Sociálna demokracia [Direction-Social Democracy], the SNS – Slovenská Národná Strana [Slovak National Party], and the LS-HZDS – Ľudová Strana-Hnutie za Demokratické Slovensko[People's Party - Movement for a Democratic Slovakia], according to their degree of radicalism, adjacent ideology and their stance on the ethnic and minority-related issues. Despite the absence of a direct support and promulgation of the ethnic nationalism in their manifestos¹⁵, the work claims that all of

¹⁵ Except the SNS, which does traditionally incorporate the nationalistic discourse into their manifestos.

the parties have embraced the ethnic nationalistic elements and during the electoral period 2006-2010, they either directly promoted or accepted the assumptions of the *collective, ethnic nationalism* (Greenfeld 1995). This argument shall be supported by the governmental stances towards the national identity and minority-related issues, bilateral relations with Hungary, and the political discourse of the party elites. I further support the claim that all three coalition parties are trying to shift the national consciousness and the public opinion towards the ethnic understanding of the national identity, although with varying degree of radicalism (Mesežnikov and Gyarfášová 2008).

The chapter examines the attempts of the three main governmental actors to re-define the Slovak national identity through deploying new historical narratives, myths and symbolic politics by analyzing their political discourse, stance on the number of causes connected with ethnic-tensions, utilization of the so-called Hungarian card as the mobilization factors in the electoral politics, evaluation of the concrete steps of policy making and finally the foreign policy decisions regarding the diplomatic tensions with Hungary.

3.1 IDENTIFICATION OF THE PRIME ACTORS AND THEIR STANCES

All the three parties of the Fico government (2006-2010) can be described as national populist, with the LS-HZDS and SNS being classified as the first generation, 'hard-populists', and SMER as belonging to the second wave of soft populism formed in the pre-accession period to the European Union. The two former parties, namely the SNS and LS-HZDS, exhibit a clear preference of ethnic and nationalist model of the national identity, projected in "the historic mythologizing, appropriation syndrome and negligence of issues related to the type of the regime, quality of democracy, liberal-democratic foundation of Slovakia's constitutional system and importance of abiding by the principles of constitutional

liberalism”(Mesežnikov 2009). In the beginning of the electoral period, the main ruling party, SMER has been more moderate on the direct promulgation of the ethnic nationalism, however, during the electoral period of 2006-2010 it has continually been adopting and picking over the nationalistic agenda of the two above mentioned parties, particularly the far-right SNS.

Since the 2006 parliamentary victory, the two incumbent parties, SMER and SNS, have been proposing various legislative initiatives to strengthen the feelings of patriotism and the attachment of the Slovak citizens to their homeland. Prime Minister Robert Fico expressed his concerns about Slovakia “being engulfed by the cancer of indifference, which is only one step away from national unconsciousness”(Fico cited in Mesežnikov 2008:16), and to make up for the lack of the ‘national outburst’, after a number of unsuccessful attempts, a new law on patriotism following the US model of ‘flagging the nation’ was proposed in 2010. The promoted ‘patriotic model’ by the government emanates from a very specific ethnic understanding of the national identity, according to which the re-patriotization of the Slovaks should mainly stem from distinguishing themselves: firstly, from other ethnic groups, meaning especially the Hungarian minority; and secondly, from civic oriented and cosmopolitan members of the majority population(17). It is clear that the Fico government has expressed its rejection of the implementation of the uniting conceptualized myth of citizenship which would embrace ethnic minorities.

Except exhibiting features of national populism, all of the coalition parties can be considered etatist parties, although etatism in their activities shows to a different degree and is differently accentuated (13). Etatism is mostly observable the political discourse of the party elites, for example SMER’s leader, and the Prime Minister, Robert Fico openly proclaimed that government should be “the father of all citizens”(25.1. 2008 SME daily). Etatism is also projected in the views of the far-right nationalist SNS which sees the

autonomous Slovak state as the utmost value and national interest to be protected against any kind of separatist attempts.¹⁶ Vladimír Mečiar's LS-HZDS, that has been the main actor of the Czechoslovak separation, can be currently defined to hold a more moderate position on the *etatist* scale.

In sum, all of the governmental subjects do exhibit features of national populism connected with etatism. They either directly ideologically advocate the ethnic understanding of the national identity and launch concrete legislative steps, or passively adopt these ideas from the more radical right wing Slovak National Party. Furthermore, stressing the above-average standards of the ethnic minority-protection, they tend to downplay the democratic quality of the regime on the account of the ethnicity which they consider to be the most crucial element the process of identity and state-building(Mesežnikov and Gyarfášová 2008).

3.1.1 LS-HZDS [PEOPLE'S PARTY – MOVEMENT FOR DEMOCRATIC SLOVAKIA]

After the first free elections, in 1991 the revolutionary movement the VPN (Public against Violence) split into two groups, one of them forming a new political party, the HZDS(Movement for Democratic Slovakia). Seeking the incensement in the power position, its leader, Vladmír Mečiar utilized the Slovak national identity issues to promote the division of the Czechoslovak Federal Republic among the society. The division became the main point on the party's agenda. In 1992, after entering the government as a main political force, HZDS achieved the split of the federation and the creation of the autonomous Slovak republic in 1993. As it was HZDS itself who the promoted and actively implemented the ethnic

¹⁶ Referring to the the initiatives for cultural autonomy and self-government of the Hungarian minority on Southern Slovakia

perception of the national identity, its ideology corresponds to the concept of collective, ethnic nationalism.

Up to today, HDZS tends to present itself as the ‘architect of Slovakia’s independent statehood’, ‘nationally oriented’ or ‘pro-Slovak’. During the period of the two Mečiar’s governments(1992-1998), the party’s ideological profile and their views on ‘inter-ethnic relations, Slovakia’s historic legacy, the character of the state and other issues were not fundamentally different from those of SNS leaders’(Mesežnikov and Gyarfášová 2008: 11-15). Thus, despite the party’s promulgated name, the politics towards ethnic minorities of both Meciar’s governments was regarded as discriminatory and almost adversarial, including official xenophobic discourse. During both Meciar’s governments, Slovakia was often internationally criticized for not respecting the rights of the Hungarians and the Roma.

Since the rapid decline in voter support and the party’s long-term isolation in the opposition between 1998 and 2006, it has become much more moderated on the above mentioned issues. Although, at present, LS-HZDS¹⁷ is not officially promoting nationalistic orientation, it continues to be a part of the national populist coalition, in which it rather plays a passive role, approving the policies of the other two more active partners, SNS and SMER respectively. Mesežnikov and Gyarfášová further observed that the party “regularly conveys messages that fit the description of national populism, although their frequency and intensity is lower compared to the SNS or SMER.”(2008: 12)

3.1.2 SNS [SLOVAK NATIONAL PARTY]

The Slovak National Party belongs to the very far right on the nationalist spectrum and it is considered to be a radical political force, using right-wing chauvinist and discriminatory rhetoric. SNS considers itself to be a successor of the historic national party

¹⁷ The party changed its name from HDZS to LS-HZDS after the internal split.

that existed until 1938 and claims it is the 'only real political power which has always confessed its support concerning the state independence of Slovakia as the independent and sovereign motherland of the constructive Slovak nation.'(SNS Party Manifesto, 2006). Serving in the two Mečiar's governments during the period of 1993-1998, and having its representatives in the national parliament until 2002, it pursued several attempts to alter the situation of the ethnic Hungarians in the negative way through the legislative proposals affecting the minority rights mainly in the education and cultural policy.

Mesežnikov argues that “throughout its modern existence, activities of the SNS have contributed to the systematic undermining of civil dialogue, particularly in terms of interactions between the majority population and minority communities. SNS leaders have become notorious for their incessantly confrontational rhetoric, aggressive tone and offensive statements aimed against political representatives and members of ethnic minorities. The party appeals primarily to voters with nationalist views and authoritarian concepts of society’s political organization”(2009: 10).

The SNS openly opposes the conceptualized myth of citizenship and civic national identity¹⁸ and promotes the concept of the ethnically-defined nation(9). The opening lines of the party manifesto of 2006 goes as follows: “We are the Slovaks. Slovak government for Slovak people.”¹⁹ Leaders of SNS try to address the community of shared symbols(Kertzer 1988: 21) from the position of those, who control the myths(Schöpflin 1997: 22-24)). They try to promulgate and deepen the myth of the ethnic others(the Hungarians) by portraying the minority groups as the danger to the dominant group, the ethnic Slovaks. The SNS publicly promulgates the idea of the Slovak Republic being a national state of ethnic Slovaks and constantly puts forth the question of the ethnic Hungarians’ loyalty to the state by interpreting

¹⁸ “Some malleable model of a citizen of the world with no linkage with the family, town, nation and state, enterprise, national or state institutions is being created” (Party Manifesto, 2006:1) reference to the situation in 2006 and the activities of minority-friendly Dzurinda's government.

¹⁹ SNS party manifesto

all the proposals of the Hungarian political representation as being pure separatist and autonomous efforts. SNS also strongly opposed, and even attempted to outlaw, the presence of the former Hungarian ethnic party SMK(Strana Maďarskej Koalície [The Hungarian Coalition Party]) in the national assembly, openly labeling the 8 years of Dzurinda government as the ‘devastation period’(SNS Party Manifesto 2010) for the Slovak Republic.

Despite claiming the democratic equality of the citizens and neutrality of the ethnic affiliation, during the electoral period of 2006-2010, SNS has frequently submitted legislature proposals that would “complicate implementation of ethnic Hungarians minority rights in the field of political representation, use of language, education, culture, regional development and maintaining ties with Hungary, which ethnic Hungarians consider their fatherland in terms of culture and language”(Mesežnikov 2008: 10).

The participation in the government has been negative on the bilateral relations between Slovakia and Hungary, and the party continuously emphasized the connection of the Slovak ethnic Hungarian political representation with the Hungarian political forces that they accused of revanchist and chauvinist aims. Ján Slota, the leader of SNS, who is notoriously known for his harsh rhetoric, repeatedly proposed the elimination of the basic bilateral agreements, suggested to withdraw the Slovak ambassador from Budapest and urged for the cessation of the diplomatic ties with Hungary. He also recently proposed that Slovakia increases the expenditures for the military budget to increase the combat ability of the army in order to protect the Slovak of the potential Hungarian attack. These, and similar political discourse approves the party’s position on the far-right spectrum, fully promoting the ethnic version of the collectivist nationalism.

3.1.3 SMER - SOCIALNA DEMOKRACIA [SMER – SOCIAL DEMOCRACY]

The SMER - Social Democracy is a rather new party, established in 1999 by its current leader and the prime minister, Robert Fico. The party ideologically developed from a 'non-ideological party of pragmatic solutions' into a political force promoting the left-wing ideology, social-democracy and pro-national orientation. Acting as the main opposition force to the Dzurinda government, the party formed a coalition with the SNS and the LS-HZDS after the electoral victory in 2006.

Generally, SMER could be characterized as a national populist party utilizing the appealing topics to gain support and achieve mobilization, one of them being the messages of nationalist nature (Mesežnikov 2009:10). Although the cooperation with the extremist SNS resulted in negative reaction of the international community and the subsequent suspension of the membership in the Party of European Socialists, Robert Fico decided to accept the right-wing nationalistic SNS in order to exclude the former governmental parties and to assure the dominant position of SMER.

Still, it must be noted, that the ideological stance of the three parties on the nationalist spectrum is close as all of them have advocated nationalism in some form despite the different magnitude and concepts. SMER's declared orientation prior to the 2006 elections was rather pro-Slovak, still, it was moderate on the national issues. Neither of the party manifestos (2006, 2010) specifically mentions any kind of ethnic conception of the national identity. However, party's ideological orientation during the four years in power has shifted, and now it seeks to disseminate the importance of the ethnic ties for the concept of Slovak national identity (see Smith's discussion on *ethno-symbolism*).

The reluctance to promote the civic form of national identity projected itself in the party elite discourse²⁰. According to Fico, the Slovak media have become a shelter for “spiritual homeless [and] media kibitzers who are unable to identify with their homeland’s fate or find their state identity.”(Mesežnikov 2008). Repeatedly attacking the independent Slovak media for being disloyal to the state, demonstrates how SMER’s leaders have adopted and promoted the ethnic conception of the national identity. It is clear that Fico started creating the new societal division of *us* and *them*, identifying the good patriotic Slovak citizens among his own voters and the bad ones on the opposition side.

With the upcoming elections of 2010, the political elites of SMER started deploying the right wing nationalistic rhetoric more frequently. They have also been progressively embracing the agenda of the SNS²¹, and subsequently positioned themselves into the protectors of the national identity and interests to attract the voters ranging from pro-national to the far-right nationalist orientation.

As previously established, the modern Slovak nationalism(Hroch 2000) as promoted by the Fico government, is to be understood as the ethnic collective nationalism(Greenfeld 1995). The national identity is subsequently based on the very concept of the ethnic dominance of the majority nation over the national minorities, which have been excluded from its creation and re-creation. Accepting a and promoting the exclusive ethnic definition of the national identity, the Fico government has during the period of 2006-2010 pursued various attempts to alter the national myths. He has done so mainly by stressing and emphasizing the ethnonym part(Smith 2000).

²⁰ Regarding the proposal of the dual-citizenship for the Slovak ethnic Hungarians, prime minister Fico officially labeled the dual-citizenship proposal by the Hungarian FIDESZ a ‘security threat’ for the Slovak Republic. (SME TV), available at: <http://tv.sme.sk/v/15368/fico-zakon-o-dvojitom-obcianske-je-vazna-bezpecnostna-hrozba.html>

²¹ It was mostly observable with the initiatives of SMER regarding the law on patriotism(2010), which was originally proposed by SNS and adopted in the parliament. On the request of Robert Fico, the President refused to sign the bill and returned it to the parliament. Subsequently, SMER came up with its own version of the law, which was later on adopted, giving SMER the full credit for its adoption.

The Fico governmental repeatedly attempted to appropriate the ethnic history and establish genealogical ties with the earlier *ethnies*. This was observable during the numerous public speeches, i.e. when the prime minister Fico kept referring to the old Slavs as the 'old Slovaks from Great Moravia',²² although the historians labeled such term as 'politicized' and 'ahistorical' (Kovac 2010).

It seems that Fico soundly understood the main function of myth which is not the historical accuracy, but rather the perceptions of the historically validated truths (Schöpflin 1997: 19). The myth of the old Slovaks inhabiting the Great Moravia only serves as a tool of cultural reproduction of the Slovak nation (Bourdieu 1993) and means of standardization (Elias 1991) for the interpretation of the national history. In order to disseminate the myth and make him resonate among the public, the Fico government attempted to implement policies in the field of education that would embed the term 'old Slovaks' into the history schoolbooks - a very similar initiative to Meciar's government in the 1990's.

In sum, it can be argued that since the 2006, SMER's position on the nationalism spectrum has shifted more to the right side as they embraced the agenda and the discourse of the Slovak National Party, which SMER is trying to scupper. Robert Fico's rhetoric towards the national identity issues became sharper and he has repeatedly positioned himself into the role of the defender of the ethnic Slovaks. SMER also started to re-write the historical narratives, re-create the national myths utilizing the legislative tools and symbolic politics.

²² At the 15th anniversary of the establishment of the Slovak Republic, the prime minister held a speech on the antiquity of the Slovak nation. Available at : <http://www.sme.sk/c/3670504/fico-nadalej-hovori-o-starych-slovakoch-nie-slovanoch.html#ixzz0pfw4ioa9> Fico nad'alej hovorí o starých Slovákoch, nie Slovanoch, <http://www.sme.sk/c/3670504/fico-nadalej-hovori-o-starych-slovakoch-nie-slovanoch.html>, 9.1.2008

3.2 THE ROLE OF THE HUNGARIAN MINORITY

Mobilization strategies deployed by the national populists have proven to be effective in both gaining the support of the majority group voters and in shifting the public opinion towards more acceptance of the nationalistic discourse. They have lead to a confrontational perception of the inter-ethnic relations, mainly aimed at the Hungarian minority. The ethnic perception of politics, the so called 'identity politics' (Ciganik 2001) has manifested itself on several occasions since the incumbent government assumed the office. As Mesežnikov observed, the 'Hungarian card', that includes the bilateral relations, is a strong political mobilization tool that has the potential of bringing solid gains in terms of voter's support(Mesežnikov 2009b).

While during the elections of 2006 is was overridden by the socio-economic division, analyzing the recent trends in the public opinion, Gyarfášová observes the comeback of the identity politics in political and public discourse, as an opposite to politics of interest(2009). The identity politics determines the understanding of the fabric of society, defines the character of the system of government, the perception of the nation as civic or ethnic, interpretation of historical narratives, myths and the subsequent ethnic-openness of the Slovak society (Mesežnikov 2008). The typical expression of the identity politics, utilizing the ethnic dichotomy *us*, the Slovaks, against *them*, the Hungarians, will be further referred to as the Hungarian ace. Until 2006 it had been mostly brought up by the ruling Slovak National Party, however, since SMER has shifted on the nationalism scale, it is being utilized by its leaders in order to gain political support for its proposals, but also as a mobilization tool in electoral politics.

To understand the significance of the Hungarian case, one must clarify the distinctive position of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia which is a consequence of the specific historical and social developments of the 19th and 20th century. The Hungarian minority forms the largest ethnic minority in Slovakia, and is mostly dispersed in the territory of Southern Slovakia which was often been oscillating between the two countries being labeled by some authors as a ‘virtual region’ or ‘imagined territory’ (Mannova 2009). The tense inter-ethnic relations are usually being perceived as confrontational due to their historical burden²³ which resulted in the number of clichés about the Hungarian minority being ‘disloyal to the state’ or ‘dangerous for the state integrity’ – an idea harshly promoted by the far-right SNS.

These clichés have successfully penetrated the Slovak society over the course of last years, connecting the negative qualities with the Hungarian political representation, whose efforts of attaining various forms of autonomy are being perceived as suspicious. The leader of the Slovak National Party, Ján Slota continually warns against the minority parties gaining power and his advertised distrust has become the main tool of political mobilization of the pro-Slovak voters. Promulgated by the official discourse of the party, the political representation of the minority parties is being accused of connections to the neighboring Hungary and separatist aims endangering the territorial integrity of the state.

The main problem of the ethnic reconciliation stems in the intertwined nature of the problems of the Hungarian minority and the bilateral relations between the two neighboring countries. Vice versa, almost all the diplomatic tensions between Hungary and Slovakia since 1993 stem from the minority-related issues, such as the legislature dealing with the execution of linguistic rights, education and schooling system, culture and the activities of the political representation. Through the utilization of the same label ‘the Hungarians’, the governmental

²³ Reference to the attempts of re-drawing the Southern borders between Slovakia and Hungary (i.e. the Vienna Arbitration in 1938), and the claims for autonomy for the concerned territory.

elites on purpose equalize the Slovak ethnic Hungarians with the citizens of Hungary, creating the presumed ties the image of a non-existent compact ‘big Hungarian’ community.

The complex and problematic nature of the inter-ethnic relation provides the space for utilizing the ethnic card, the Hungarian card respectively, as a possible mobilization tool for the nationally-oriented political forces. With the right interpretation of the national myths, in the Slovak divided society, the Hungarian minority tends to become the object against which mobilization is needed especially in the electoral campaigns. It has been shown that the Fico government has rejected the implementation of the unifying ‘conceptualized myth of citizenship’, and has instead been initiating steps to re-enforce the myth of the Hungarian minority as the ethnic others, representing a ‘threat’ to the Slovaks. In Schöpflin’s words, the Fico government has through its discourse and stances pursued a nationalistic strategy to ‘exclude others, screen out certain memories, establish solidarity or, indeed, reinforce the hierarchy of status and values’(1997: 22).

The anti-Hungarian approach was demonstrated during the electoral campaign of 2010, which Robert Fico entered the with the devise calling for the prevention of the Hungarian ethnic party, the SMK, from gaining power. As a part of his electoral campaign SMER deployed the devise “They gave power to SMK! They will do it again! ” accusing the former opposition of sharing the power with the Hungarian political representation.

At the time, Fico strongly profited from the dispute triggered by the Hungarian FIDESZ’s proposal on dual-citizenship which would also grant Hungarian citizenship to ethnic Hungarians living in Slovakia. He tried to convince the pro-nationally oriented electorate with his argument that the participation of the ethnic Hungarians in administering public affairs [or holding public offices] would be risky for the Slovak government and it poses a threat to interests of the country as such(Mesežnikov 2008: 19).

Regarding the Hungarian minority rights and their implementation, the Fico government has been repeatedly advocating the relatively high-standards of the ethnic Hungarians pointing out the ‘high levels’ outreaching the European standards. The Slovak government claimed the supremacy of the home standards over the ones deployed in Western liberal democracies with long multicultural traditions.²⁴ Still, when assessing the minority right implementation, Fico’s government repeatedly applied the comparative approach taking the Slovak minority in Hungary as its reference. Taking into account the numbers and the historical events, the comparison is hardly justifiable, just as the calls for Slovak-Hungarian reciprocity in the minority politics. However, the governmental discourse and the steps taken successfully convinced the domestic public about the soundness and high-standards of the policy towards ethnic minorities. On the contrary, recent surveys showed a high level of perceived discrimination by the members of ethnic minorities in Slovakia.

Further fostered by the legislative steps, such as the implementation of the politics of language isolationism instead of the integrative model of dual-language schooling, the Fico government has attempted to cut off the communication with the excluded Hungarian minority group in order to keep the mythicized language within the national community of shared symbols. The lack inter-community communication among the societal groups has given the nationalistic subjects the advantage of intensified and mobilized negative emotions of the side of the ethnic majority (Schöpflin 1997: 24-27) and led to further separation.

²⁴ In 2004 Fico stated: “Legal and actual situation of members of ethnic minorities in Slovakia is generally above-standard and may serve as an example for the whole world.” (see Mesežnikov 2008).

3.3 THE UTILIZATION OF THE HUNGARIAN CARD IN THE ELECTORAL POLITICS

The utilization of means of ethno-politics in all kind of elections became a traditional strategy of the nationalistic oriented political subjects. The Hungarian card was brought up already during the 1999 and the 2004 electoral campaign, however, not with a significant success. This supports the claim that during the two Dzurinda governments(1998-2002, 2002-2006), the civic form of collective nationalism was promoted and thus certain mitigation of the ethnic tensions and reconciliation occurred.

The revival of the ethnic nationalism demonstrated itself in the most recent presidential campaign of 2009, which had two major candidates who made it to the second round: the incumbent president Ivan Gašparovič, a former member of Mečiar's HZDS, supported by the coalition government, and the opposition candidate Iveta Radičová. While Gašparovič clearly presented himself as a pro-national candidate,²⁵ his rival, Radičová, held a neutral stance on the national issues and exhibited rather positive approach towards the questions of ethnic diversity and minorities, appealing for the civic understanding of the concept of citizenship.

Initially, the 2009 presidential elections were different from the previous two of 1999, and 2004 because for the first time the voters were not put into the position to decide for the lesser evil. The expected deployment of the Hungarian ace came in the second round. The political actors close to the incumbent president Gašparovič, started to overemphasize the connection of the opposition candidate Radičová with the Hungarian minority and several times openly accused her of anti-Slovak intentions.²⁶ The representation of SNS, declaring its

²⁵ Ivan Gašparovič entered the election with the devise "I think nationally, I feel socially".

²⁶ The official statement of the deputz leader of SNS, Anna Belousovová, available at: <http://www.sns.sk/aktuality/anna-belousovova-prezidentom-sa-nemoze-stat-kandidatka-ktora-pred-vznikom-samostatnej-sr-hlasala-ze-jej-vznik-je-hrozbousns-mobilizuje-voľcov-v-2-kole-prezidentskych-voľieb/>

support for Gašparovič, struggled to push the campaign into the sphere of ethno-politics. The nationalists organized an extensive anti-campaign stressing that Slovak president cannot be elected by the 'rich Bratislava and the regions governed by the Hungarian minorities'²⁷. Ján Slota, the leader of SNS openly accused Radičová of the cooperation with SMK which was allegedly claiming autonomy of Southern Slovak regions. SMER and HDSZ were more moderate on the issue, however, they both declared their support to Gašparovič. Furthermore, SMER's leader and the prime minister Fico also repeatedly expressed his concerns about the electoral outcome despite the new minister of foreign affairs condemning the categorization of the citizens and the candidates, as well as the utilization of the ethnic card as the mobilization strategy.

The tensions culminated a week before the final polls, when a set of falsified leaflets appeared in some areas of Southern Slovakia declaring Radičová's intention of granting the autonomy to the southern part of Slovakia in the case of her electoral victory. This strategic step transformed the presidential run into the negative media campaign and discouraged the potential voters of Radičová who were susceptible to the inter-ethnic relations. On the other hand, the incident has the adverse effect as it mobilized the Hungarian minority to vote for the opposition candidate.

The deployment of the Hungarian ace in the presidential elections was the paramount example of the persistent significance and power of the ethno-politics in Slovakia. The Hungarian ace was brought up also in the following VUC and the EP elections, although with lesser salience and effectiveness (Mesežnikov 2009). According to Ivo Samson, the Hungarian card has been held for years in the 'regime of low intensity ' only to be brought up in its full intensity in the right time. As it proved to be a good mobilization strategy and a

marketing step in the previous presidential elections, it is most probably that the low-high intensity pattern will repeat itself in the next elections. (Samson Ivo 2010).

It has been argued throughout this paper that the persistent power of the appeal to ethnicity among the contemporary Slovak electorate stems from: a.) the initial nature of the Slovak national identity, which is ethnically-based dividing the political nation into separate groups and excluding the members of the minorities from its formation; and b.) the current type of nationalism – *collective ethnic nationalism* – that is being pushed through by the governmental elites in order to shift the public opinion.

CONCLUSION

The presented paper provided a socio-political analysis of the nature of the Slovak national identity, and after the historical examination of its formation, the author claimed that *ethnic collective nationalism* accompanied the foundations of the new political identity emerging after the establishment of the autonomous Slovak Republic in 1993. The exclusionary dominant-nation model concept, excluding the national minorities from the common identity formation, subsequently allowed the incumbent Fico government(2006-2010), namely the parties SMER – Sociálna demokracia [Direction-Social Democracy], the SNS – Slovenská Národná Strana [Slovak National Party], and the LS-HZDS – Ľudová Strana-Hnutie za Demokratické Slovensko[People's Party - Movement for a Democratic Slovakia] to utilize the concept of ethnicity for the political mobilization purposes during the electoral period of 2006-2010.

By performing the historical analyses, the work has examined the crucial factors contributing to and shaping the nature of the modern Slovak national identity. Subsequently, I identified and classified the nationalisms pursued by the Slovak governmental constellations from 1993 onwards, namely the cabinets of: the Meciar I (1992-1994), Meciar II (1994-1998), Dzurinda I (1998-2002), Dzurinda II (2002-2006), and Fico (2006-2010) according to the categories of: a.) *collective, civic nationalism* and b.) *collective, ethnic nationalism*.

It was demonstrated how the two Mečiar governments(1993-1998) were overemphasizing the ethnic dimensions instead of strengthening the civic model of nationalism, and how after the eight-year period of national reconciliation of the two Dzurinda governments(1998-2006), an identity vacuum created by the accession to the euro-Atlantic structures and the non-consolidated national identity allowed for the Fico government(2006-2010) to steer the wheel to ethnicity again.

Finally, by performing the analyses on the discourse of the political elites, I have shown that the parties, namely the SNS and SMER, have during the period of 2006-2010 undertaken numerous attempts to re-define the modern Slovak national identity in ethnic terms and sought to deepen the present *schmittian* us-them antagonisms by the utilization of national myths, symbols and rituals. The suggested outcome was the successful depiction of the Hungarian minority and the neighboring state of Hungary as a threat to the Slovak national identity. It was as argued that these steps gained intensity mainly in the pre-electoral periods, and it was demonstrated on the deployment of the so called Hungarian ace in the presidential elections 2009.

As the identity politics resonates among the wide public, it proved to be a successful strategy in the contemporary socio-political settings, with the upcoming Slovak parliamentary elections 2010, it is predictable that ethno-politics and the appeal to ethnonym (Smith 2008) will remain the main mobilization tool in the hands of the nationally oriented political subjects which will 'prefer a political appeal based on a combination of populist mobilization methods and elements of ethnic nationalism as the means to drum up voter support' (Mesežnikov 2009: 31)

Arguing that the Slovak national identity is still in the process of its (re-)construction, the work leaves an open question: which factors contribute to the acceptance of the nationalistic and national populist discourse among the contemporary Slovak society.

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