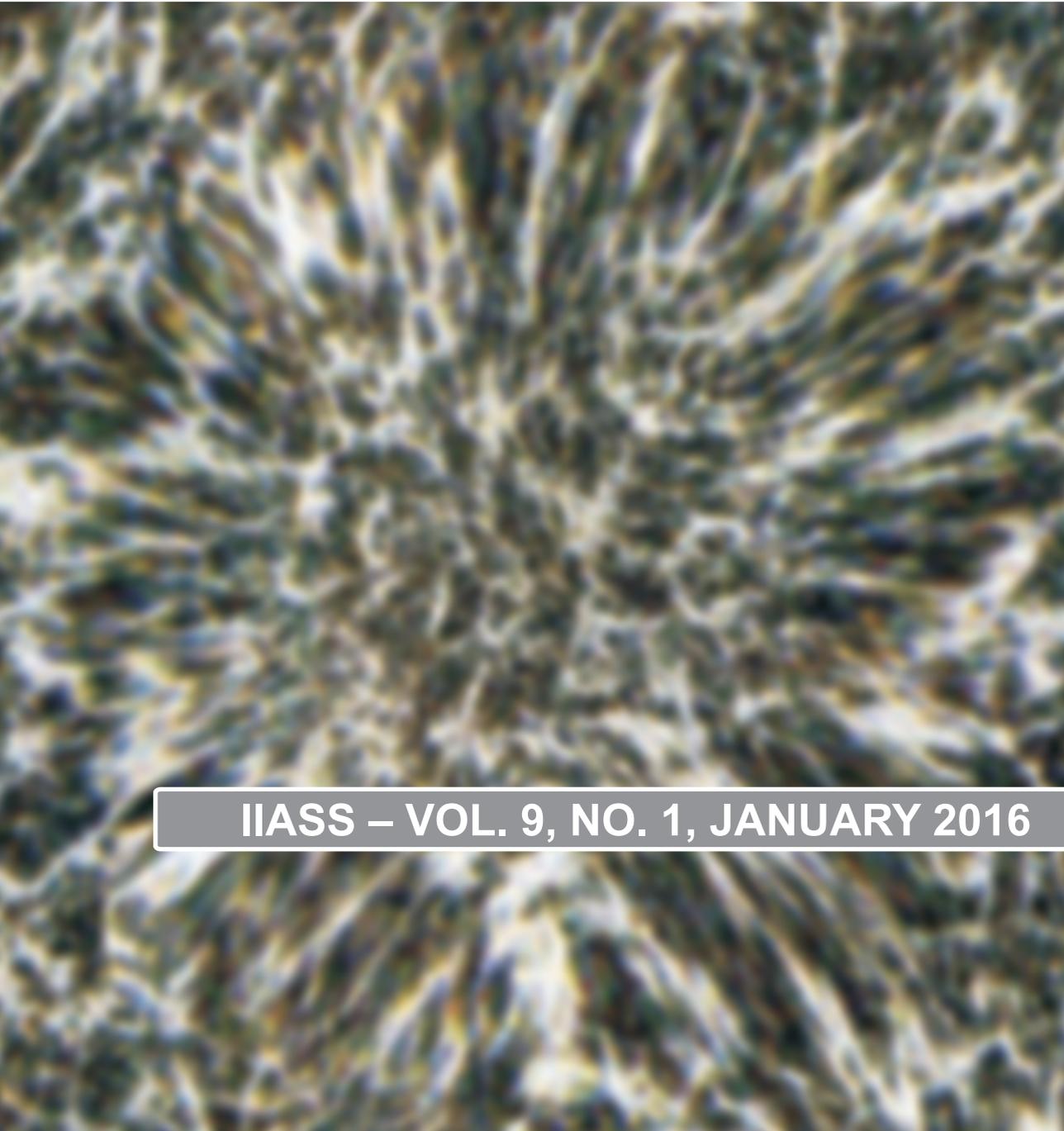


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# THE POLITICAL COMPETITION OF MINORITY PARTIES IN SLOVAKIA: THE DECLINE OF POLITICAL INFLUENCE OF PARTIES REPRESENTING THE HUNGARIAN MINORITY

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## Abstract

The political parties representing Hungarian minority in Slovakia have always played significant role in the Slovak party system which had been closely associated with the substantive number of ethnic Hungarians living in the country. Hungarian speaking minority had constituted approximately 8-10% of the total population since 1993. The parliamentary elections in Slovakia in 2010 and 2012 revealed the differentiation of the electoral success of traditional and newly emerged political parties that essentially consider the Hungarian voters in Slovakia. This evolution and the context of the theoretical grounding of ethnic minority parties (outbidding model by Donald Horowitz and categorization of ethnic parties by Kanchan Chandra) made it a new source for research of the party competition in terms of Slovakia.

The authors argue in multiple dimensions: What are the current perspectives and position of ethnic minority parties in Slovakia? To what extent are these parties able to attract minority voters, and do they correspond to the profile of traditional minority party? Hereby, we present and explain the electoral manifestos of two minority parties and analyze their contents. The authors' assumption is tested through the content analysis of the party programs and evaluation of the electoral results of the respective political parties.

**Key words:** minority parties, political competition, elections, Slovakia, Most-Híd, SMK

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## **Introduction**

The political competition in the practice of the post-communist Europe attracts significant attention (Pinterič 2011, Hloušek – Kopeček 2010, Riishøj 2009, Hloušek – Chytílek 2007, Kitschelt, Mansfeldova, Markowski, Toka 1999). Individual transformation, development and status of political parties in the system constantly brings new issues for the political and sociological research (Bureš – Charvát – Just 2010, Muránsky 2004, Kostelecký 2002, Wyman – White – Miller – Heywood 1998), which is more or less caused by common factors that post-communist party systems show: high volatility, constant emergence of new political parties, as well as frequent (Gyarfášova – Krivý 2007, Hloušek – Chytílek 2007) shortfalls of political preferences of established political parties and visible disintegration or division of political parties.

From this perspective the minority parties appear to be stable compared to the others as they are oriented to build their party agenda and program merely over one social (ethnic) group of citizens in the country. Slovakia has not been any exception in this sense. However, we have to admit that not only the early parliamentary elections in 2012, but yet the elections in 2010 brought a visible change in the status of minority political parties, especially in relation to their political (parliamentary) potential. The newly established Most-Híd party (along with the old party SMK)<sup>1</sup> proved its position in parliamentary elections in 2010, and in 2012 elections the new minority platform was confirmed. There is an important question though; to what extent are the adequate party strategies addressing and targeting the potential voters between the two major political entities that compete for the same group of citizens, in this case the Hungarian minority in Slovakia?

In this article, we seek to demonstrate the changing positions of two distinctive, yet personally similar political parties. The political platform of SMK was established around unification of all previous Hungarian parties and movements in order to strengthen the position and representation of Hungarians living in Slovakia, while the new political party Most-Híd established by SMK disintegration in 2009 sought for the political agenda which is not exclusively oriented toward the particular ethnic group or category of citizens. Thus, the authors try to address the current political competition of two parties from the perspective of ethnic voters and ethnic parties.

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<sup>1</sup> Most-Híd was created earlier before the parliamentary election in 2010; their founding members and the leader Béla Bugár were dominantly from the old SMK party.

### **The theories and models of ethnic party**

The observed models of ethnic parties are derived from publications by Alvin Rabushka and Kenneth Shepsle (1972) and Donald Horowitz (1985). Furthermore we distinguish the ethnic outbidding model introduced by Horowitz which is a socio – psychological approach of human rational choice and motivation in the conflicting areas of democratic governance, especially in the electoral system. The reason for selecting the Horowitz’s approach is the assumption that both models incline to common beliefs and identify the similarity of the political competition and generate identical factors of competition and actors’ rationale. This model is based on the suggestion that ethnic groups within the specific political system stand on the counter parts if they act in the widely divided society and perform their political potential separately. The individuals in each ethnic group share common preferences, ideas and therefore the political competition of the parties is performed in the boundaries of ethnic cleavage.

There is another impression regarding the Horowitz’s model which is given by two ethnic parties that do not compete and more likely are trying to mobilize the voters from the ethnic group. To put this simply, the more the ethnic political parties mobilize the groups the better positive electoral output is expected and it should adequately express the share of the ethnic group in the society. As stated by Horowitz (1985), the competitive attitude of the ethnic party is limited toward the existence of the ethnic or minority group. On the other hand, as soon as a new political subject emerges alongside the stable ethnic political party, the first goal of the original one is to limit or abolish the emergence of a new subject. If the subject is already operating then the political competition is on the table and the original party claims to win over the latter. Nevertheless, we have to point out that the reason of emergence of a new political party that concur the established one might be expressed and researched in the inability of the former to represent the interests of the given ethnic group. Then, the rivalry and competition between two identic ethnic parties grows from the specific competitiveness when the newly established subject presents itself more radically and extreme with intention to attract the particular ethnic group. This is a vivid signal for the stable party in order to change the rhetoric’s and strategies more toward the radicalization.

The perspective of operationalization of this model is implied in the necessity to characterize the ethnic party first which, at first glance, seems straightforward but given the position, status and intraparty composition of the subject it may be confusing to label the party. For example, deriving from the party system division, the ethnic parties may

present political subject which is dominantly oriented to attract specific ethnic group, represent and defend its interest in the system. Similar definition is defined by Donald Horowitz in his book *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* where the author observes the ethnic party as the one that serves the interests of one particular ethnic group (Horowitz 1985). On the opposite side there is a multi-ethnic party which is, not only regarding their political scope but as well by program objectives, activating and attracting the larger number of ethnic groups from the multiple distinguished groups in a society.

Then, there is a non-ethnic party which is not in favor of any particular ethnic group (Chandra 2011). The given division is dependent on the transmission of the party profile toward the society and electorate. Similar party division is introduced by Mozaffar and Scarritt (2000) but their typology derives from the total support of those political parties or the demographic composition of their electoral support. To formulate their definition, the authors consider as ethnic party the subject that receives the support of above the average part of ethnic group in the society, and vice – versa, the multiethnic party is able to mobilize more than one group through the absence of any exclusiveness within the cleavages (Mozaffar, Scarritt 2000).

Ethnic party is differentiated by the appeal toward the voters of one particular ethnic group through specific interests, aims that automatically exclude the other groups in society, while these appeals are mobilizing and monopoly tool or strategy (Chandra 2005). In other words the key term in defining the ethnic political party is exclusion.

From the perspective of impact of the ethnic parties in relation to the dimension of competitiveness we can distinguish between ethnic outbidding model and centrism. In terms of outbidding model the major assumption lies in final/boundary position of ethnic group within the dimension while centrism is merely oriented into the centralist position of the dimension. We have to state though, it is not that simple to define the ethnic party as suggested above. For one of the reasons there is a fact that ethnic party might be considered as multi-ethnic since it starts to appeal on various groups in the society. Investigation of the particular differences between ethnic and multi-ethnic is vested further in theory application of Donald Horowitz. He suggests an argument when ethnic party can be composed from more than one ethnic group (Horowitz 1985). In this sense, the only difference between those two party models does not lie in the number of groups that compose the party or their appeal but in the fact if there is a particular group that is excluded by other parties. To illustrate this we can use a specific case observed by

Kanchan Chandra. She states that party which is trying to appeal to all castes in India and excludes the upper castes would be considered as ethnic party. On the other hand, a party that appeals to all castes would be considered as multi-ethnic party (Chandra 2011, 157).

With regard to this distinction we reflect the differences between the ethnic and multi-ethnic party to understand and reveal the position of two ethnic parties in the condition of the Slovak Republic. The methodological approach is based on eight indicators introduced by Kanchan Chandra to classify the ethnic political party (Chandra 2011, 157 - 165):

- Classification based on name of a political party;
- Classification based on explicit appeals (the category of groups that are grounded around the party promotion; including the electoral campaigns);
- Classification based on explicit issue positions (the topics and themes that they present through party communication in explicit party messaging);
- Classification based on the implicit activation of ethnic identities (the implicit electoral messaging/electoral communication);
- Classification based on a group's votes ;
- Party votes;
- Ethnic leadership;
- Ethnic area of contestation (areas where the parties perform their activity and mobilize potential voters).

In this case we try to understand the rational thinking of political parties in their electoral (party) strategies toward minority policy making and the stability of democracy (political system) that often depends on whether the political parties are trying to politically mobilize potential voters through moderate or radical appeals in relation to the representation of ethnic (minority) interests of social groups.

### **Ethnic political parties in Slovakia and their electoral results**

Parliamentary elections and their results practically reflect the setting of the party system in Slovakia. At the national level Slovak voters allow to pass the five per cent electoral threshold in elections on a regular basis for political parties and electoral coalitions (1998) whose number in the Slovak parliament had never fallen below six since 1994 (Mesežnikov 2006, 71). From this reason as well as derived from the number of political parties and movements that regularly compete in the elections (in 2010 there were 18 subjects, during early parliamentary elections in 2012 even 26 parties), we can talk about polarized multipartism. This

condition is highly influenced by the format of the election in which Slovakia has a strong form of proportional system using the Hagenbach-Bischoff method of distribution of seats among the parties or coalitions. On the other hand, the electoral system guarantees to participate in legislative activity and politics to relatively smaller parties representing the interests of the minority population as well. The year 1989 was also crucial because it opened the way to Hungarian political formations in Slovakia. In the beginning there were three Hungarian political party formations, which have determined the political life of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia for many years (Öllös 2008, 62).

If we look back to the fundamental changes in the socio-political processes in the early 90's of the past century, the electoral system allowed the creation of minority political parties and initiatives and then, participation in the Federal Assembly as well as the representation in the Slovak National Council. At that time we are talking mainly about Hungarian Independent Initiative (MNI), which accessed the election in partnership with Public against Violence (VPN) in 1990 (Labuda 2008, 61). Later on there were other entities created, the Coexistence and the Hungarian Christian Democratic Movement (MKDH). They participated in the elections in 1990 in a joint candidate ticket. As a result of VPN disintegration the MNI grouping decided to create a separate political entity in connection with this and changed its name to Magyar Polgári Party - Hungarian Civic Party (MPP-MOS). Its political program focused mainly on the regions where the Hungarian minority was settled and living. At the end of 1991 the third Hungarian party was created - the Hungarian People's Party.

The political as well as economic transformation brought the openness of the previously unsolved dilemmas related to the position of national minorities and legal framework of its rights and protection. The democratization and related discourses also created a fertile ground and factor of mobilization in the political parties' competition that consider Hungarian minority and Hungarian speakers, together with the formulation of particular demands for all citizens. Since 1989 we have witnessed the final period of Slovak national consolidation and the process towards the nationalizing state (Mihálik, Marušiak 2014). For example, there was visible dependence of the centrist right parties on the pro-liberal Hungarian Civic Party that recruited candidates from the mass movement in the transition period (Public Against Violence) in the elections of 1990. When the civic movement was disintegrated in 1991 and Vladimír Mečiar was recalled from the position of prime minister the factor of dependence of the minority government had strengthened its role based on support of the Hungarian political representation. As

interpreted by Mihálik and Marušiak (2014, 137-138): “the centrist right parties enjoyed accommodated program toward the national minorities than nationally oriented Slovak national party and Movement for democratic Slovakia (HZDS) or the later partner, left populist Association of the workers in Slovakia. The weakness of the parties of the centrist left was influential for the Hungarian parties integrated into Party of Hungarian Coalition (SMK).”

The support by Hungarian parties to the wide coalition with the domination of the centre-right parties in the government of 1994 was yet substituted by the presence of Hungarian parties in coalition government in 1998-2002 and then in 2002-2006. On a contrary, Hungarian political representation opposed the national and populist Mečiar government 1994-1998, similarly to later established coalition of social democratic party SMER-SD with nationally oriented Slovak National Party and Movement for Democratic Slovakia in 2006-2010. This process of transitional democracy during the nineties can also meet characteristics from the perspective of peripheral nationalism aimed toward Hungarians. Some patterns of this nationalism sources became visible already in 1992 (Mihálik, Marušiak 2014). Kevin Deegan-Krause states that, most of the major issues of that time, such as fear of Hungarianization, position of Hungarian minority, irredentism and secession, as well as minority language use, outlined the strong antagonism between the supporters of the Slovak nationalists (SNS) and the wing of Slovak Hungarian parties (Deegan-Krause 2004, 679).

For more complex overview of the existence of Hungarian parties in Slovakia, we provided the comparison of the ethnic structure of Slovakia based on the censuses of 1991, 2001 and 2011. The absolute number of inhabitants in Slovakia has not improved significantly since 1991 which gives us adequate space for comparing the ethnic composition in percentage. The proportion of national minorities in Slovakia according to the last census conducted in 2011 is approximately 12,3% compared to 13,1% in 2001. The slight decrease of the Hungarian national minority (over 1% total) might be caused by the citizens not claiming the Hungarian ethnicity in the survey. The second largest ethnic group is Roma population which estimates about 2% of the inhabitants in Slovakia. Again, we have to deal with the different statistical data that claimed there were approximately 380 000 Roma people in Slovakia compared to less than 90 000 from official 2001 census (Petruška 2001). In this sense, we are confronted again with the key feature that Roma people do not want to claim their ethnic origin and claim themselves to be either Hungarian or Slovak ethnicity.

**Table 1:** The ethnic structure of Slovakia based on 1991, 2001 and 2011 census

Living inhabitants (permanent residence) total	Slovak Republic					
	2011		2001		1991	
	abs.	%	abs.	%	abs.	%
	5 397 036	100,0	5 379 455	100,0	5 274 335	100,0
<b>Nationality</b>						
Slovak	4 352 775	80,7	4 614 854	85,8	4 519 328	85,7
Hungarian	458 467	8,5	520 528	9,7	567 296	10,8
Roma	105 738	2,0	89 920	1,7	75 802	1,4
Czech	30 367	0,6	44 620	0,8	52 884	1,0
Ruthenian	33 482	0,6	24 201	0,4	17 197	0,3
Ukrainian	7 430	0,1	10 814	0,2	13 281	0,3
German	4 690	0,1	5 405	0,1	5 414	0,1
Polish	3 084	0,1	2 602	0,0	2 659	0,1
Croatian	1 022	0,0	890	0,0	x	x
Serbian	698	0,0	434	0,0	x	x
Russian	1 997	0,0	1 590	0,0	1 389	0,0
Jewish	631	0,0	218	0,0	134	0,0
Moravian	3 286	0,1	2 348	0,0	6 037	0,1
Bulgarian	1 051	0,0	1 179	0,0	1 400	0,0
Other	9 825	0,2	5 350	0,1	2 732	0,1
Unknown	382 493	7,0	54 502	1,0	8 782	0,2

x – record is not possible from logical reasons

**Source:** Statistical Office of Slovakia 2012: <http://portal.statistics.sk/files/tab-10.pdf>

A positive step in terms of the definition of a single political vision of ethnic minority parties in the elections took place in 1994 when the existing minority parties (MKDH, MPP-MOS, and Coexistence) were united under the Hungarian Coalition. Despite this unifying line we mention radical wing of Miklós Duray fraction within Coexistence whose active policy was often referred to as a separatist on the both sides of Danube River (Kopa 2008, 243-244). The next major step in terms of the representation of minorities in the Slovak party system occurred with the enforcement of the election law changes in 1998, which repealed the previous four constituencies and replaced them with one circuit for nationwide parliamentary elections. Another factor that influenced the

outcome of the elections in 1998 and helped to create another hitch government led by Vladimír Mečiar, was the clause which required that each of the parties united in a coalition had to gain at least 5 percent of the popular vote to enable the electoral coalition to gather mandates. This factor has led to the creation of the Slovak Democratic Coalition (SDK) as well as the Hungarian Coalition Party (SMK).

Dušan Labuda accurately assessed the SMK program in the 1998 elections: “SMK electoral program was focused on coping with the era of mečiarism. The program declared the impossibility of building Slovakia as a nation-state and indicated more prospectively multicultural direction. The document defined the legal status of a national minority. Then, the focus was to restore the democratic rule of law. They demanded the change of the Constitution, and consistent fulfillment of the rights for national minorities, according to the internationally recognized documents” (Labuda 2008, 70-71). Based on the results of the elections when SMK received a total share of 9.12% of valid votes, it created a coalition government with the SDK, SDL and SOP parties. In the 2002 elections SMK confirmed their constituencies and backgrounds to gain 11.16% of the votes again accounted for the creation of a coalition government. In this term SMK achieved significant success in the field of culture and education and was able to open the University of János Selye in Komárno with Hungarian language.

In Slovakia after the election in 2006, the established ethnic party SMK lost their parliamentary position, this step was, perhaps the starting point for the inner destruction of the party. SMK managed to get, despite a significantly lower turnout around 11.68% of the votes in the 2006 parliamentary elections. The composition of the ruling coalition did not allow SMK to participate in the government as there was created a coalition with the party leaders with strongly nationalist context (SMER-SD, SNS, HZDS).

More “radical” politics with increasingly supported extreme stances than before and tense conflicts in the government with the international impact and strongly nationalist oriented policy led to internal dissolution and split of SMK. This inner destruction into two separate camps led to the establishment of a new political party, under the former leader of SMK (Béla Bugár) called Most- Híd (in English “The Bridge”). The official reason for the creation of the new party was to bridge the gap between the ethnic groups (Slovaks and Hungarians). The unofficial reasons for the creation of Most-Híd were commented by political analysts, as the resolution of the inner conflict between leaders of the main fraction in the party, one was represented by the old party leader Béla Bugár (1998 –

2007) while he represents the moderate faction, and the second one by the new party leader Pál Csáky (from 2007). From the party council where the new party structure was created and confirmed we can observe the inner – conflict between these two fractions (SITA 2009).

The outcome of the newly created political party was 8.12% of the votes in 2010 elections (Statistical Office of Slovakia 2010), which ensured the participation of the party in government with the center-right parties SDKÚ-DS, SaS and KDH. SMK in this term reached only 4.33% share, making it the first time in its history condemned to the lack of participation in the parliament. An important role is played by the fact that MOST - Híd is a party of cooperation and reconciliation between Hungarians and Slovaks, Hungarians among each other, as well as the other national minorities and ethnic groups. Failure of its electoral potential was reiterated in early parliamentary elections in 2012 - the party gained a record of lowest number of the popular vote, only 4.28% (Statistical Office of Slovakia 2012), which again excluded SMK of representation in the national parliament. Even though, the other formation - MOST-Híd received the required number of votes to enter the Parliament (6.89%), post-election negotiations to form a government, however, moved the party into the opposition camp. Moreover, SMK changed its image at the end of 2012 when the party members voted for the new party name. It has changed from Party of Hungarian Coalition into Party of Hungarian Community. The major argument for such change was the new direction of party openness and the aim of attracting more voters.

### **The political potential of “Hungarian” political parties in Slovakia**

Early parliamentary elections in 2012 allowed competing together to 26 political parties. Out of this number we can distinguish three parties that can be added to the group whose program focus largely on the status and role of minorities in the Slovak civil society. From a retrospective the elections and in 1998 they united into the Hungarian Coalition Party, which in subsequent point of view, it is clear that since 1990 the Hungarian parties actively participated in periods always gained enough votes to enter Parliament, and, during two terms actually formed the coalition government (1998-2006). Ultimately, the party paid the price for ideological fusion of multiple platforms and the radical wing of Miklós Duray which was reflected in the 2006-2010 period. This cleavage was also due to unfortunate political steps when the radical positions of the Slovak foreign and national policy towards its southern neighbor escalated. SMK was left by longtime chairman and leader Béla Bugár,

who founded the party MOST - Híd, which became a platform for not exclusively liberal Hungarian voters.

From the visual perspective (**based on name**) we can observe more differences. For example, as we follow the Chandra classification of ethnic parties based on name, the political party SMK as Party of Hungarian Community represents the ethnic party, and Most-Híd a multi-ethnic party. The main principle of this indicator is that to what extent the party name includes an ethnic category. The division or the layout of the name SMK means “Party of Hungarian Community”, this could include the ethnic category “Hungarians”, on the other hand, Most-Híd cannot be considered as an ethnic principle since it simple means “Bridge,” in Slovak “Most” and Hungarian “Híd” and include more than only one ethnic category.

From the visual perspective we must also include other reference that characterizes an ethnic or multi-ethnic party, in other words we identify some other ways such as speech or symbols associated with the party (**based on explicit appeals**). For example through the symbols, we observe that SMK party is more Hungarian oriented comparing the logo, the name, the symbols as flag, colors which are very similar to the national symbols of Hungary, as well as the official abbreviation of the party in the logo MK, which means “Magyar közösség” (Hungarian community). Most – Híd also has the Hungarian language in its logo, but the symbol represents the orange bridge between two ethnic groups, while the text refers to the party of cooperation.

**Picture 1:** The party logos of Most-Híd and SMK



**Source:** The official web pages of both parties.



occurrence of János Selye University in Komárno and calls for the future development of this institution to become the educational center of Hungarians living in Slovakia. They consider any other similar institution as important where the learning process takes place in the Hungarian language. In terms of research activities there is noticeable effort to increase the level and proportion of Hungarians in Slovakia in scientific activities through the EU funds schemes.

Within the identity questions and minority rights the party emphasizes the cultural and ethnic diversity in Europe and claims as necessary to preserve the specifics of the variety of national and minority cultures by respecting the uniqueness. The program defines the central European cultural and national association since „it is the only way to create specific central European and pan European cultural integration.” Therefore, the party seeks a special emphasis on the publication of Hungarian books and magazines without political influence and creation of a public broadcasting in Hungarian language. In the same vein they consider as important the protection and care for cultural heritage, historical monuments, museums and galleries, which gives space to our material culture. The party does not forget the continuous cooperation of the Visegrad 4 countries. SMK did not give up the idea of an appointment of a Hungarian bishop in the Stefanski tradition and the Roman Catholic Church. The eighth part of the electoral program defines the validity of the existence of an ethnic political party that, in addition to social and economic measures, would respond to the challenges stemming from the life and status of minorities. On this basis they consider ethnic group of Hungarians living in Slovakia as part of the Slovak population with specific characteristics whose linguistic, cultural and historical identity is different from most people of the country. They put such ethnic party in the same position as a party that attracts Christian voters, liberal voters and other groups. From the ethnic point of view the party therefore considers as the most important conservation and development of linguistic, cultural and social identity of Hungarians in Slovakia, to which the party requires appropriate legal standards. These might be divided into 2 broad categories:

- The rights of Hungarian communities in Slovakia

Preserving the Hungarian national identity in the medium and long range cannot be arranged solely by securing the rights of individuals. Providing community (collective) rights of minorities is based on the finding that solution of public affairs related to minority identity (use of language, culture, education, media) cannot be dependent on the political dominance of mainstream society, but it is necessary to address the communities knowing their needs. Given that the decisive majority of

European minorities that have similar features, as the Hungarian ethnic group in Slovakia successfully operate within various forms of social self-government (autonomy) minority communities and brought political stability that has lasted for several decades. The party goal is, also in this area, to get Slovakia closer to Western Europe, and to achieve its long-term stabilization (SMK electoral manifesto 2012).

- The issue of Hungarian language use in the public life

The question of the use of the Hungarian language deserves special attention, since language is central to the identity of an individual. The oppression of use of the Hungarian language into the background especially in official communications, but also in other public contacts in Slovakia is currently evident in our experience. However, increasing the social prestige of the Hungarian language is possible to reverse this process, just as was the case in periods of regime change when the minority community significantly improved the level of Hungarian language - especially in public relations. The main instrument of increasing the prestige of the Hungarian language is an extension of laws to be implemented in the use of minority languages. The proposed solution shall be vested in proclamation of Hungarian language as a regional one in minority settlements in southern Slovakia. In achieving the party goals, related to the use of language they consider as an important partner the Hungarian civil movements operating in Slovakia. The division of labor is inevitable in this perspective taking into account the possibility of the partners in the mutual contacts between majority and minority (SMK electoral manifesto 2012). In the section which addresses the rights and the application of national identity the party usurps a change from current law which does not allow the principle of dual citizenship. Party refuses to lose the Slovak citizenship when acquiring the citizenship of another country that is considered as an ally of the Slovak Republic. SMK also considers as necessary to point out onto signs of discrimination at the international discourse, particularly toward the institutions that should guarantee non-discrimination policy such as the Council of Europe and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. In this area the party considers the State Language Act as inadequate and declares that the Slovak Republic and its minority policy is significantly behind in comparison with other European countries and does not respect the obligations arising from international agreements.

**Most – Híd – The party of cooperation** – the party seeks to bring the widest possible range of voters by its very name. The adjective evokes "to attract Slovak voters while not distracting the Hungarian ones" (Baránek 2012). Approved electoral program was based on four



and national minorities" (Most - Híd electoral manifesto 2012). They reaffirm the principle of cooperation and openly oppose supporting any political party that rejects an active policy of confrontation and agree with the requirements of minority communities that they consider natural and legitimate. Life of minorities in Slovakia is not considered as a threat to the nation state or a threat to the sovereignty and the sovereignty of the people of Slovakia. The party approach toward minorities and their rights of determination is vested in the concept of minority policy, which would guarantee the status of national minorities in the Slovak constitutional law. There is a draft suggestion of legislation to underpin the protection and promotion of culture and identity of minorities due to their regional proportional representation. The following points highlight the need for education in the mother tongue, without Roma exception. In the minority issues the final point is a declaration of necessary implementation of Roma integration strategies into the EU by 2020 in line with the commitments of Slovakia to the EU. Thus, the party manifesto clearly states the need for greater dialogue in the adoption of a legislative framework to the situation of minorities in Slovakia. Unlike the SMK, the party lacks a specific vision of how to achieve these goals. Most - Híd formulates its program liberally and does not emphasize the turbulent 20th century and does not seek radical solutions. Under the slogan "Just responsibly" the party offers plenty of scope for political compromises, while stressing the need to adopt laws that would constitutionally guarantee the minority status. A certain shift is in the emphasis and the situation of the Roma minority, which is not vested in any word of SMK proclamation. Most - Híd considers as a significant setback the decision to abolish the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for Minorities. On the other hand the party puts a positive value in creation of the government commissioner for minority issues and civil society. Most - Híd prepared relatively brief and not very specific electoral program, where it is difficult to identify specific solutions and proposals for action or achieving the success in above mentioned aspirations. President of Institute for Public Affairs (IVO – NGO) Grigorij Mesežnikov reflects the part of Most – Híd program succinctly: "(Most - Híd) proposes to adopt a new constitutional standard - Constitutional Law on the Status of Minorities. This basically exhausts the catalogue of proposals in the political and constitutional system of democratic institutions and the rule of law" (Mesežnikov 2012).

If we conclude the main differences between these two parties through the second indicator of classification of the ethnic party (based on explicit appeals), SMK is in favor with the Hungarian minority (ethnic party), it is visible not only from the name of the party, but also through the analysis of the party manifesto where the party favors the interests of

one ethnic category (Hungarian) more often than the interests of any other. On the other side Most-Híd manifesto is more generally and seeks to be the representative of “all” minorities (multi-ethnic party) in Slovak republic, in the manifesto they characterize only the term “minority” without any dominance of the Hungarian category. Furthermore, if we compare the official web pages we can see the difference, SMK offers the possibility to translate the web page into three languages – Hungarian, English and Slovak. Most- Híd offers the possibility to translate the web page into six languages – Slovak, English, Hungarian, German, Roma and Russian.

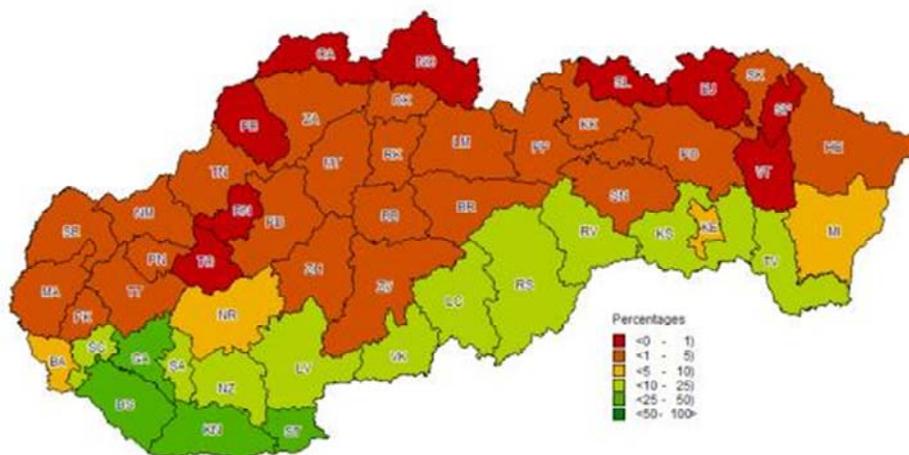
The classification **based on explicit issue position**, as Chandra (2011) observes it is difficult to code the position on distinct issues, as for example language policy or budget allocation, etc. in a way that would be comparable. If we compare some policies of both parties that were mentioned above, we can see some similarities and differences. For example in the language policy of SMK is in favor with the tradition and opportunities to educate in the mother tongue from primary to college education with regard to the institutions providing the teaching process in the Hungarian language. Most-Híd continues in the same vein and considers as important to keep continuous learning process in mother tongues of minorities, and vice-versa, to enable the option for all minority members to educate in Slovak language to obtain communicative skills in the state language. There is a significant difference though, Most-Híd is not essentially pointing on the Hungarian language and its role in education system.

The fourth identifier that is **based on the implicit activation of ethnic identities** has more sub-categories through which we can classify if distinguished between ethnic or multi-ethnic party. An example can be used the choice of candidates and party leaders. The candidate list of Most-Híd in the election 2012 was filled visibly by many famous and specific personalities, such as Ivan Švejna (Foundation F. A. Hayek), Andrej Hrnčiar (the Mayor of Martin), or Rudolf Chmel (former minister of culture), František Šebej (former vice-chairman of political party OKS). The top ten of candidate list of Most-Híd was composed of three ethnic Slovaks (Chmel, Švejna, Hrnčiar) and among the 150 candidates there were seven Ruthenians, seven Roma, one Czech and one Afghan candidate. On the other side, the candidate list of SMK was truly based on geographical position which means that the candidates were mostly from the southern part of Slovakia where the largest population of ethnic Hungarians lives.

The next sub-category is based on the fact that ethnic parties rely on the “shadow of the past” that can be visible specifically within SMK and its electoral program. SMK strictly reacts to legislation after World War II and brings to the forefront the anti-discrimination recommendation of the Council of Europe in 1993 that claims: “The notion of collective guilt, all its implications and repercussions transverse the principle of equality and equal rights of citizens” (SMK electoral manifesto 2012).

The further classification introduced by Kanchan Chandra is based on a **group’s votes**. This practically means that an ethnic party attracts voters of some ethnic category and, at the same time excludes the other ethnic groups. As Chandra specifies, there is no specific condition to have political support from only one ethnic group. The principle that matters in terms of classifying the party as ethnic one is the situation when some significant category of society is excluded (Chandra 2011). And she continues with proclamation that if majority of all relevant ethnic categories support then it becomes a party with a multi-ethnic definition. From the other perspective, if the party support comes from non-members of ethnic categories then it has a non-ethnic support base and classification (Ibid). For the comparative perspective of the two parties in Slovakia we chose the best illustration prepared by Statistical Office of Slovakia based on the share of the valid votes by territorial districts.

**Chart 1:** Most – Híd – share of valid votes by territorial districts (2012)

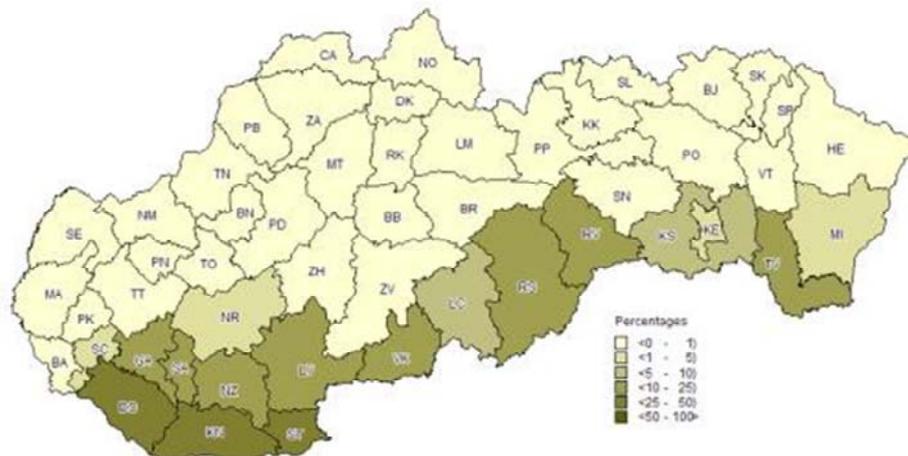


**Source:** Statistical Office of Slovakia  
<http://app.statistics.sk/nrsr2012/graf/kart2.jsp?lang=en&pc=16>

This chart illustrates that the voters and support base in the 2012 parliamentary elections for Most-Híd represented even the regions

where Hungarian population does not predominantly live. We can follow 5-10% support in the regions of the capital city Bratislava (BA) and Nitra (NR) region or 1-5% in northern parts of Slovakia.

**Chart 2:** SMK - share of valid votes by territorial districts (2012)



**Source:** Statistical Office of Slovakia  
<http://app.statistics.sk/nrsr2012/graf/kart2.jsp?lang=en&pc=24>

Chart 2 displays the comparative difference between the two parties when SMK voters and support comes predominantly from the territories and regions inhabited by the Hungarian population and communities. From this perspective, SMK is much closer to the definition of ethnic party compared to Most-Híd position.

**Party votes** also classify a party as ethnic, when majority of votes are from one (or more) ethnic categories, however in the case when it comes to the exclusion of other ethnic categories. We can only assume that this indicator is valid for SMK and its position that they receive votes from ethnic Hungarians, while Most-Híd receives votes from more than one ethnic category (including Hungarians and Slovak voters). Only by comparison of both parties' results in the recent elections we can assume this fact. If we count only the votes from both parties in the election 2010 and 2012 we can observe that they have more than the "old" Hungarian party under old party structure that played an important role in the recent years. In other words, while in the 2006 elections the "old" SMK had nearly 12 percent votes, two Hungarian parties exceeded 12 percent in 2010 election. Based on this consideration we can conclude that after the emergence of Most – Híd the votes of Hungarian voters were not just split between the two subjects. For Most-Híd

apparently voted much more ethnic Slovaks (comp. Chart 3). This is evidenced by the preferential voting system that received Slovak politicians on the electoral list of Most-Híd. Also in the election of 2010 only seven members of ethnic Hungarians represented the minority in the parliament, the lowest since 1990. In the last election period, there were twenty (Petková 2010).

**Table 2:** The electoral turnout of Hungarian parties in Slovak parliamentary elections 1998, 2002, 2006, 2010 and 2012 (% share)

<b>National elections (year)</b>	<b>SMK (2009)</b>	<b>(until SMK split)</b>	<b>(after Most-Híd (from 2009)</b>
<b>1998</b>	9,12	-	-
<b>2002</b>	11,16	-	x
<b>2006</b>	11,68	-	x
<b>2010</b>	-	4,33	8,12
<b>2012</b>	-	4,28	6,89

**Source:** Statistical Office of Slovakia (<http://portal.statistics.sk/showdoc.do?docid=4490>)

The official rhetoric of the leaders of SMK is the indicator that could have activated the ethnic category (Hungarian) to vote for them. As for example, the party leader József Berényi stated that “SMK is the only one party that represents the Hungarian minority in the Slovak Republic. It is the only party that defends the interests of the Hungarian community” (SITA 2012a). From this evidence we can classify another indicator – **ethnic leadership** – when the party leader places the party and himself in some ethnic category (or categories). From the rhetoric of Most-Híd, especially from the rhetoric of the party leader Béla Bugár it is measurable, that the party promotes the interests of “all ethnic groups living in the Slovak Republic.” As in his statement, he presents that “Most-Híd is not only building a bridge in the party title, but also among all groups in Slovakia. For each agreement we must have a compromise”. This means that, for example, the electoral program must be consulted not only within single ethnicity, but within ethnic groups, and also within majority of people who are in favor with the party and, in the party (SITA 2012b).

**Table 3:** Trust towards the Hungarian political leaders in Slovakia (in % 2010 – 2014)

Name of the party leader	February 2010	May 2010	March 2011	January 2012	December 2014
<b>Béla Bugár (Most-Híd)</b>	8,40	7,3	7,00	9,00	7,00
<b>József Berényi (SMK)</b>	-	-	-	-	2,40

**Source:** data were collected from the research Agency Focus.

Since Béla Bugár is placed and considered as ethnic Hungarian, mainly related to his previous party career, it is more prospective to remark that his ethnic origin is activated by the others as a member of Hungarian community, no matter what the new political platform he leads represent. In this case, both leaders belong to some specific ethnic identity category, either nominal or activated.

Despite the facts about the ethnic origin, Béla Bugár has enjoyed the category of one of the most trusted politicians in Slovakia. We believe that this could be related to his different rhetoric, calling for equal minority rights and status of all minorities living in Slovakia, in comparison with the rhetoric of party leader of SMK József Berényi (see Table 2). Despite previously analyzed criteria for classifying the two political parties in Slovakia, there is the final category that would give the same position for both of them. The principle of **ethnic arena of contestation** puts both parties to multi-ethnic dimension since from the recent declarations of the party leaders; it does not seem they have specific ethnic criteria to exclude some ethnic identity categories from the political contest. Ever since the SMK party changed its name from coalition to community, it might be reflected that they try to attract voters from specific ethnic group but situated in all areas of the national state. If considered regionally, there would be a claim for ethnic arena of contestation which is due to the demographic overview of the Slovak regions and the Hungarian settlements. Nevertheless, regarding actual situation and based on the results from 2012 parliamentary elections we put both subjects to multi-ethnic dimension in the sense of their common arena of contestation.

For the comparative overview of the previously analyzed classification for both parties, we provide a table that reflects the criteria developed by Kanchan Chandra applied to “Hungarian” parties in Slovakia. These results cannot be considered as rigorous due to some significant changes in the recent party structures, not mentioning the intra-party

conflicts and the emergence of a new subject itself. Another point must be made when comparing these results with previous electoral periods or before Most-Híd was founded. These results are valid for the current party and electoral system as well as the political contest and results based on the 2012 parliamentary elections in Slovakia.

**Table 3:** Classification of Hungarian parties as ethnic, multi-ethnic or non-ethnic

<b>Indicators for classifying parties as ethnic, multi-ethnic or non-ethnic</b>	<b>SMK</b>	<b>Most-Híd</b>
based on their name	ethnic	multi-ethnic
based on explicit appeals	ethnic	multi-ethnic
based on explicit issue positions	ethnic	multi-ethnic
based on the implicit activation of ethnic identities	ethnic	multi-ethnic
based on a group´s votes	ethnic	multi-ethnic
based on the composition of party votes	ethnic	multi-ethnic
based on composition of its leadership	ethnic	ethnic
based on its arena of contestation	multi-ethnic	multi-ethnic

### **Conclusion**

The electoral turnout for both parties (see Chart 3) only confirms the socio political climate as well as their actual electoral potential. Until now, the stable vector of political representation of the Hungarian minority in the Slovak parliament – SMK, did not even meet the criteria to qualify to enter the National Council. On a contrary, Most - Híd with the charismatic leader and his policy of “cooperation,” has attracted more voters, not just from the Hungarian minority and became virtually the only representative of the interests of our most numerous ethnic minority. The party offered a solution through compromise agreements, favoring stability and responsible policy making. This may confirm the change in voter sentiment, when people prefer more stability and are interested in social issues at the expense of nationalism, national populism, which we have seen particularly during periods of governments that were formed by Slovak National Party or its counterpart, SMK.

Even though the political party Most-Híd again surpassed the threshold of electoral turnout to enter the parliament there is not that huge advantage before his “minority oriented” opponent and concurrent. Thus, we can say that the political party addressed the “old” voters’ potential which SMK established before leaving some of its members (including the leader), who actually formed Most-Híd.

The communication and the presentation as a “bridge” between the two ethnic groups were effective only in its very political beginning and in the early elections did not have sufficient appeal in the eyes of voters. This shift can be explained by the opinion polls, which have tried to compare the regrouping of voters in two elections (2010 and 2012), which was also visible in the slight Most – Híd voters’ outflow towards more radical SMK and Smer-SD (8% of voters in 2010), and other parties.

Based on a number of theoretical concepts dealing with the political competitiveness of ethnic (minority) party in the party system (Bartolini 1999, 435-470; Chandra 2005, 235-252; Coakley 2008, 766-793; Gormley-Heenan, Macginty 2008, 43-61) or in relation of poorly - highly segmented electoral market, we can conclude that in the Slovak Republic there is poorly segmented electoral market. Our conclusion is based on the observation that both the highly segmented market is recognized by political parties and a majority of minority representation are classifiable in the moment as they use ethnic appeals along the center of ethnical identity. Subsequently the political competitiveness takes place at several levels of ethnic arenas (among ethnic bias parties, between ethnic - minority and majority parties) using negative appeals towards the society and to attract voters of one ethnic (minority) group.

However, if there is not adequately segmented political (electoral) market orientation of minority political parties, these are trying to appeal voters along its ethnic (minority) diversity as was the case of Most-Híd in the 2010 elections as well as elections in 2012. On the other hand SMK did not seek an appeal of a degree along such diversity, although in the early parliamentary elections were visible differences at least in terms of visual presentation, and open cooperation, and thus it is still defined as a political party representing primarily the Hungarian demands. We presume that if the situation in respect of the majority party and the minority party would not change from the perspective of political competitiveness in the future, the political party SMK will have to proceed to change the electoral strategy, to that extent as Most-Híd is able to show positive preferences with its electoral strategies. These conclusions are based on the analysis of the position of both parties in the ethnic dimension. For an ethnic based party in current party system

in Slovakia it is useful to compete in the multi-ethnic dimension (Most-Híd) compared to the ethnic dimension (SMK) which may be a handicap or a barrier for the electoral success. We consider, that both elections, especially the election in 2012 confirmed the “new” trend of ethnic parties in Slovakia. If an ethnic party wants to be successful, it must compete in multi-ethnic dimension, rather than in single ethnic dimension which leads to exclusion of some other ethnic categories that live in a common area.

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