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## We hate them all? Issue adaptation of extreme right parties in Slovakia 1993–2016

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### ABSTRACT

This article presents electoral developments and mobilization issues of the extreme right political parties between 1993 and 2016. It analyzes the changes in the extreme right discourses and framing strategies in relation to their electoral results. We argue that during the transition to democracy in the 1990s and partially later in the 2000s, the extreme right parties were predominantly focusing on the issues related to national sovereignty and were successful mostly in the context of hostility against groups that could potentially threaten this independence, while their electoral achievements were affected mainly by their internal party stability. In the late 2000s, the extreme right has, however, begun to adopt a strategy that has bridged nationalist, populist and xenophobic discourses, with stronger success during the economic and refugee crises in Europe.

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### 1. Introduction

The political parties on Slovakia's extreme right were part of a broader political current that began to form in the region of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) after 1989. Present-day extreme right in Europe is a phenomenon that has in post-war Western societies undergone several phases of renewal as a consequence of modernization (Ignazi, 1992; Kitschelt and McGann, 1995) and in CEE appeared as newly constituted forms after the regime change (Minkenberg, 2011). Their electoral achievements and mobilization activities during the past decades in a number of countries have resulted in the growth of the extreme right, which supports an exclusive conception of citizenship bridged with populist discourse, attracting supporters in both national and European parliament elections (Caiani et al., 2012). Though the extreme right groups usually formally abide by the democratic rules, they have often directly or indirectly criticized the basic rights and have been products and agents of some major changes in European politics over the last decades (Art, 2011). The extreme right has been particularly successful in putting frames on the agenda in relation to issues such as migration, integration, minority issues, or national identity, presenting themselves as defenders of the interests of ordinary people (Betz and Johnson, 2004).

In Slovakia, the extreme right, it has been observed, is relatively successful and dynamic, especially at the level of political parties<sup>1</sup> (Mareš, 2011; Smolík, 2013). They range from parties established in mainstream politics<sup>2</sup> (for example, Slovak National Party, SNS) and their split-off parties (Real Slovak National Party, PSNS) to marginal parties that have occupied non-

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<sup>1</sup> Although the contemporary extreme right mobilization takes various forms and involves various organizational actors, from registered political parties to individual subcultures (Mareš, 2003), this paper narrows the focus to political parties.

<sup>2</sup> The list with the names of the parties with acronyms is placed at the end of the text.

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parliamentary spectrum since the 1990s (Slovak People's Party, SL'S; Slovak National Unity, SNJ) and more recent (Nation and Justice, NaS) or radical counterparts (Slovak Togetherness – National Party, SP-NS; Kotleba – People's Party Our Slovakia, L'SNS<sup>3</sup>). Among these extreme right groups, which we also follow in the paper, the SNS has been electorally the most successful and politically long-established extreme right party, while the movement-party<sup>4</sup> L'SNS was the most successful in mobilization of local appeals and has recently managed to make a major breakthrough at both regional and national political levels.

The dynamism of the extreme right in Slovakia manifests itself in the ability to raise special issues and relay them to potential voters. These mobilizing issues have changed in the course of more than two decades and their appeal could be ascribed to: political context, including political and economic transformation after regime change, macroeconomic factors; real-world developments and key-events, such as immigration, accession to the European Union [EU] and Eurozone, the economic and refugee crises; public attitudes towards ethnic minorities and tolerance towards xenophobic ideas; or internal processes within the extreme right parties. In this context, we ask what changes occurred in these mobilization issues over the last two decades and how have these changes related to their electoral (mis)fortunes?

The main aim of this exploratory study is thus to overview the discourse and framing strategies of the extreme right political parties in Slovakia in relation to their electoral fortunes from 1993 to 2016. We argue that after the fall of communism, the extreme right parties focused mostly on issues related to the establishment of independent Slovakia and later on issues of national sovereignty and were successful mainly against the factors they considered as threatening to this independence. However, later these parties have gone over to strategy bridging nationalistic, populist and xenophobic frames, with increasing electoral results, especially after the favorable opportunities have opened up to them. Several downturns in electoral gains were caused mainly by extreme right party internal problems and strong disagreements in the leadership. This suggests that there exists a demand for the extreme right ideology in Slovak society, and the extreme right has been able through strategic framing mobilize the potential voters.

Acknowledging the on-going academic discussion about the terminological and ideological conceptualization of this party family,<sup>5</sup> in the paper we follow the term “extreme right” as widely used and suited term for such political formations in Europe (Jackman and Volpert, 1996; Mudde, 2000; Caiani et al., 2012) and the ideological conceptualization by Mudde (2007), defined by three core features: nativism (nationalistic and xenophobic positions), authoritarianism (a belief in a strictly ordered society), and populism (the wisdom of an “ordinary man”). The aim of this paper is driven by the somewhat lack of academic research on the extreme right in Slovakia. In general, the research on Central and Eastern European extreme right parties in comparison to Western Europe lacks systematic approach. This is true especially for the research on the right-wing extremism in Slovakia. This paper therefore sheds some light on actors and mobilization of the Slovak extreme right and makes a contribution to the overview of the state of the extreme right in the region of CEE.

In what follows, we firstly present the political and economic context, in which the extreme right parties in CEE formed and developed. In the next parts, we show the electoral results of the extreme right political parties in Slovakia over 20 years at local, regional, national, and European levels and continue by analyzing the development of extreme right mobilization issues over time. In the concluding section, we summarize the main arguments and discuss their implications.

## 2. Formation and early development of the extreme right in CEE: the context

The end of communism in CEE offered an opportunity for institutional redesign, which was affected by the aim to build democratic states and join the EU (Malová and Haughton, 2002). CEE after 1989 underwent a complex process of simultaneous political, economic and social transformation, accompanied by the consolidation of democracy, liberalization and nation-building. The transformations shocked population accustomed to state-guaranteed security and resulted in a high degree of discontent, social disorientation and ambivalence towards the new social order (Beichelt and Minkenberg, 2002). These processes were accompanied by formation of new cleavages focused on citizenship, ethnicity or relations between the state and Church (Pirro, 2014a). During the first two post-communist decades, the bases of political competition had shifted and turned largely about two axis of competition: the role of national identity<sup>6</sup> (Deegan-Krause and Haughton, 2012) and the role of the market, while the dominant questions were those of statehood, nationalism and democracy (Rybář, 2007). As this provided various opportunities for extreme right parties to emerge, they were considered to be a product of the political, economic and socio-cultural changes (Beichelt and Minkenberg, 2002; Anastasakis, 2001), magnified in the CEE countries by rise of nationalism, corruption, and perceived moral decadency (Mareš, 2008; Pirro, 2014b). In other words, the extreme right

<sup>3</sup> Until November 2015, the party used the name People's Party Our Slovakia (L'SNS).

<sup>4</sup> Though the political group, it is officially registered as a 'political party'. The parties, that lack extensive party organization and tend to behave as social movements, are often referred to as “movement parties” (Gunther and Diamond, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> The origin of the concept of right-wing extremism can be found in the study of fascism and until the 1980s the term extreme right was synonymous with that of neo-fascism (Ignazi, 2003). However, as new parties emerged and older ones innovated themselves without an explicit link to the tradition of fascism, different terms such as extreme right, far right, right-wing extremist, radical right, populist radical right, anti-immigrant, ultra-nationalist and others eroded and some of them have often been used interchangeably.

<sup>6</sup> Slovakia therefore during the 1990s belonged to the group of European states, in which socio-economic issues did not structure political competition (Rybář, 2007), but the politics was rather dominated by questions of the character of the political regime, the purpose of economic reform, nationalism (the national question) and the role of religion in public life (Deegan-Krause, 2006; Haughton and Rybář, 2008).

**Table 1**  
Electoral results of extreme right parties in national and European elections in Slovakia.

Political party	Parliamentary elections (In %/absolute numbers)						European elections (In %/absolute numbers)			
	1994	1998	2002	2006	2010	2012	2016	2004	2009	2014
Nation and Justice – Our Party (NaS)						0.63				1.38
						16,234				7763
People's Party Our Slovakia (L'SNS)					1.33	1.58	8.04			1.73
					33,724	40,460	209,779			9749
Slovak Togetherness (SP – NS)				0.16 <sup>a</sup>						
				3815						
Real Slovak National Party (PSNS)			3.65					2.01 <sup>c</sup>		
			105,084					14,150		
Slovak National Party (SNS)	5.40	9.07	3.32	11.73	5.07	4.55	8.64	2.01 <sup>d</sup>	5.55	3.61
	155,359	304,839	95,633	270,230	128,490	116,420	225,386	14,150	45,960	20,244
Slovak National Unity (SNJ)		0.14	0.16	0.17 <sup>b</sup>						
		4688	4548	3815						
Slovak People's Party (SL'S)		0.27		0.17				0.17		0.46
		9227		3815				1241		2590

<sup>a</sup> On a shared ballot with SL'S.

<sup>b</sup> On a shared ballot with Slovak National Coalition – Slovak Mutuality (Slovenská národná koalícia - Slovenská vzájomnosť, SLNKO).

<sup>c</sup> In coalition with SNS.

<sup>d</sup> In coalition with PSNS.

Source: Statistical office of the Slovak Republic.

in CEE has often been considered as neither a return of pre-communist past, nor the equivalent of contemporary Western extreme right parties, but a unique phenomenon, affected by the pre-communist and communist historical legacies, modernization process and the economic and political insecurity during the transformation from an authoritarian regime to liberal democracy (Beichelt and Minkenberg, 2002; Pirro, 2014b).

As the extreme right in CEE reacted to the transformation processes after 1989 (Minkenberg, 2000; Ramet, 1999) and not to post-material changes in the 1970s as the extreme right in Western Europe, their ideology was to certain point shaped by the different context (Pirro, 2014a). Extreme right parties in CEE tried to present themselves as a non-communist alternative to other party families and to bring up nationalistic issues, which was, according to Minkenberg (2013), a tendency of compensating the weak legitimacy of the regime, in order to enhance its political legitimization. While being often ideologically openly antidemocratic and more extreme, especially during the 1990s (Minkenberg, 2002), the extreme right parties pointed to the perceived threat from the presence of various outsiders, either internal, such as ethnic or national minorities, or external such as immigrants or foreigners.

### 3. The extreme right's electoral (mis)fortunes: Slovakia

The extreme right in Slovakia achieved a strong position within the party system mostly thanks to the SNS, which became a coalition partner in the then-Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar<sup>7</sup>'s nationalist-populist governments in the 1990s and Robert Fico<sup>8</sup>'s governments between 2006 and 2010 and after 2016. Winning the parliamentary seats in the 1990 Czechoslovak elections, the SNS set up its course to become long-standing political party in Slovakia. It was a part of five Slovak parliaments<sup>9</sup> (1994–1998, 1998–2002, 2006–2010, 2010–2012, 2016-current). As Table 1 shows, its rather stable position was disrupted only twice. First, the SNS fell below the electoral threshold in the 2002 parliamentary elections due to a party split between then-chairman Anna Belousovová<sup>10</sup> and former chairman Ján Slota,<sup>11</sup> after which Slota formed a new political formation, Real Slovak National Party (PSNS) in 2001. The results of the election, in which both parties gained around 3.5%, produced disappointment in both camps and lead to reunification of the party in 2003. In 2006, a re-united SNS won 11.73%, but then their popularity had slowly declined after it was part of a governing coalition with Smer-SD and L'S-HZDS. In the 2010 parliamentary elections, the SNS barely made it into parliament with 5.08% and in the early 2012 elections, the party failed to meet the threshold and with a 4.56% lost the representation in parliament. This was accompanied by an internal

<sup>7</sup> Vladimír Mečiar was a chairman of the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) between 1991 and 2003 and the chairman of the People's Party – Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (L'S-HZDS) between 2003 and 2013. He also served as Prime Minister (1990–1991, 1992–1994, 1994–1998).

<sup>8</sup> Robert Fico is a chairman of the Smer-Social Democracy (Smer-SD) and served as Prime Minister three times (2006–2010, 2012–2016, 2016-currently).

<sup>9</sup> After dissolution of Czechoslovakia and foundation of independent Slovak Republic on January 1, 1993.

<sup>10</sup> Anna Belousovová was a vice-chairman of the SNS between 1994 and 1999 and the party chairman between 1999 and 2003. She was expelled from the SNS in 2011, after which she founded a new party Nation and Justice – Our Party (NaS).

<sup>11</sup> Ján Slota was a co-founder of the SNS, of which he was also a chairman between 1994–1999 and 2003–2012. He was expelled from the party in 2013, after which he founded unsuccessful Christian Slovak National Party (K-SNS). K-SNS was formed from the SNJ by changing its name, but remained politically insignificant.

**Table 2**

Electoral results of extreme right parties in the elections to the bodies of self-governing regions (regional) and the elections to the bodies of municipal self-governments (local) in Slovakia.

Political party	Regional elections In %/Running for governor of the region y/n <sup>a</sup> (number of regions)				Local elections									
	2001	2005	2009	2013	Mayors (In %/number of mayors)				Deputies (In %/number of deputies)					
					2002	2006	2010	2014	2002	2006	2010	2014		
Nation and Justice – Our Party (NaS)				0.24 y (1)										0.10 (21)
People's Party Our Slovakia (L'SNS)			y (1) <sup>c</sup>	0.24 y (5) <sup>d</sup>									0.00 (1)	0.15 (33)
Real Slovak National Party (PSNS)	0.74 y (1)	y (7) <sup>b</sup>			0.44 (13)					1.16 (250)				
Slovak National Party (SNS)	0.49 y (7)	y (4) <sup>b</sup>	1.47 y (1 + 3) <sup>b</sup>	1.22 y (2 + 1) <sup>b</sup>	1.30 (38)	2.92 (85)	2.06 (60)	1.40 (41)		3.13 (673)	5.49 (1169)	4.46 (938)	4.05 (841)	
Slovak National Unity (SNJ)	y (6)	y (2)		y (2)			0.03 (1)			0.0 (1)	0.0 (1)	0.04 (9)		
Slovak People's Party (SL'S)	y (5)	y (1)	y (1)								0.01 (3)	0.00 (2)	0.02 (6)	

<sup>a</sup> y/n = yes/no (the party had/did not have a candidate in the elections for governor of the regional self-government).

<sup>b</sup> The party ran in coalition with other parties in the region/s.

<sup>c</sup> The party leader Marian Kotleba ran for governor of the Banská Bystrica region, winning 10.03% in the first round of the elections.

<sup>d</sup> The party leader Marian Kotleba ran for governor of the Banská Bystrica region, winning 21.30% in the first round of the elections (the second place). In the second round of the elections Kotleba gained 55.53% and became a governor of a self-governing region.

Source: Statistical office of the Slovak Republic.

party crisis and the departure of Slota from the leadership in 2012, followed by his expulsion from the party a year later. With the new chairman Andrej Danko, the party gained 8.64% of the votes in 2016 parliamentary elections and has become a member of a four-party coalition lead by Smer-SD.

Though the SNS was not the only extreme right party running in the European Parliament (EP) elections,<sup>12</sup> it was the only party which was successful. It entered the EP only once in 2009 when it received 5.55% of votes. In subsequent 2014 EP elections the party gained only 3.61%. At the regional and local levels, the party had its best success in 2006 (Table 2), after the reunification of the two split-off parties. In overall, the SNS's electoral gains suggest that there exists a stable group of voters not averse to nationalistic and xenophobic rhetoric, and who are being fought over by several parties.

After the 2016 parliamentary elections, yet another extreme right party unexpectedly entered the national politics after it succeeded in winning nationally oriented voters with a more radical and xenophobic program (Kluknavská, 2012). The L'SNS, which was launched in the beginning of 2010, gained 8.04% of the votes, resulting in 14 members in the Parliament and forcing some experts and the media to claim that the neo-Nazi party penetrated the Slovak politics. The public reactions to this result were those of a surprise since in the previous 2010 and 2012 parliamentary elections the party received substantially less votes, 1.33% and 1.58%, respectively. Nevertheless, the trend in the increase of support for the party was suggested already in the 2013 regional elections, when its leader Marian Kotleba became a governor of the Banská Bystrica region, when he scored 55.53% of the votes (71,397 votes) in the second round<sup>13</sup> of the elections against then-incumbent Vladimír Maňka from the ruling Smer-SD (Table 2). The regional potential for support of Kotleba had been previously manifested in the 2009 regional elections when he ran as an independent candidate for governor of the Banská Bystrica region and in the first round gained 10.03%. Before 2009, the political formation around Kotleba, the SP-NS<sup>14</sup> had little electoral success – after the party was dissolved by the Supreme Court as being in violation with the constitution just a couple of months before the 2006 parliamentary elections, when it ended up winning only 0.16%.

Two marginal extreme right parties, the SNJ and the SL'S, existed in the political arena since the opening up of the pluralistic political system after 1989, but they never earned any significant electoral success – their bests, 0.27% and 0.46% were gained by the SL'S in the 1998 parliamentary elections and the 2014 European elections, respectively. The other marginal extreme right political party – the NaS, which registered in 2011 under the leadership of Anna Belousovová (former significant member of the SNS), ran for the 2012 parliamentary elections, but fell short of 0.5%. It remained politically insignificant and did not compete in the subsequent parliamentary elections.

<sup>12</sup> Slovakia took part in EP elections for the first time after it became a member of the EU in May 2004.

<sup>13</sup> In the first round of the election, he received 21.3% of the votes and placed in the second place.

<sup>14</sup> The L'SNS was formed by Marian Kotleba and some of the members of the SP-NS. The SP-NS (active 2005–2006) was dissolved by the Supreme Court of the Slovak Republic in the early 2006. The reason was the party's programme violation of civil and human rights and encouragement of xenophobic and anti-Semitic sentiments.

#### 4. The Slovak extreme right's mobilizing issues: the 1990s

As the electoral results suggest, the extreme right discourse was shaped during the 1990s mainly by the SNS. Soon after the breakup of the Communist regime, the so-called “national camp”, to which the SNS belonged, called for a fundamentally new foundation for Slovak statehood (Hloušek and Kopeček, 2008). The nationalist rhetoric of the SNS and its electoral success inspired also other parties to follow the example of the nationalist appeals, however, the SNS was the only party that consistently favored Slovak independence (Hilde, 1999). The party under the leadership of Ján Slota presented itself as the champion of Slovak national interests, vowing to defend the physical, political, and cultural identity of the state and the country and calling for the moral rebirth of the Slovak nation (Kopeček and Urubek, 2000; Haughton, 2002). Capitalizing on strong nationalistic attitudes that were part of the process leading to the breakup of Czechoslovakia, the party envisioned Slovakia as a state comprising (mostly) of ethnic Slovaks (Stanley, 2011) and used the Hungarian issue to intensify ethnic tensions to gain political support. It built upon feelings of resentment of some parts of Slovaks against past Hungarian domination and agitated against alleged Hungarian irredentism in southern Slovakia (Carpenter, 1997). As Kavková (2008: 165) maintains, after the creation of independent Slovakia in 1993, the elites transferred their anger against “Czechs” and “Czechoslovaks” to a demonized “Hungarian”, while “disloyal” individuals and groups were symbolically labeled as “false Slovaks”. The party spoke of the “hoards of Asiatic barbarians” who descended on the country a thousand years ago and carried out the “annihilation of the civilized nations” (Zetocha and Konečný, 2005; Kopeček, 2007b). In a statement of a similar character, Slota referred to Hungarians as “evil people who murdered many of our fathers and mothers” (Kopeček, 1999: 51).

During 1994–1998, when the SNS was part of the governing coalition with the HZDS and the Association of Workers of Slovakia (ZRS), the party put the politics of problematizing Slovak–Hungarian relations into practice. Shortly before the 1998 parliamentary elections, Slota declared that the Hungarian political party representatives were “the true parasites on the Slovak state, because their actions demonstrate that they want to undermine the sovereignty of the Slovak Republic” (SME, 2013). The party radicalized ideologically and Slota refused to work with Hungarian political parties, claiming their potential participation in the government: “would be a catastrophe. If the Hungarians get into the government, this will be the end of Slovak independence in five years” (SITA, 1998).

Besides its remarks on the primacy of Slovak national interests and attacks against the Hungarian minority, the SNS focused (though less intensively) on issues regarding Roma minority, strengthening the country's defense capabilities, the “evils” of Czechoslovakism (especially in the army and culture), internationalization of the Balkan conflict, the unstable situation in Ukraine, and the economic transformation (Kopeček and Urubek, 2000; Kopeček, 2007b). The animosities towards Roma minority in the discourses of the extreme right became visible in the late 1990s after the SNS began to demand radical measures. Slota called for deporting the Roma to “separate villages” and at the end of 1997 the party member Vít'azoslav Moric spoke on the state-run Slovak Television of “Gypsies who don't work but get the state benefits” (Mesežnikov, 1998: 69). Towards the end of the 1998 election campaign, the SNS went even further. Its electoral slogan claimed: “Let's vote for a Slovakia without parasites” (Mesežnikov, 1999).

However, the party was not unified on the question of the Slovak state that existed during World War II. Besides the occasional defenses, which were directed mainly at the nostalgically-minded public, there appeared, at least at a rhetorical level, an effort to distance themselves from the wartime political regime. Yet, they still praised the general accomplishment of the great goal of national independence and statehood. Alongside its historical-traditionalist self-description, the SNS also emphasized the country's Christian national identity (Kupka et al., 2009).

Before the 1998 parliamentary elections, the SNS tried to distance itself from the HZDS. Its electoral campaign sought to draw attention by organizing petitions in favor of constitutionalizing the neutrality of Slovakia and re-introduction of death penalty (Zetocha and Konečný, 2005) and its opposition to NATO membership (Haughton, 2002). In the field of foreign policy, the SNS supported joining the EU on the condition that the risks of integration and economic losses would be defined, thus proposing the Slovak sovereignty with some concessions (Kopeček and Urubek, 2000; Kluknavská, 2015). At that time, the SNS also exhibited some anti-Semitic tendencies, when party chairman Slota spoke of the “Jewish policies of the USA, which no one will kneel down to” (Mesežnikov, 1998: 69).

#### 5. The internal party conflict and the figure of Ján Slota: misery of the SNS after 2000 and the rebirths in 2006 and 2016

Although the SNS had suffered from repeated internal party conflicts, deeper divides within the party began to appear after the 1998 parliamentary elections. Disagreements and conflicts arose when some other party leaders began to view Slota as an obstacle to possible inclusion in a government coalition. In 1999, an open conflict between then-leader Slota and then-first vice-chairman Belousovová (then Malíková) broke out. Belousovová represented a wing within the SNS that (claimed to) called for a less extreme style of politics, though not for any fundamental changes in the program (Zetocha and Konečný, 2005). Slota was criticized for his behavior, once calling for a tank assault on Budapest. He continued in his hostility towards Hungary when he called the Hungarians a “misfortune for Europe” (Mesežnikov, 1998: 69). The position of Slota in the SNS was further weakened by his candidacy in direct elections for Slovak president, in which he suffered a major defeat (Kopeček, 2007a).

After the string of incidents, Belousovová became a chairman of the party in 1999. She declared that she would make the party's argument in a more cultivated manner, and that the SNS is based on principles of patriotism and Christianity. However,

despite its efforts to behave as a constructive opposition party, the SNS continued to criticize the presence of the Party of the Hungarian Coalition (SMK) in the coalition government, as well as the government policies toward the Roma and Hungarian minorities (Zetocha and Konečný, 2005). Belousovová herself called for changing the ethnic composition of the population in southern Slovakia. In August 2000, another party member Moric proposed “setting up reservations for unadaptable Gypsies modeled after the Indian reservations in the USA”, and spoke of the growing Roma population as the “reproduction of mentally retarded people and the growing percentage of idiots in our nation” (SME, 2001). Moric have been prosecuted for some of his anti-Roma statements (Milo, 2005).

Nevertheless, the internal problems within the SNS continued until 2001, when Slota and other members of the SNS were expelled from the party and formed the PSNS, which existed independently in 2001–2003. The PSNS tried to raise awareness of its existence by submitting proposals such as resolution on the Beneš Decrees and demanded that the SMK party members resign from the Parliament, or that the SMK would be outlawed altogether (Zetocha and Konečný, 2005).

In the 2002 parliamentary elections, the SNS and the PSNS ran separately, but with more or less identical programs; the differentiating factor remained the list of names on the party ballots. The results of the elections produced disappointment in both parties. The PSNS leadership called the electoral defeat a national tragedy and Slota commented the situation that “Slovaks are genetically stupid, and should get clobbered with a 50 kg sledgehammer across the head to bring them to their senses” (Zetocha and Konečný, 2005, 254). After their electoral defeat, the two parties agreed on the need to re-unite, which happened in May 2003. Slota took over as the party's leader after Belousovová, who again became a vice-chairman. The party, however, did not completely unite, as the disputes began between groups concentrated around Slota and Belousovová, and a group rejecting the leadership of Slota around party member Peter Suľovský. The battle over the chairmanship ended in late 2004 and early 2005, with Slota being recognized as a chairman.

The re-united SNS again began to position itself as a strong defender of Slovak national interests. In the 2006 program, it criticized the reform measures of previous governments, claiming it would throw the country's population into poverty. The party continually warned of a moral crisis, the cultural decline, and the end of traditional values, while associating the political crisis with the actions of the SMK, which the SNS accused of “hating Slovakia” and being “ready to jump into another coalition with further autonomy and final secession of south Slovakia” (Kluknavská, 2015, 130). The SNS presented itself as a main pro-national force, the only one that had in mind the “real” welfare of the Slovak nation. After forming the coalition with the Smer-SD and the ĽS-HZDS (2006–2010), the SNS fueled the tensions with Hungary and the nationalist rhetoric of the government (Deegan-Krause and Haughton, 2012), but at the same time served as a tool for achieving personal and political goals of its chairman (Rybář, 2011). In the next years, the party continued to frame social reality in a very similar manner, mostly pointing to the perceived destruction of society and its independence (Kluknavská, 2015). Before the 2012 parliamentary elections the party discourse rotated around the issues of nationalism, criticism of Hungarian minority and the EU while praising a strong national state built upon traditional values (Kluknavská, 2012). The party also took very negative stances against Roma minority. To stress again, despite still being on the agenda, this issue resonated simultaneously with consistent anti-Hungarian orientation, nationalist rhetoric and internal party struggles. In regard to the EU, the party had been critical, even strongly negative at times (often calling the EU “dictate”). However, when in power, the SNS has usually masked this antagonism into the discourse of cooperation with the EU, conditioned by the strengthening within the Union and keeping the national sovereignty (Kluknavská, 2015).

When Andrej Danko replaced Slota as a chairman of the SNS, he envisioned the beginning of the new era for the SNS, using the new communication tools and addressing the young people, who “cannot stand the sight of the one-party government anymore” (SNS, 2012), because the party cannot watch “impoverishment of Slovaks” (SNS, 2012) and loss of the autonomy and security (but the party claimed it was willing to talk with the EU in some matters). Nevertheless, in 2016, the SNS entered a governing coalition with the Smer-SD, which it had previously criticized and which similar ideology and framing of reality the party kept.

## 6. Non-parliamentary extreme right parties: significantly insignificant?

Since the fall of communist regime there have existed extreme right parties in Slovakia that have not triumphed in terms of voters, but their persistence and continuity of the electoral support have been politically significant. They enjoy the stable support of a small part of the population that is willing to cast its vote for extreme right group despite having no real political power. This “thrown-away” vote is a direct expression of support for radical ideas and takes votes away from those extreme right groups that do have a real chance to succeed at the polls.

The SL'S, which registered as a political party in April 1990, has regarded itself as the heir to the historic Hlinka's Slovak People's Party (HSL'S). The party has emphasized the legacy of Andrej Hlinka, a Catholic priest and leading Slovak nationalist politician in inter-war Czechoslovakia,<sup>15</sup> and the promotion of a Christian, national, and social state, but it also commended the representatives of the war Slovak state.<sup>16</sup> In the 2006 electoral program, it cited the president of the Slovak state Tiso<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> In May 2016, the party even changed its name to Slovak People's Party of Andrej Hlinka.

<sup>16</sup> The war Slovak state was an authoritarian regime and a satellite of Nazi Third Reich established on March 14, 1939.

<sup>17</sup> Jozef Tiso was a Catholic priest who after meeting Adolf Hitler in Berlin on 13 March 1939 organized the meeting of Slovak parliament which led to establishment of the first Slovak Republic. Tiso was tried and executed as a war criminal in April 1947.

several times, demanding “the clearing of the name of president Dr. Jozef Tiso, as well as other Slovak heroes” (Electoral program *SL’S*, 2006: 12). The party also wished to place the interests of the Slovak nation above those of citizens of other ethnic minorities and support the traditional Slovak family (Electoral program *SL’S*, 2006). The other extreme right party, SNJ was founded in 1991 by its chairman Stanislav Pánis, who had left the radical nationalist wing of the SNS. The SNJ described its ideology as national Christian realism, which criticizes globalization, individualism, and the consequent weakening of the role of family and nation (Kupka et al., 2009). Not hiding the admiration for the war Slovak state, Pánis during an interview on the Norwegian television questioned the fact that 6 million Jews died during the war (Kopeček, 2007a, 419).

The party NaS could also be included in this category (although it was founded only in 2011 as a reaction to Belousovová being expelled from the SNS); the same share of votes that the NaS gained in the 2012 elections (0.37%) presented the lacking votes that would have put the SNS over the mandate threshold into the Parliament. The NaS based the popularity on the reputation of its leader Belousovová and advocated “the principles of a true, civilized, and non-confrontational patriotism, and values based on Christianity” (Electoral program *NaS*, 2012, 1). The party declared its fundamental idea to be the “exertion of national sovereignty in all internal domestic affairs” (Electoral program *NaS*, 2012, 1), but declared they were “clearly against totalitarianism in all its forms, including multiculturalism” (Electoral program *NaS*, 2012, 1). One of the society’s most serious problems, the party claimed, was the “Gypsy problem” (Electoral program *NaS*, 2012, 18), which has to be addressed by immediate and radical measures.

In sum, on the Slovak extreme right scene there exist less significant but often more extremist groups that demonstrate the support of part of the population willing to give the vote to extreme right groups that have no actual chance at real political power.

## 7. Issue and mobilization changes of the extreme right: the role of Kotleba and the L’SNS

The L’SNS is currently the most interesting Slovak case in the extreme right political milieu and the most determined extreme right party building upon issues of high political relevance, seizing the political and cultural opportunities which have opened up to it. While the SP-NS, which formed around Kotleba in 2005–2006, tried to breed on political issues with local relevance and appeal, but was politically very unsuccessful, the L’SNS altered its discourse to anti-establishment and anti-minority framing and has been gradually successful in terms of mobilization and diffusion of nationalistic and xenophobic sentiments in some parts of population (Kluknavská, 2015).

Back in 2005–2006, the SP-NS presented itself with national flags and marches with torches in uniforms, resembling those of the wartime Slovak state. The marches, publicly often marked as rallies of right-wing extremists or neo-Nazis, attracted significant media attention (Kluknavská, 2014). The party put out intolerant discourse against minorities, criticized multiculturalism, communism, liberalism, and anarchism, praised Slovak historical figures, and celebrated the legacy of the wartime president Tiso and the Slovak state. As some of these activities and the content of the SP-NS electoral program culminated in the party being dissolved by the Supreme Court in March 2006 (see above). Some of the party members, including Marian Kotleba, founded the new party L’SNS and put forward the discourse, through which they gradually convinced supporters that the party is a legitimate political actor, making a breakthrough to the Parliament.

The L’SNS after its foundation took a systematic stance on the issues, which were perceived as highly relevant and negative in the society, mainly anti-establishment and anti-Roma. Although the SNS was already speaking out against Roma back in the late 1990s and opportunistically used anti-Roma attitudes also later on, this element was outwardly overshadowed by their strongly presented antipathy towards everything Hungarian. To the contrary, the L’SNS began to actively criticize the Roma minority (this issue was secondary in the discourse of the SP-NS) and the establishment, presenting itself as the only political actor who has been active and effective in this regard (Kluknavská, 2015).

By targeting Roma, the party at first showed the potential to mobilize voters in locations where majority–minority relations have been regarded as problematic (Kluknavská, 2013). Before the 2010 and 2012 parliamentary elections, the party accused the “lazy Gypsies” of taking advantage of the social welfare system. The party used slogans such as “For Decent People! Against Parasites!” meaning “Gypsy parasites” (Electoral program, *L’SNS*, 2010 and 2012, point 1). For instance, the party claimed that “we will give the parasites nothing for free – no houses, welfare, or benefits” (Electoral program *L’SNS*, 2010 and 2012, point 2). Although the party continued to appeal to (Slovak) national sentiments, the nation’s “salvation” was not seen directly through patriotic revival, but through criticism of those who (according to the party) were harming the nation. Beside the Roma minority, the party also accused the government and established politicians for their political actions and decisions that negatively affected lives of “ordinary people”. The party’s statements often included a distinction between “us” and “them”, specifically between “honest people” and “corrupt elites”. Yet, the Roma were mostly to blame and even the criticism of established politicians often took the form of pointing to their “incapability” of protecting decent people in any way from the attacks of “Gypsy extremists” (*L’SNS*, *Naše Slovensko*, 2011, 1). Nevertheless, the L’SNS at the same time criticized Hungarians, the USA, and international organizations, taking an anti-liberal, and sometimes anti-democratic stance, which often made the party appear to be an illegitimate political actor.

The results of the 2010 and 2012 elections were not enough to put the L’SNS through to the Parliament, partly because of this inconsistent framing. Yet, since the party had adapted its agenda towards sharp criticism of the Roma minority and has begun to present itself as the only political actor who is actively and effectively doing something about the perceived problem, the party’s electoral gains have risen in areas where it organized the rallies to protest the perceived problematic relations between the majority and the Roma minority (Kluknavská, 2012).

This anti-Roma and anti-elite discourse intensified after the party recognized its resonance with public and fully adopted the strategy of anti-establishment populism and nationalist xenophobia before the 2013 regional elections, in which Kotleba became a governor of the Banská Bystrica region (Kluknavská, 2015). With the eruption of economic and refugee crises, the L'SNS blamed political elites even more and has intensified the negative rhetoric towards the EU, foreigners and immigrants. Breeding on the refugee crisis, the party in its 2016 electoral program claimed that Slovakia is flooded by “hoards of Muslim immigrants”, who “cannot and do not want to accommodate to our laws and social norms” (Electoral program L'SNS, 2016; point 4). This suggests the shift from the strong anti-Roma discourse to greater emphasis on anti-establishment and anti-immigrant framing, which proved to be successful in electoral mobilization.

## 8. Conclusion

This article presented electoral achievements and mobilization issues of the extreme right political parties in Slovakia between 1993 and 2016, analyzing the changes in their discourses and framing strategies in relation to their electoral fortunes. We have shown that the extreme right in Slovakia have, over the course of the two decades after the collapse of communism, been rather stable in the electoral support and mobilization issues. During this period the SNS was the most successful among the extreme right parties, shifting amid several inter-related issues, such as a national rebirth and defense of the nation (nationalist issue) and anti-Hungarian and anti-Roma issues. However, in the early 2010s, the new extreme right party L'SNS have begun to rise in the party system as it succeeded in winning over nationalistic oriented voters with a more radical program combining anti-Roma and anti-establishment issues.

In this paper we have argued that during the transformation to democracy in the 1990s and later in the 2000s, the extreme right in Slovakia, represented mainly by the SNS, was predominantly focused on the issues related to national sovereignty and was successful mostly in the context of hostility against groups that potentially could threaten this independence. The SNS's electoral achievements were affected mainly by the party's internal (in)stability. In the late 2000s and early 2010s, the extreme right has, however, begun to adopt a strategy that has bridged nationalistic, populist and xenophobic discourses through anti-elite and anti-minority framing, building upon negative anti-establishment and anti-Roma attitudes held by the public. Particularly the L'SNS was able to mobilize voters in locations where relations between majority and Roma minority were regarded as problematic. It took an advantage not only of the negative attitudes towards Roma in the society, but also of a failure of the SNS to fully make an “issue-ownership” over this matter. After legitimizing its politics to broader parts of public in the regional elections, the party built upon anti-establishment populism and xenophobia aimed at various out-groups, including Roma, immigrants and Muslims and seized the political and cultural opportunities, which opened up to them. Negative public attitudes towards the Roma and the government, and the discursive opportunities such as stereotyping and negative depicting of the Roma in the media and economic and refugee crises created a favorable ground for the extreme right to put an emphasis on anti-elite and anti-minority frames (Kluknavská, 2013).

The Slovak extreme right political parties have relied on a set of basic issues that fall into the ideological definition of extreme right groups identified by Mudde (2007), characterized by nativism, populism and authoritarianism. The extreme right parties frame their ideology through the populist and xenophobic criticisms of perceived enemies. They present the social world as a struggle for the rights of decent, hard-working people, who are harmed by various out-groups. This framing can be interpreted in terms of ethno-nationalist xenophobia and anti-establishment populism defined by Rydgren (2005, 2007). According to this concept, the society is separated into two opposing groups, within which the extreme right accuses elites of putting foreign/other interests ahead of the national and their own personal interests ahead of the people's (Rydgren, 2007). The presence of anti-establishment populist inclination in the Slovak extreme right parties is indicated by the distinctive presence of “us”-“them” dichotomy and strong criticism of elites. Xenophobic discourse is based on ethno-nationalism and in Western Europe usually on opposition to immigration and multicultural society (Betz, 2004; Mudde, 2007; Rydgren, 2007) and in CEE is often aimed at indigenous minorities (Wilson and Hainsworth, 2012; Voda and Spáč, 2014). The trend in recent years, however, as demonstrated on the case of Slovakia, suggests that the immigrants and foreigners are increasingly targeted by the extreme right also in CEE, which could be partly attributed to the opportunities opened by ongoing refugee crisis. Although this framing has been characteristic mainly of the contemporary extreme right in Western Europe (Rydgren, 2007), in recent years it has been gradually taken up by the extreme right parties in several countries in CEE, including Slovakia (Kluknavská, 2014).

### List of the parties' and movements' acronyms used in the text

HSL'S	Hlinka's Slovak People's Party (Hlinkova Slovenská ľudová strana)
HZDS	Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko)
K SNS	Christian Slovak National Party (Kresťanská slovenská národná strana)
L'S-HZDS	People's Party – Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (Ľudová strana – Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko)
L'SNS	People's Party – Our Slovakia (Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko)
NaS	Nation and Justice – Our Party (Národ a Spravodlivosť – naša strana)
PSNS	Real Slovak National Party (Pravá Slovenská národná strana)
SL'S	Slovak People's Party (Slovenská ľudová strana)
Smer-SD	Smer – Social Democracy (Smer – sociálna demokracia)



SMK	Party of the Hungarian Coalition (Strana maďarskej koalície)
SNJ	Slovak National Unity (Slovenská národná jednota)
SNS	Slovak National Party (Slovenská národná strana)
SP-NS	Slovak Togetherness – Our Party (Slovenská pospolitosť – národná strana)
ZRS	Association of Workers of Slovakia (Združenie robotníkov Slovenska)

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