
INFLUENCE OF THE POWER AND THE OPPOSITION ON DEMOCRATIZATION DYNAMICS IN THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

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Abstract

Available differences between the transition to democracy and its consolidation have actualized the need for researching conceptual perspectives of the functioning of political institutions and constructing an optimal model of their interaction as a guarantee of further democratization. The goal of this paper is to determine the influence made by the ruling authorities and the opposition on the dynamics of democratization in the Slovak Republic. The combination of methodological principles based on the concept of social capital conversion, fluctuation theorem, institutional and neo-institutional approaches constitutes the methodological foundation of the research. The paper has determined specifics of the interrelationship between the power and the opposition in the state before 2020 in the context of current political processes. The main conclusion reached is that the process of democratization in the Slovak Republic has significantly depended on the strategies of social capital accumulation and conversion, selected and implemented by the power and the opposition, as well as on the development of stable dispositions between them in the political field.

Key words: *Democratization, Opposition, Power, Political Processes, Political System, the Slovak Republic.*

INTRODUCTION

The differences between the transition to democracy and its consolidation predetermined the relevance of the present research which studies conceptual perspectives of the functioning of political institutions and development of an optimal model for in-

teraction between them as a guarantee of democratic changes. As for democracy itself, in the recent decades its main theme has changed and, as stated by K. Popper, “today it is not a justification of the idea of democracy through ethical, theological, philosophical constructions or arguments of common sense, but rather a concern for its fragility and searches for ways to strengthen it” (Popper, 1988). Political history has a lot of examples in which democracy, formally preserving a certain system of institutions and procedures, gradually contradicts its classical understanding as a “majority rule”. Instead, we can observe the so-called “democracy deficit”, with the decreased level of citizen participation and minor involvement of the opposition in the political decision-making. This makes the modernization of the political system in countries with approximately the same structure of the political field different.

Of particular *relevance* is the analysis of the interrelationship between the power and the opposition as the factor predetermining the linearity of transition to consolidated democracy. The case study is based on the Slovak Republic.

The problem under research is determination of the impact of the relationship between the power and the opposition on the democratization dynamics in the Slovak Republic.

The objectives of the research are as follows:

- to determine the specifics of the relationship between the power and the opposition in the Slovak Republic in the context of ongoing political processes;
- to clarify the strategies of accumulation and conversion of social capitals of the power and the opposition as well as their effect on the state democratization dynamics.

The article consists of four interrelated parts. The first part substantiates the theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of the relationship between the power and the opposition in the context of their effect on democratization. The second part analyzes the status of scientific research into this range of problems. The next part discloses the division of the political domain between the pro-ruling and opposition actors in the context of the ongoing political process. The fourth part of the article is dedicated to the analysis of the democratization dynamics in the Slovak Republic, with determination of the effect of the power and the opposition on the divergence and convergence phases.

1. THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES

The methodological basis of this research is made up by the combination of methodological principles of the concept of social capital conversion (Bourdieu, 2002), fluctuation theorem (Sorokin, 2007), institutional and neo-institutional approaches. The theory of social capital conversion helps to substantiate individual and group strategies of social capital conversion and to identify the dynamics of the objective structure of the political field, the proportionality of dispositions between the power and the opposition, as well as the change of their boundaries during repositioning. The relationship between the power and the opposition is seen as the process of ac-

cumulation, conversion, and exchange of capital in the struggle for the metacapital of the state.

To determine the impact that the relationship between the power and the opposition has on the fluctuation of the political system when one political force is replaced with the other one, we have applied the fluctuation theorem developed by P. Sorokin as a component of the social stratification theory. He defined “fluctuation” as permanent oscillations from the optimal value. This process is typical not only for socio-cultural systems but for specific fields, including politics, as well. Fluctuation goes through a number of consecutive stages: disintegration – crisis – mobilization of forces – new socio-cultural order (Sorokin, 2007). Changes occur in a certain quantitative and qualitative direction before they reach a “saturation point”. After that, they continue by inertia or under coercion. According to Sorokin, when the political potential of movement in one direction is exhausted, movement in the opposite direction starts, though on a new basis. Therefore, following the principles of cyclicity and evolution, one system of power is replaced by the other, alternative system, which, influenced by the dominance of new value orientations, starts moving in the opposite direction towards the new “saturation point”. This approach helps to consider the relationship between the opposition and the ruling authorities as a struggle between the deterrence and stratification forces, bringing a better understanding of the causes of fluctuations in the social stratification profile and identifying the determinants which bring the system to its equilibrium. We assume that, in the case of the Slovak Republic, deviation from the equilibrium as the result of the actions of the opposition as the leveling force, finally restores the initial democracy status and contributes to its deepening.

We also assume that democratization dynamics results from a certain conversion strategy of not just the ruling, but the opposition elite as well and is of non-linear nature. To study this hypothesis, in the research we have identified the level of democracy in the Slovak Republic within a certain time domain and recorded benchmarks diagnosing the changes in the democratic movement trajectory.

In order to operationalize and generalize the data and identify defining points, we have applied several global indices. The most commonly cited and extensive indices, which in one way or another meet the five criteria of democracy, formulated by the German political scientist W. Merkel (democratic electoral regime, rights of political participation, civil liberties, horizontal accountability, guarantees of the effective governance exercise by the democratically elected representatives (Merkel, 2004)) have been selected for analysis in the present paper. Among them there are Freedom House Index, World Bank International Monitoring Project *Worldwide Governance Indicators*, *the Polity IV Project* etc. The data presented in the projects are mainly related to the early 2000s. This has determined the choice of the lower research boundary. 2018 has been defined as the upper research boundary. This gives us the possibility to analyze the influence made by the power and the opposition on democratization

in the country before the Covid-2019 pandemic. By its nature, this factor reminds the strange attractor that has deepened the convergence of democratization. Therefore, the political changes in the trajectory of democratic development of the state that took place after 2019 require a separate study.

We have studied the dynamics of rates and causes of growth and decline of such indicators as “Rule of Law”, “Voice and Accountability”, “Political Stability and Absence of Violence”, “Stability of Democratic Institutions”, “Stateness”, “Political Participation”, “Political and Social Integration” and others that are important for assessing the quality of the democratization process in political systems at different stages, as well as the models of these interrelations. This has made it possible to identify the dynamics of democratization and to establish certain defining points that diagnose its strengthening or weakening. Hypothetically, these points were the result of a struggle between stratification and equalitarian forces. We assume that the change in the democratization vector depends on the patterned relations between the power and the opposition. Implementation of quantitative data has made it possible to build a dynamic model of democratization in Slovak Republic, developed with consideration of the influence made by oppositional social agents and the specifics of their conversion strategies.

Using indicators “Stability of Democratic Institutions”, “Rule of Law” and “Stateness” the study shows that elections are the point of balance between the power and the opposition and, at the same time, a new starting point in the process of democratization. They fix a new ratio between political forces, giving the possibility to a more competitive political actor to implement its election program and continue democratic processes. By restarting relations between competing forces, relieving political tension from publicly significant issues, setting a starting point for new political stratification and gradual organizational formation of the opposition, and increasing the potential of the deterrent force, the elections allow stabilizing the political system for a while. The indicator “Political Participation” has helped to define the time periods when there were violations of democratic rights and freedoms in Slovakia (the right to free elections, freedom of expression, and freedom of association). Analysis of the indicator “Political and Social Integration” has revealed the conversion strategies of the ruling Smer-SD.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The interrelations between the power and the opposition in the context of democratization have not yet been the subject of research in foreign and domestic studies. Most of the literature on post-communist regime democratization problems focused on the analysis of the governmental activity and parliamentary stability. Instead of the growing interest in the opposition, scholars focused on the governmental mandate and duration of the government’s rule as well as on the factors constituting the basis for the different trajectory of post-communist transformations.

One of the reasons for certain lack of scholars' attention to the role of interrelationship between the power and the opposition as democratization factors in Slovak Republic is an exceptional variability of the object of research. The opinion that in the conditions of instability of the party and government functioning it is difficult to even determine who was in the opposition at that time is still rather wide-spread. In the opinion of P. Kopecky, M. Spirova, "the changing institutional framework has hindered a clear-cut assessment of the opposition's institutional opportunity structure, while the complex nature of the political process has made any evaluation of the role of the opposition in constitutional practice a challenging task" (Kopecky, Spirova, 2008).

This problem is in general terms mentioned by many authors researching the processes of transition to democracy in the Central and Eastern Europe. In particular, substantial analysis of its aspects can be found in the paper by M. Kubat (Kubát, 2010). The scholar studied the party dimension of the opposition functioning in the Slovak Republic in a detailed way and determined the role of institutional factors in the development of the opposition. That enabled us to substantiate rational motives in the choice of this or that interaction option by the power and the opposition.

In the article the author also grounded his ideas on the paper by P. Sorokin (Sorokin, 2007), in which the fluctuation theory is described. The theoretical part of the article is supplemented by Bourdieu's paper (Bourdieu, 2002), where the theory of capital accumulation and conversion is disclosed. For a deeper understanding of the issue extremely important are the scientific achievements of A. Ágh (Ágh, 1995), P. Kopecky (Kopecky, 2008), M. Spirova (Spirova, 2008). They substantiate the theoretical and methodological approaches to the functional aspects of the parliamentary opposition in post-communist democracies. Theoretical aspects of the problem are analyzed in the studies made by K. Popper (Popper, 1998), W. Reisinger (Reisinger, 2003). Due to specific direction of the research, of primary importance have been the papers dedicated to the political conditions of the opposition development in the context of democratization processes in Slovak Republic. First of all, we refer to the works of D. Leška (Leška, 2013), D. Malová (Malová, 2011), P. Učeň (Učeň, 2011). J. Marušiak (Marušiak, 2017) dedicated his article to the analysis of new trends in the party system of the state. The scholar proved and generalized the reasons that provoke the emergence of business-type parties and their oppositional capacity, especially in the period between the elections. The nature of interrelations between political opponents in the parliament and the dynamics of the country's democratization is covered in the works by Kollár M. (Kollár, 2011), Vašečka M. (Vašečka, 2011). The nature of the relationship between political opponents in the parliament is covered in the papers by G. Mesežnikov (Mesežnikov, 2011). The formation of pro-government and opposition circles during election campaigns is covered in the study by S. Szomolányi (Szomolányi, 2010). Generally, Slovak scholars in their works do not tend to

consider the parliamentary opposition as a separate political institution and to specify the model of its interaction with other power institutions in the temporal dynamics. At the same time, rather interesting for us was the integrative combination of the researches related to the theoretical and empirical aspects of democratization, the specificity of democratization in Slovak Republic as well as the relationship between the power and the opposition.

3. POLITICAL CONTEXT OF DEMOCRATIZATION

Transition to democracy in Slovak Republic took place within the global democratization process that embraced the countries of the Central and Eastern Europe. Methodologically, this process did not fit the “classical” model of three subsequent stages of transition to democracy (liberalism, democratization, consolidation). In the opinion of A. Kljuchkovich, “in the case of Slovakia the sequence of transition was violated due to lack of delineation between (parallel nature of) the liberalization and democratization phases as well as short-term functioning of the hybrid political regime causing zigzag-shaped (non-linear) trajectory of the transition” (Kljuchkovich, 2019). We agree to T. Kuzio’s standpoint who said that “Slovakia implemented its fourth transit which included development of political democracy, market economy, national statehood, and political nation” (Kuzio, 2001).

As far as conceptualization of democracy itself is concerned, several core theoretical directions can be pointed out here: competitive elitism concept (M. Weber, Ph. Schmitter), liberal democracy (J. Lock, Ch. Montesquieu), pluralistic democracy model (R. Dahl), participatory democracy model (C. Pateman, B. Barber). In our opinion, in the case of the Slovak Republic the liberal democracy concept is the most acceptable in the context of our research, with its focus on the actual freedom of faith, expression, assembly, demonstrations; pluralism; uncertainty about the consequences of choices and availability of alternative sources of information as well as regular channels for the expression and representation of their interests and values (Diamond, 1999). These and other elements of liberal democracy make up the basic criteria by which Freedom House makes its annual assessment of political rights (competition, opposition, participation) and civil liberties in different countries of the world.

The dynamics of democratic transformations in the post-socialist space substantially depended on the level of competition among pro-government and oppositional political parties. At the same time, each country had a different balance of political forces, characteristic rules of “political game”, and a specific institutional environment for the parliamentary opposition. A. Ágh notes that the first stage of democratic transformations is the stage of parliamentarization (the East Central European parliaments have had an overwhelmingly dominant role in politics) (Ágh, 1995). The first democratic elections organized in then-Czechoslovakia, brought the post-opposition to power, and the Communists, as outsiders, occupied the niche of the parliamentary opposition (Kubát, 2010).

In 1994-1998, during the rule of HZDS and its leader V. Mečiar the state was experiencing some democratic backsliding. It was accompanied by restrictions set for democratic rights and freedoms of citizens, a slowdown in the European integration, and the weakening the inter-party competition by narrowing the opposition's institutional capacity to control government activities. In the face of real threats to liberal democracy, the efforts of the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary political opposition merged (Buslenko, 2014). The government formed around this party was opposed by a weak and fragmented opposition. It lacked internal consensus and could not effectively compete with illiberal parties for influence. At that time its fragmentation was conditioned by ideological heterogeneity due to which opposition both center-right and center-left forces. This factor significantly complicated the development of a policy alternative to the one offered by the government. HZDS presented itself as a wide-spectrum movement. Its neutrality enabled it to carry out populist policy and maneuver between nationalism and center-leftism, taking the votes of the constituency from the classical left-wing and right-wing parties (Leška, 2013).

Gradually, the opposition parties began to coordinate their strategies, considering the policy of V. Mečiar's government to be populist and anti-democratic. Since 1998 Slovak Republic has restored the democratic practice of the party-in-power alteration and democratic control of the executive power. This created objective conditions for eliminating the consequences of Mečiar's illiberal rule and gave impetus for the implementation of the European integration policy and further democratization.

In 1998–2010 the relationship between the power and the opposition was occasionally very intense and sharp, accompanied by regular political crises. This happened because significant party fragmentation in the parliament led to the development of the minimum winning coalitions and ideologically diverse government and parliamentary opposition. Under such conditions, the parliamentary opposition remained ideologically and organizationally split and included political parties that represented the political spectrum from left to right. Smer, led by R. Fico, remained the main opposition force.

The 2010 election campaign was taking place in the background of a more clear division between the pro-ruling and opposition parties. The latter was caused by the fact that the previous parliamentary coalition that consisted of the center-left Smer-SD, ultra-right SNS and right-wing L'S-HZDS implemented the policy incompatible with the principles of liberal democracy. Its implementation, in the opinion of the Slovak scholar G. Mesežnikov, aimed at the "weakening of the mechanisms of controlling executive authorities, total marginalization and deligitimization of the parliamentary opposition, violation of the principle of equality before the law" (Mesežnikov, 2011 a). The deficit of democracy was enhanced by the global economic crisis which also affected the Slovak Republic. The government of R. Fico failed to cope with its negative consequences. As the result there came budget deficit rise from 1.9 % of the GNP in 2007 to 7.8 % in 2010. (D. Malová, P. Učeň, 2011). That is why the opposition right-wing

parties SDKÚ-DS and KDH together with the newly established “Sloboda a solidarita” (SaS) and the Party of the Hungarian Minority (Most-Híd) tried to adjust the election programs as they could make them closer to the basic topic of the election campaign. The main slogans of the opposition were accusations of the government of its incapability of coping with the consequences of the global economic decline in the country as well as of the spread of such negative phenomena as clientelism and corruption. 2010 was the year of the third full rotation of the parties in power due to the election. Previous change from the pro-government status to the opposition one took place in 1998 and 2006. S. Huntington once offered a test for consolidated democracy, which involved a twofold change of the parties in power. The third rotation of power showed that the Slovak Republic was exactly at that stage of its development. After power rotation the new ruling coalition started its governance which was characterized by mutual cooperation and respect for constitutional laws and balances. The government undertook a number of legislative and administrative measures aimed to strengthen the openness of the institutional system. The then-coalition had a small numerical advantage over the strong and moderately integrated opposition (79:71) (Szomolányi, 2011).

After the 2010 parliamentary election a new configuration of the party system developed in the Slovak Republic, which included a powerful Smer-SD, two middle-range parties (SDKÚ-DS and SaS) and three smaller parties (KDH, Most-Híd and SNS). In that period “the country still had the party system division into two blocks of different nature in place: the block of national and populist parties that included Smer-SD and SNS as well as the block of program parties made up by SDKÚ-DS, SaS, KDH, and Most-Híd (Mesežnikov, 2011 B). This division line influenced the nature of the interparty relationship considerably, including the coalition strategies used as well as access of the parties to power, their political style and adherence to a certain type of political culture.

At the same time, it has been noticed that the “power-opposition” dichotomy is prone to a certain indistinctiveness and non-transparency. For example, there can be traced the influence of economic capital on the structure of the overall party capital, which reinforces the political capacity of business-type parties and the interdependence between business and politics. Entrepreneurial parties were created directly by businessmen or leaders and received funding from them. Before elections such entrepreneurial parties usually criticize the government. This sort of opposition behavior can be considered as a technology that increased the effectiveness of mobilization of the frustrated pro-government electorate. New political parties’ rise to power in the form of individual projects can be explained by the voters’ “fatigue” with constant rotation of power, frustration with the low government efficiency, and the search for “new faces” in politics. One example are Civic Understanding Party (SOP), Alliance of the New Citizen (ANO), SaS and We Are Family – Boris Kollár. The Slovak scholar J. Marušiak reasonably writes that “success in parliamentary elections and even par-

ticipation in government did not motivate such parties to create territorial structures or improve the mechanisms of internal democracy” (Marušiak, 2017).

On March 10, 2012 Smer-SD won a convincing victory in the early parliamentary election, getting 83 seats in the parliament out of 150. Having gained the support of the left-party voters, the party was supported by 44.4 % of votes (BTI, 2016). That enabled Smer-SD to establish the one-party government headed by R. Fico. The party’s coming to power was not accidental. The success of Smer-SD was considerably due to the high level of centralization that allowed avoiding internal opposition and fractionalization with the minimum level of party democracy. This is the leader-type party grouped around the charismatic R. Fico.

The one-party government had a rather weak and fragmented parliamentary opposition. The ruling Smer-SD became the obstacle for its uniting and implementation of controlling functions, since, having the absolute majority of votes in the parliament, it tried to openly weaken it all the time. That was manifested in the violation of procedural processes via ignoring of the legitimate claims of the opposition deputies. Opposition fragmentation and rather powerful positions of Smer-SD can be accounted for by the positioning of social and political forces. Back then the party system of Slovak Republic remained rather fragmented, in spite of its openness. The Smer-SD, dominating in the left flank of the party spectrum, was not faced with any real competition from the left. Among the center-right parties there were no powerful entities. The party of M. Dzurinda SDKU-DS was gradually losing its deputies in the parliament, part of whom left it or changed their party belonging. The process was taking place in the background of enhancement of the influence of the Network (Sieť) set up by the former KDH member R. Procházka. During the 2014 presidential election he was the third most successful candidate and got 21 % votes in the first round of elections. Some fragments of the “old” center-right parties contributed to the appearance of new individual projects (Nova, Chance, SKOK, OĽaNO, ĽSNS).

The activity of populist parties impeded positive democratization development considerably. In particular, Smer-SD used “rigid” populism options for the sake of the preservation of its consolidated capital that was based on the delegated party capital as well as the personal symbolic capital of its leader R. Fico (Mesežnikov, 2008). This was manifested in foreign policy and the rights of minorities matters; unclear and ambiguous political program, declaration of the “popular” nature of its own political line, and not specific policy suggestions.

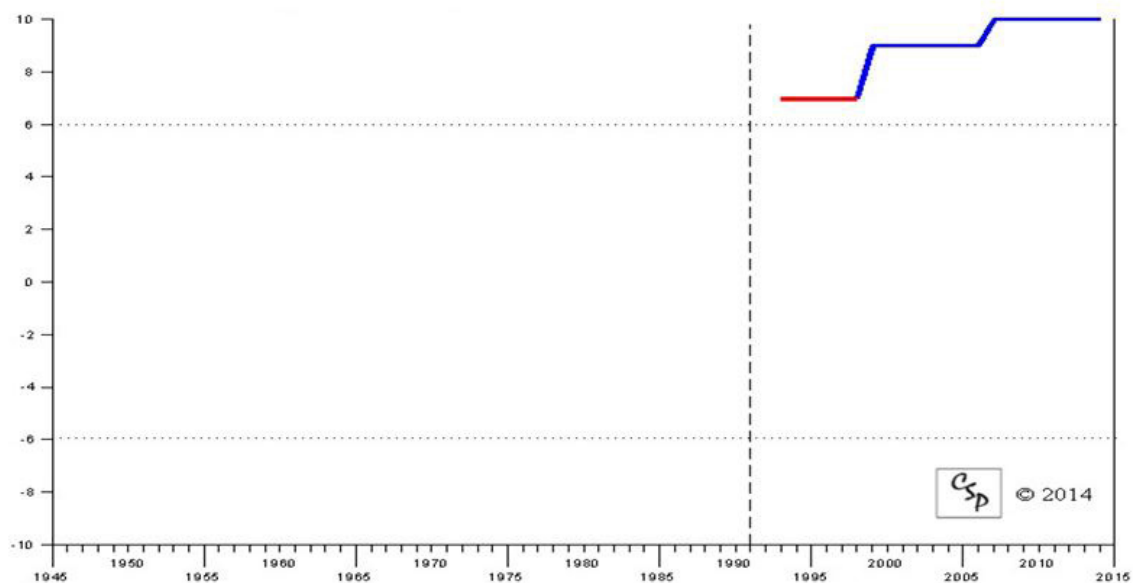
4. DEMOCRATIZATION TRENDS

Building a formal model of democratization in the country implies taking into account the influence made by social agents and the nature of their interaction; for this, we will apply the following indices and indicators of democratization: Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI), Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI), The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), Freedom House, the Polity IV Project. They will serve

as an empirical basis and will help us determine fluctuations periods when democratization of a political system goes through the phases of divergence and convergence as well as to reveal the reasons for such processes.

One of the tools for the conceptual analysis of democratization processes is annual analytical generalizations presented by the *Polity IV* Project. The Project lasted from 1992 to 2013 and its results reflect transformation periods in the government policy for each country, including such characteristics as the strengthening of authoritarian tendencies, weakening of central power, intensification of direct popular participation. Graphs that reflect transformation trends of a political regime and allow drawing conclusions about the state of democratization in the country were extremely important in the context of the researched issues. As it can be seen from Graph 1, the lowest level of the regime's democracy was recorded in the Slovak Republic in 1994-1998 (7 points out of maximum 10).

Graph. 1. Dynamics of the regime's democratization in the Slovak Republic in 1992-2013



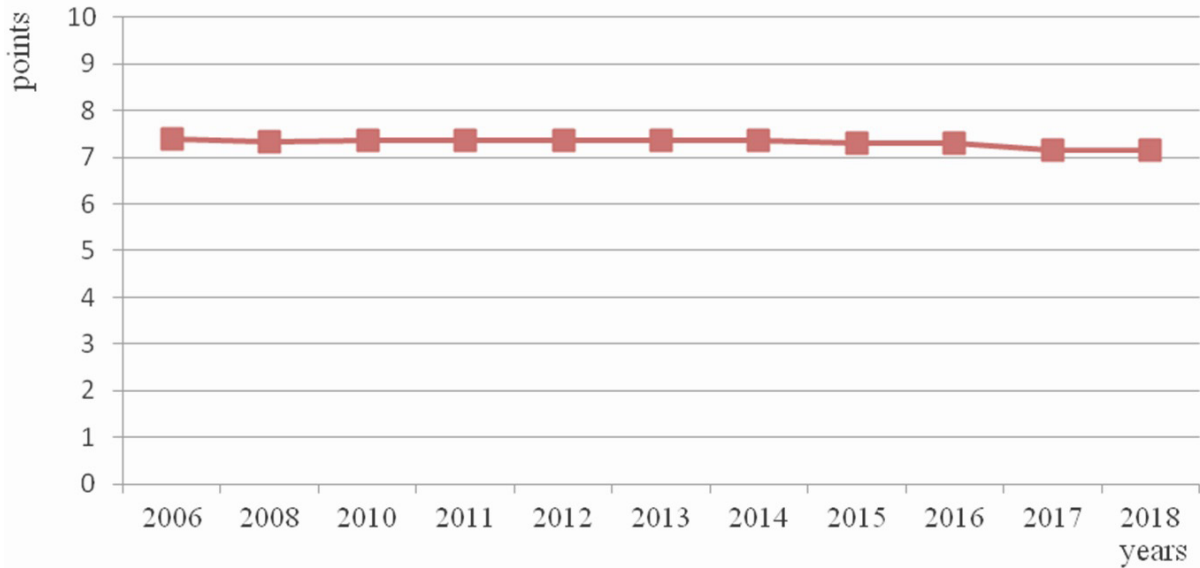
Source: *Polity IV Project (2013)*.

It should be noted that the upper and lower points of this period coincided with the parliamentary elections and the change of the ruling elite. This gives grounds to preliminarily consider elections to be the upper points of fluctuation.

Change of power in the country in 1998 initiated positive changes in terms of democratization of the regime, which in the period from 2000 to 2008 approached 9 points. After that it was stabilized at the maximum level of 10 points. According to the EIU, the democracy index in the Slovak Republic in 2007-2018 averaged 7.35 points,

with 7.4 points in 2006. Since 2015 there was a slight decrease to 7.29, and then to 7.16 points in 2018 (Graph 2).

Graph. 2. Democracy Index in the Slovak Republic in 2006-2018



Note: 0 is the lowest index, 10 is the highest.

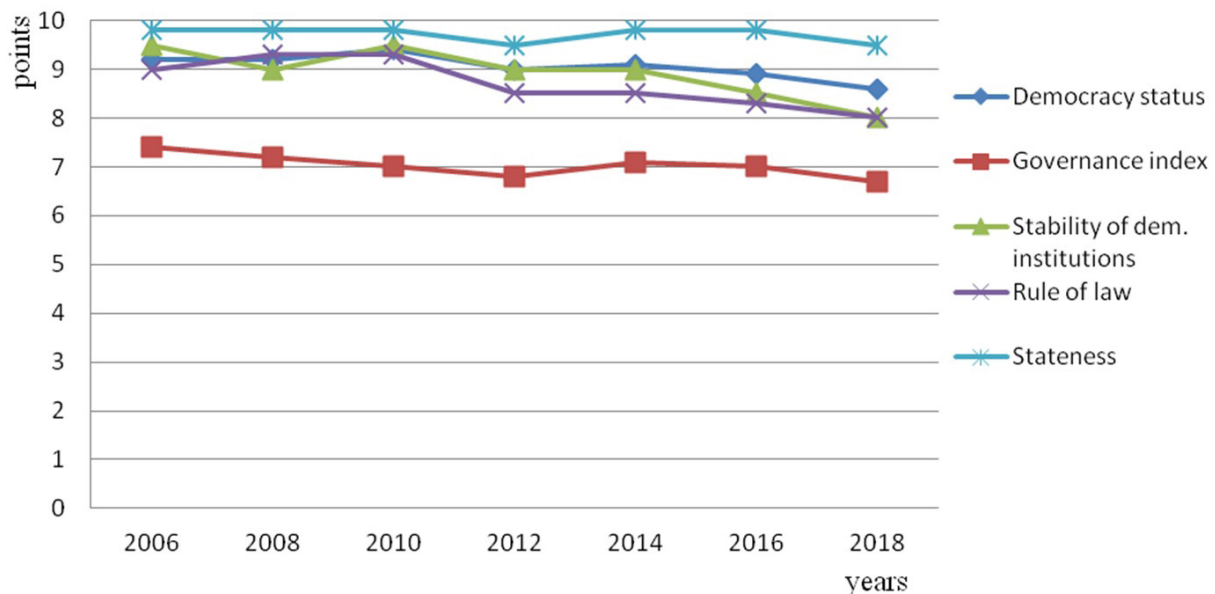
Source: Economist Intelligence Unit (2018).

The research made by *Bertelsmann Stiftung* has demonstrated a slightly different trend. Graph 3 shows a more explicit slow decline in the democracy index from 9.4 in 2010 to 8.6 in 2018. The regression in these dynamics correlated with the decrease in the Governance Index and such indicators as “Stability of Democratic Institutions”, “Rule of Law”, and “Stateness”. The trend towards relative stabilization of democratization in the country, evident in 2006-2017, showed two contradictory trends. On the one hand, there was a noticeable consolidation of democracy as the “transformation of random systems, reasonable norms and unpredictable decisions that have emerged during the transition to credible relations of cooperation and competition” (Rejsinger, 2003). One point of evidence is the fact that the change of power that took place in 2006, 2010, and 2012 did not significantly affect the fluctuations, which is quite symptomatic and requires a deeper analysis. Of interest is the fact that during 2006-2010 and 2012-2017 Smer-SD remained the ruling party.

On the other hand, the lack of obvious fluctuations in the democratization processes revealed some sort of “freezing” in the political changes directed at the development, expansion, and solidarization of democratic rule. Therefore, it is important to pay more attention to both short-term decisions (contextual approach) and strategies and approaches of the ruling elite to the political system development (structural approach), made to achieve effective functioning of democratic institutions and procedures and to support further trajectory and process of democratization. The combination of structural and contextual approaches is quite useful and allows to comprehen-

sively approach the phenomenon under study, taking into account interrelations between social agents. The application of all these types of theories in combination with the concept of social capital conversion to the development of the post-communist Slovakia will contribute to the progress in the consolidation of the structural and contextual understanding of democratization processes.

Graph. 3. Dynamics of democratization in the Slovak Republic in 2006-2018



Source: Bertelsmann Transformation Index (2018).

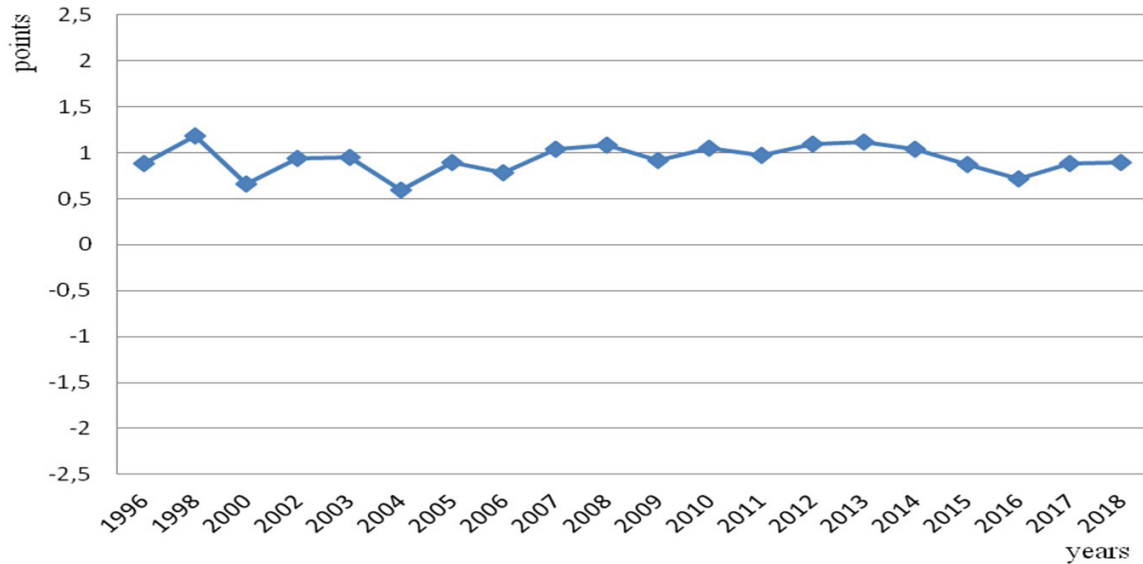
When Smer-SD joined the political arena, the relative stabilization of the country's political system became evident. As it can be seen from Graph 4, in 1996-2005 the arithmetic mean of political stability was 0.87, however, in 2006-2017 it increased to 0.9. At the same time, after 2006 the amplitude of fluctuations in this indicator has been significantly decreasing. In particular, in the period from 1996 to 2005, the highest surge, 0.59 points, was observed in 1998-2000, while during the 2006-2017 period the most substantial difference of 0.26 points was recorded in 2006-2008.

However, the value of the "Political stability" indicator alone is not yet a sufficient argument to assess the state of democratization.

The overall picture was complemented with the indicator "Stability of Democratic Institutions", modeled by BTI. Graph 5 demonstrates certain fluctuations in the indicator in 2008, 2010, and 2014, which chronologically coincided with the parliamentary elections and prove the growing conflict of the inter-party relations in the period of elections as well as their gradual decline in the period between the elections. At the same time, the indicators "Performance of Democratic Institutions" and "Commitment of Democratic Institutions" show additional parameters of changes in the political stability trend. Thus, in 2006-2012 the indicator "Performance of Democratic Institutions" was recorded at the level of 9 points. After 2012 a gradual decline could be traced, and this indicator decreased to 8 points in 2014. At the same time, there

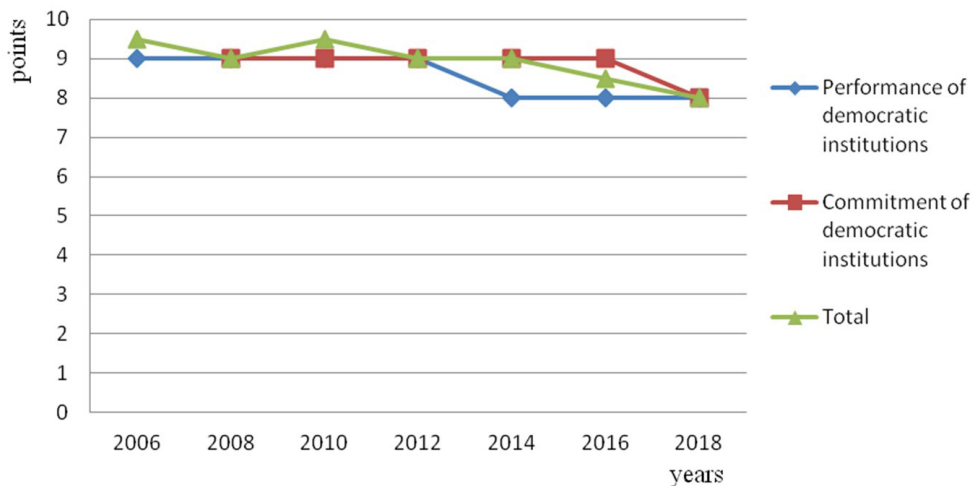
was a noticeable decrease in the indicator “Commitment of Democratic Institutions” from 9 points in 2016 to 8 in 2018. All this generally determined a slow trend towards the decline of the political stability index from 9.5 to 9 during the 2006-2008 period, and then from 9.5 to 8 during the 2010-2017 period, with the increase of 0.5 points in 2008-2010.

Graph. 4. Changes of the indicator “Political Stability and Absence of Violence” in the Slovak Republic in 1996-2018



Note: 2.5 is the maximum rate, - 2.5 – is the minimum.
Source: Worldwide Governance Indicators (2018).

Graph. 5. Changes of the indicator “Stability of Democratic Institutions” in the Slovak Republic in 2006-2018



Source: Bertelsmann Transformation Index (2018).

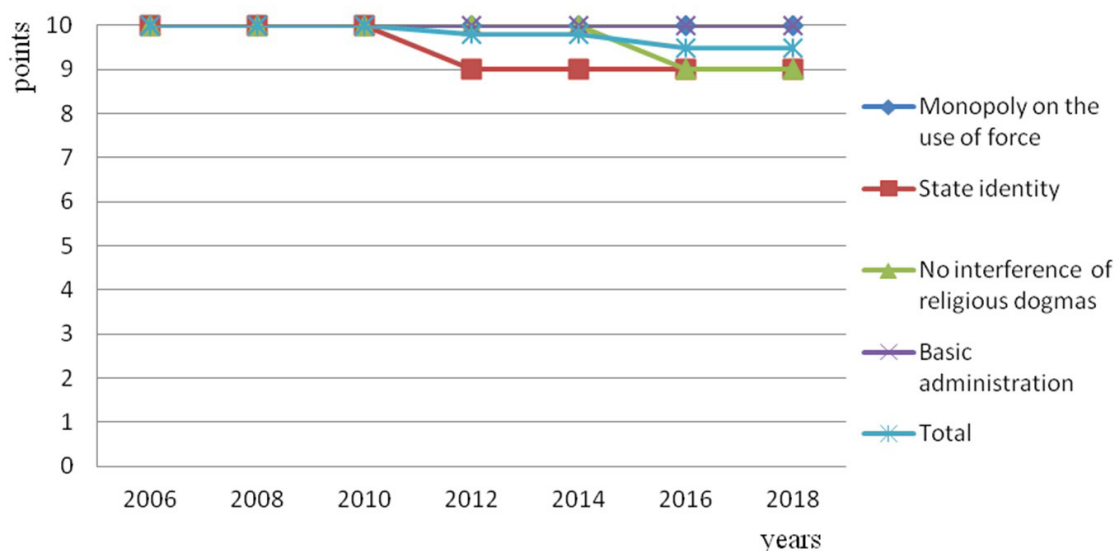
Against the background of a relatively linear trend of democratization, the stability index and additional indicators give us grounds to assume the following. First of all, when Smer-SD came to power, political stability in the country was gradually de-

clining. Moreover, this trend progressed in 2010-2017. Given the fact that similar processes had already been observed in 2006-2008, it seems that the wave of the political situation destabilization became a breeding ground for the center-left Smer-SD. This also seemed plausible because the so-called “soft” populism became a tool that allowed its leader R. Fico to accumulate political capital.

Besides, the government demonstrated its fairly low management efficiency. In particular, Graph 3 shows the instability and drastic changes in the relevant rates. The stage of gradual decline from 7.4 to 7 points was taking place during 2006-2010. After that we can see a slow regression to 6.7 points in 2017. This backsliding, on the one hand, testified to complex changes in the management model of the transformation period. On the other hand, it showed that low level of management efficiency had become an obstacle on the way to democratization but not an obstacle on the way to another coming to power by Smer-SD. It seemed that the power disregarded effective governance as a significant resource for capital accumulation and preferred potentially stronger ones.

The decline of the democracy index correlated with the indicator “Stateness”. As it can be seen from Graph 6, it started to decrease since 2010. This can be explained by the aggravation of ethnonational problems in the country as the result of the policy of national populism implemented by R. Fico. Since 2014 the negative dynamics was shown by the indicator “No Interference of Religions Dogmas”. It dropped from 10 points in 2014 to 9 in 2016. Violation of religious rights and freedoms in the country by the ruling party is one of the signs of a defective democracy.

Graph. 6. Changes of the indicator “Stateness” in the Slovak Republic in 2006-2018



Source: Bertelsmann Transformation Index (2018).

It is noteworthy that in the process of interaction between the power and the opposition positive changes in democratization were gradually developing, in particular, the ones demonstrated by the indicator “Voice and Accountability” (Worldwide Govern-

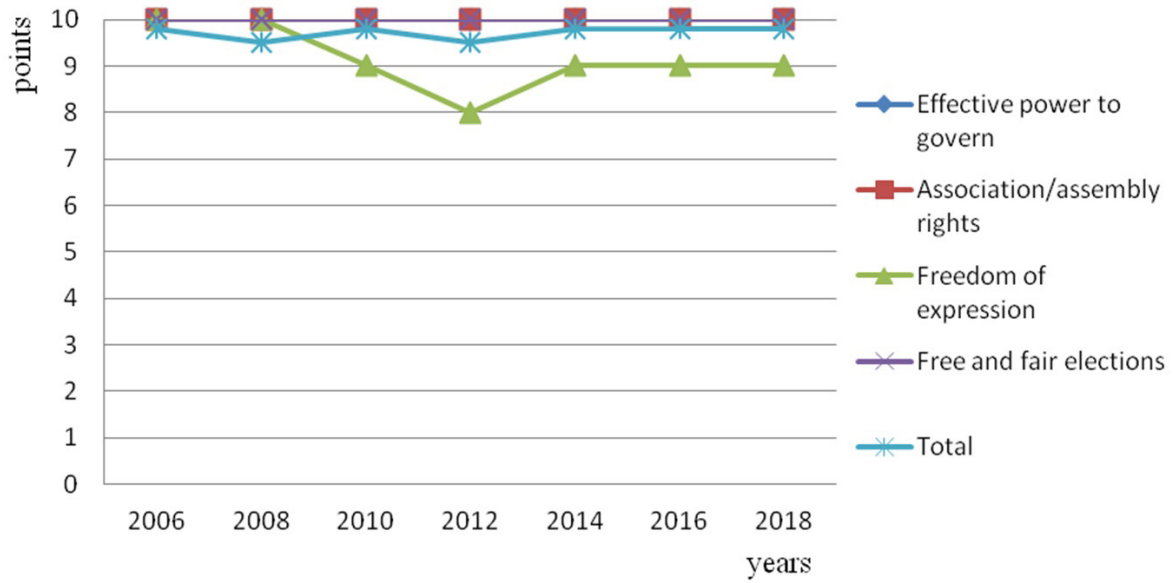
nance Indicators, 2018). As we can see, after the 1998 parliamentary elections which brought the opposition to power the process of democratization underwent some positive changes. The citizens' ability to participate in elections increased significantly, and the government itself became more accountable and transparent, which was a sign of liberal democracy. In fact, since 2002, according to the WGI, there has been a distinct trend towards stabilization of the "Voice and Accountability" indicator at the rate of 1 point. At the same time, from 2002 to 2017, despite permanent changes of power, this indicator remained stable. It seems that there was an imitation of the struggle between the deterrence and stratification forces. This is quite symptomatic, as it was not about the stabilization of democratic processes in terms of transparency, elections' democracy, and openness of power, but about their stopping at the level of 2002.

As it can be seen from Graph 7, BTI's studies demonstrate the stage of high rates of indicators "Free and Fair Elections" and "Association/Assembly Rights" in 2006-2018. During this period they did not go below the maximum 10 points, which proves the trend towards democracy stabilization. On the whole, this testified to the fact that, first of all, the reform of these institutions caused by the interaction of the equalitarian and stratification forces had been a success and, as a consequence, had ensured voting rights of citizens, transparency, and competitiveness in the electoral process. Secondly, no political force questioned alternatives to democratic processes and institutions as an essential feature of consolidated democracy.

However, democratization, according to W. Reisinger, "belongs to the political changes taking place in an effort to expand and solidify democratic ways of governing and where citizens are entitled with the right to freedom of expression" (Reisinger, 2003). This right allows vetoing undemocratic decisions of legally elected government officials. In fact, these are channels for the formation of social capital for the opposition. As Graph 7 shows, the "Freedom of expression" indicator in Slovak Republic is quite contradictory, unstable, and reveals the most problematic areas in the index of political participation. The stage of stabilization of the indicator rates at the level of 10 points was recorded in 2006-2008. After that, it began to regress to 8 points in 2012. Since 2014 the indicator has been fixed at the level of 9 points. Limitation of citizens' rights to express their views created certain obstacles on the way to the equalitarian forces development.

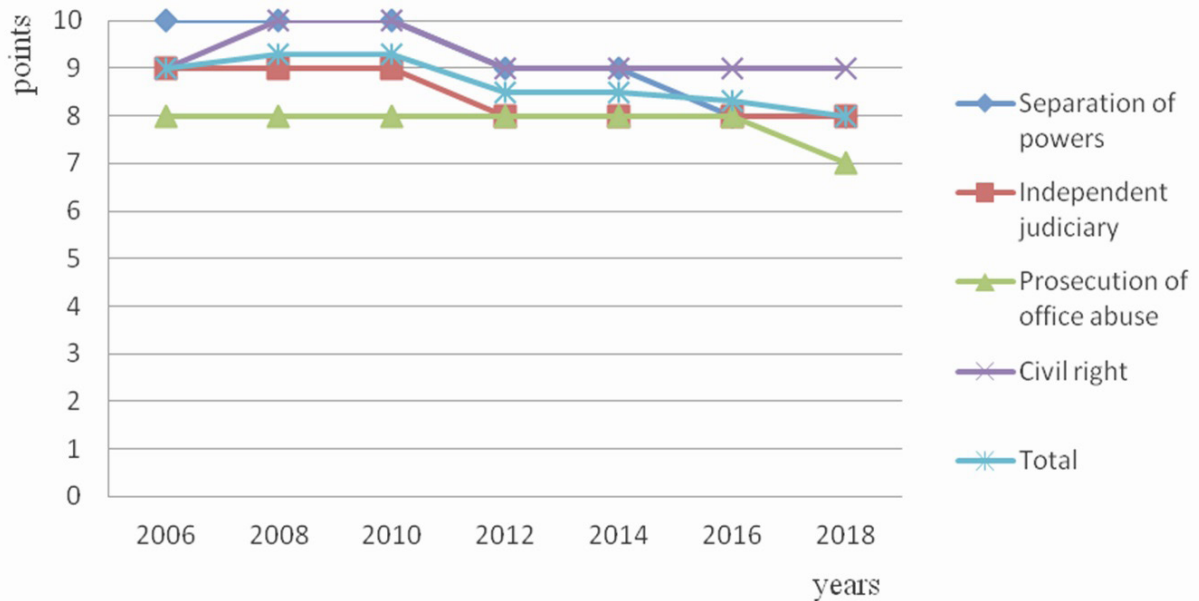
In general, the indicator "Political Participation" did not change significantly. Over the entire period under analysis it decreased from 9.8 to 9.5 points in 2006-2008 and 2010-2012. After 2012 its rate has stabilized at 9.8 points. It's worth mentioning that its decline coincided with the parliamentary elections and the beginning of the rule of the majority government led by Smer-SD. This allows us to consider 2010 to be a bifurcation point, with a short-term perspective of fluctuation divergence.

Graph. 7. Changes of the indicator “Political Participation” in the Slovak Republic in 2006-2018



Source: Bertelsmann Transformation Index (2018).

Graph. 8. Changes of the indicator “Stateness” in the Slovak Republic in 2006-2018



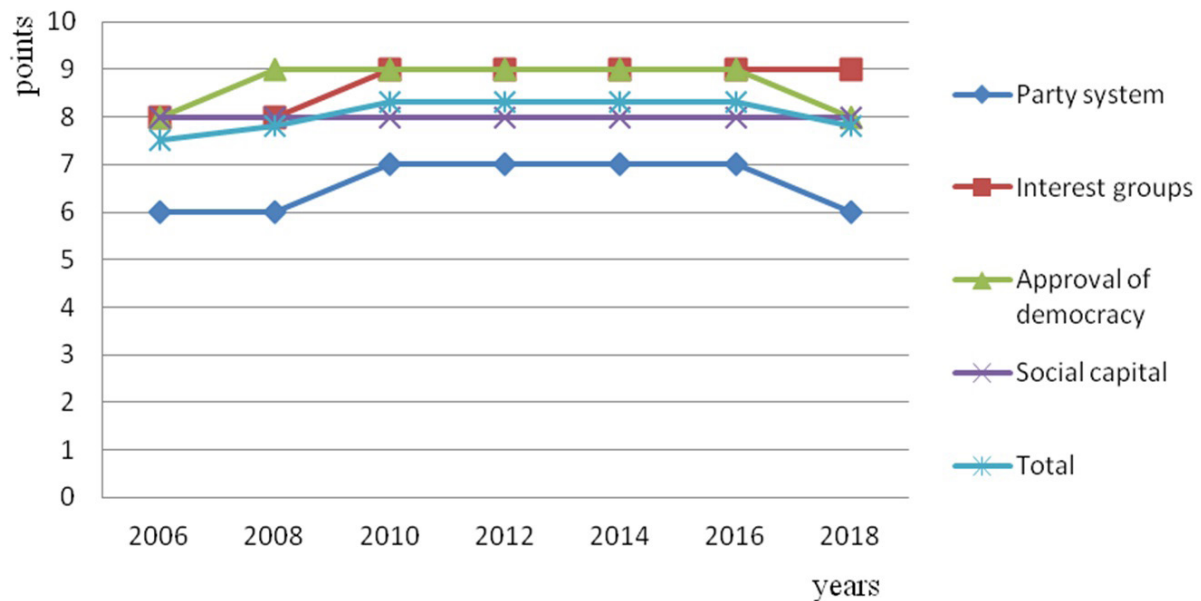
Source: Bertelsmann Transformation Index (2018).

In the language of social capital theory, this meant that the ruling party tried to strengthen its position in the political field in a non-democratic way through constitutional changes, which in the long run undermined the system of checks and balances in power. By making changes in the parameters of democratization (institutional design), Smer-SD, in fact, increased its fluctuation.

We should note a specific trait of the democratization process during the Smer-SD rule. BTI's research did not discover significant violations in the field of citizens' rights protection. The corresponding indicator did not change significantly and averaged at the rate of 9 points. At the same time, since 2010, negative trends have been traced in the indicator "Independent judiciary". It has demonstrated a steady regression changing its rate from 9 points in 2010 to 8 in 2012. Since then there hasn't been any noticeable positive dynamics in this area, which is quite symptomatic. We may assume a certain effect of the political factor on the judiciary, which reduced its role in the protection of citizens' rights and undermined the effectiveness of democratic institutions.

To better understand the nature of behavior and the role of social agents in the context of democratization, we will analyze the indicator "Political and Social Integration". As we can see from Graph 9, there was a slight increase in this indicator from 7.5 to 8.3 points in 2006–2010, with subsequent stopping and stabilization at the rate of 8.3 points in 2016. In 2016-2017 the index decreased to 7.8 points. Against this background the growth of the indicator "Interest Groups" from 8 points in 2008 to 9 points in 2010 can easily be seen. It is worth mentioning that during the Smer-SD government such a high rate remained stable. It can be assumed that this was somehow linked to the activities of public agents who were in power and through which the pro-government party could accumulate associated capital. Thus, a network of formal and informal ties between the ruling elite and the carriers of economic capital was being formed. Therefore, the absence of changes in the democratization process meant that none of the agents was interested in changing the existing "rules of the game". In this regard, I must agree with the opinion expressed by S. Patrushev, who, taking D. North's concept of institutional evolution as a basis, stated: "the state may be interested in preserving inefficient institutions ... such institutions can be supported by powerful groups with special interests; and the evolution of the society may depend on a once-chosen institutional trajectory" (Patrushev, 2006). Such a situation, according to the Ukrainian researcher O. Chaltseva, "is typical of closed systems, unprepared for innovations and seeking to preserve their institutional order in the system" (Chaltseva, 2017). Accordingly, in such circumstances, the development of full value democratization of the political system is impossible, because it acquires the traits of imitation, which leads to institutional changes that cannot always be predicted.

The influence of social agents as associated capital carriers on the democratization in Slovak Republic has been quite considerable and cannot be underestimated. In addition, it, having a latent nature, is not taken into account before detection in any index. It was difficult to make the analysis because for a long time, a social agent could influence government agents through bribery and blackmail using a network of informal connections, while remaining in the shadows. This allows us to assume certain errors in the estimation of the "Interest Groups" indicator.

Graph. 9. Changes of the indicator “Political Participation” in the Slovak Republic in 2006-2018

Source: Bertelsmann Transformation Index (2018).

CONCLUSIONS

Thus, the article studies the effect of interrelationship of the power and the opposition on the democratization dynamics in the Slovak Republic. Such a goal of the research has caused the following research objectives: to determine the specifics of the relationship between the power and the opposition in the Slovak Republic in the context of ongoing political processes; to clarify the strategies of accumulation and conversion of social capitals of the power and the opposition as well as their effect on the state democratization dynamics.

The key conclusion is that the democratization process in the Slovak Republic depended considerably on the strategies of accumulation and conversion of social capitals of the power and the opposition as well as on the development of stable dispositions between them in the political field.

In the Slovak Republic the dichotomous political field structure was shaped, which was intrinsically and directly linked to voters and pre-determined establishment and appearance of the positions and interests related to a certain situation in this field. Such positions resulted from indirect, “coordinated” relationship between the pro-ruling and opposition parties, based on the striving for accessing the state’s metacapital. That forced the competing parties to produce alternative projects that aimed not at promoting democracy strengthening, but at taking into account the competitor’s positions and mobilizing the constituency for the sake of fixing and enhancing one’s positions. Hence, the popularity of populist parties in the Visegrad Group countries as the result of gradual replacement of the inter-party competition with in-

formally fixed rules of the “game”, where the main actors developed as the result of the political discourse the problems that were though close for the constituency, but distracting from the core problems (corruption and ways of its combating, power transparency, etc.).

Such processes were taking place in the background of the drastic increase in the political capital of Smer-SD. The increase in the party’s popularity was conditioned by the so-called “soft populism” which expanded its presence in the political field at the expense of both center-left and center-right parties. Through the mechanism of democratic elections and application of the majority principle, Smer-SD managed to control the legislative and executive power democratically, strengthening its positions in the system of separation of powers. This strategy of the social agent is well-illustrated by P. Bourdieu’s approach to the properties of the field. He believed that there is a constant struggle acquiring different forms between those who dominate the field and their contenders. In this struggle the former are trying to protect their monopoly and to eliminate competition, while the latter – to destroy the obstacles set by the right for entering the field (Bourdieu, 2002). The fragmentation and organizational weakness of the opposition in Slovak Republic allowed Smer-SD to determine the stakes and specific interests, while other players in this field were forced to follow them. Slovakia’s political system resembled a battlefield between the ruling elite seeking to maintain control over the distribution of specific metacapital of the state and to retain a legitimate violent control, and the opposition elite fighting for control but forced to accept the rules of the game and the basic stakes as an basis important for entering the field.

The trend dynamics of democratization in Slovak Republic reproduced by means of indicators in the model form is characterized by the periods of fluctuation and its main phases – divergence and convergence. It has been established that parliamentary elections were the typical points of fluctuation. They allowed agents to legitimately implement the election strategy, to change the vector of democratization in a constitutional way, to determine the short- or long-term implementation of the strategy of the ruling party or its leader, which, under the conditions of greater consolidated social capital, helps either the deterrence or stratification forces in their coming to power, triggering the dissipative democratization of the political system.

On the basis of the democratization trend analysis we have identified the determining points that marked democratization termination and its entry into the fluctuation phase. This state of the system has been defined as the result of achieving a certain balance between the power and the opposition, as the prolongation of the established “rules of the game”, according to which the parties bore minimum transaction costs, thus reducing the inter-party competition and bringing about institutional stability. It has been proven that after a certain stabilization there comes the stage at which the level of democracy of the political system goes down to a new saturation point (convergence).

Besides, there has been a negative trend in the political system democratization as well. In our opinion, this is the result of pattern relationship between the power and the opposition, which was manifested in the reproduction of political practices and was rather aimed not at the democratization but at the preservation of dispositions in the political field and further distribution of the state metacapital. Since the pro-ruling and opposition parties mainly embraced democratic ideas and procedures, imitating inter-party competition, fluctuation was slow.

A prospective direction for further research is determination of the effect of strange attractors on the relationship between the power and the opposition. Here the effect of the pandemic on the convergence of the democratization processes in terms of limitation of the political influence of the opposition and strengthening of the executive branch of power is meant. We also consider it to be expedient to develop the methodology for determining the institutional opportunities of the opposition's influence on the power. That would enable to determine the dynamics of the changing strength of the opposition pole in the political field as an additional democratization indicator.

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