Radoslava Brhlíková (Ed.)

SEEKING THE NATIONAL INTEREST

Slovakia after 15 Years of EU and NATO Accession

ibidem

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CONTENT

FOREWORD

This monograph analyzes the Slovak Republic's international relations in the post-integration period—that is, after the country joined the European Union and NATO in 2004. The authors examine how these memberships affected the discussion in Slovakia on the formulation of the country's national interests as well as related procedural aspects and political actors. The key research question of the publication is how Slovakia's integration into the European Union impacted the country's definition and subsequent enforcement of its national interests. The authors have primarily focused on the aspects contributing to the definition of Slovakia's national interests on a domestic level.

The individual chapters therefore explore the interaction between domestic, foreign, and transnational actors who take part in the development of Slovakia's national interests. While identifying these participants, the authors also examine the extent to which the role of non-state actors has strengthened in the formulation of Slovakia's national interests in the post-integration period. The authors work with the hypothesis that Slovakia's foreign policy preferences are to a considerable degree defined by political elites, while the role of civil society players remains largely passive.

When formulating their theses and conclusions, the authors have taken into consideration the fact that a state's definition of its national interest as a concept and as an integral part of its foreign policy is still a highly topical issue. The question of "national interests" is seen as one of the key areas of international relations. In Slovakia, the expression "national interest" has become a target of criticism especially because of the impossibility to delineate the terms "nation" and "state" in the multicultural Slovak society. This is why, besides "national interest" (*národný záujem*), the term "nation-state interest" (*národnoštátny záujem*) is also used. Slovak political and academic discourse operates with both terms, since there is no consensus on whether this problem should be analyzed from the perspective of the majority's interests—which implicitly

suggests the exclusion of the minority population and the ethnicization of the term—or from the perspective of state interests, which are primarily understood as coinciding with the interests of the Slovak population as a whole. That is why the research team prefers to use in the Slovak version of this publication the term "nation-state interest," a much more consensual expression in the Slovak context. The question of migration, the position of autochthonous and allochthonous minorities, and minority policies are all comprised in the concept of national interest.

To what extent has its interpretation changed since 2004? And how is it being interpreted? These questions lie at the core of the individual chapters that examine the potential shift that might have occurred in the perception of the term "national interest" after 2004, acquiring a more transnational meaning. The research also explores the role bilateral relations and subregional cooperation structures play in this process.

The methodological framework of this publication is provided by case studies, the synthesis of individual outputs, and the analysis and identification of internal political factors that affect the creation of national interests. The authors have also attempted to classify the main actors and their role in society. The members of the research team analyzed the notion of "national interest" as the preferences of a state as a socially constructed reality. The authors based their observations on the concepts of liberal intergovernmentalism and Europeanization.

The authors of this publication have focused on several partial areas of Slovakia's national interests, such as security policy, the issue of ethnic minorities and human rights, the creation of Slovakia's public image, and the problem of migration. The chapters also examine the impact that the social and economic crises have on the formulation of Slovakia's national interests, and the coordination of political actors when it comes to enforcing them on a European level; that is, they scrutinize to what extent Slovakia's particular problem areas have become internationalized and how the country's national interests correspond (or not) with those of the EU and NATO.

In the chapter "The Temptation of Underdevelopment," László Öllös focuses on the objective and subjective causes behind this phenomenon in Central Europe, placing it in a wider European context. The author analyzes Central Europe's underdevelopment in the post-1989 period, which is characterized by the former socialist countries trying to "catch up" with Western Europe. Öllös furthermore notes that the EU is falling behind other world powers, posing the question of what such a gradual lagging behind would mean to Europe in its competition with other world powers. He concludes that in this globalized world (Kershaw 2016, 13-21) gradually falling behind its competitors would jeopardize Europe's belief in development and success. At the same time, Öllös believes this crisis would also affect the values of European democracy.

In the chapter "Security as a National Interest after EU Accession," Radoslava Brhlíková examines the connection between the concept of security and the concept of the state. In this methodological context, she compares the security interests of the European Union with those of the Slovak Republic. She defines the term "security" and analyzes it as the ultimate national interest. In the context of national interest and Slovakia's EU membership, she compares the interests of the European Union with those of Slovakia as a member of a wider community. Her premise is that with the gradual enhancement of the integration process (even in foreign policy matters), the national interests of Slovakia are gradually coming nearer and becoming more identical to the foreign policy interests of the European Union. She seeks to answer the question of whether upon joining a wider community of states in pursuit of a common policy, a state—a rather small one, considering its strength, capabilities, and skills—still has its own national interests. Brhlíková concludes that by being part of a wider community, a state seems to give up on its own interests, seeking protection—and therefore the fulfillment of its priorities and objectives—under the wings of a joint organization.

Norbert Kmeť arrives to almost the same conclusions in his chapter "National Interest and Politicians," where he analyzes the domestic political scene and its impact on the formulation of Slovakia's foreign policy. He comes to the conclusion that, as far as

the external and internal policies of a state are concerned, whether one uses the term "state interest," "national interest," or "nation-state interest" is not the main issue. State interests should represent a society-wide consensus concerning matters such as a stable state economy, compliance with EU rules, the prevention of corruption, border protection, and state security. Slovakia's interests or strategic objectives should match those represented by the EU. In the pursuit of a common goal, individual interests must be pushed aside and cooperation between European and state institutions should be enhanced.

In the chapter "Migration Policy as National Interest," Radoslav Štefančík tries to define migration policy in relation to Slovakia's national interests. The author notes that in recent decades, migration policy has become a priority to every economically strong and modern state, as all of them now face the phenomenon of international migration. Štefančík claims that migration policy is an important part of politics which also affects the sovereignty of nation-states. He defines it as a set of arrangements a state makes to manage migration matters, such as regulating the admission of foreigners into its territory, determining the conditions of their stay, and arranging their integration into society. He emphasises that migration policy is not only about crossing borders and residing in the territory of another state, but it also concerns the integration of immigrants into the host society and ultimately dealing with the reactions of the resident population. He interprets "migration policy" as a term encompassing three areas of international migration: immigration, asylum policy, and the integration of immigrants. He differentiates between three basic models: the French assimilative model, the British (or Dutch) multiculturalist model, and the German model of social exclusion.

In the chapter "The Importance of Political Culture for Slovak National Interest in the Context of Migration Crisis," Dirk Dalberg also examines the phenomenon of migration. This chapter offers an interesting insight into a German researcher's view on Slovak political culture and the way it influences the perception and resolution of the migration crisis in the country. He opines that

Slovakia refuses the mandatory refugee quotas because of its negative perception of Islam, which is deeply rooted in its political and socio-cultural system. This negative image of Islam is nowadays much abused by national, conservative, and Christian-oriented parties such as the Slovenská národná strana ("Slovak National Party," SNS), the Ľudová strana—Naše Slovensko ("People's Party—Our Slovakia," ĽSNS), and Obyčajní ľudia a nezávislé osobnosti ("Ordinary People and Independent Personalities," OľaNO) as well as by the left-wing Smer-SD ("Direction—Social Democracy") and the liberal Sloboda a Solidarita ("Freedom and Solidarity," SaS). This historically inherited and nowadays oft-articulated ideology has much to do with a fear of an asymmetric relationship between the EU and Slovakia. A considerable part of the Slovak population believes that the European Union is forcing the country and its citizens to accept "other" inhabitants, even though the Slovaks perceive them as a threat to their national and cultural identity. For this reason, the Slovaks have refused Muslim refugees in their territory. He also believes that there is another reason at play: Slovakia only has experiences with emigration. Slovaks primarily associate migration with emigrating abroad and not with immigrating to Slovakia. This Central European country differs from Western European states for this very reason.

In the chapter "Slovak National Interest and the Hungarian Minority in the Post-Integration Period," Tibor Szentandrási surveys the position of the Hungarian minority after 2004, which he sees as an important milestone in the research of minority issues. His core argument is simple: he claims that despite all their differences and contradictions, Slovakia's national and state interests have a lot in common with those of its neighbours, including the Hungarians, the alleged age-old enemies of the Slovaks. The European dimension brings new aspects into the research, nudging it in a different direction. Terms such as "ethnic conflict," "intolerance" and "antagonisms" are pushed into the background, while questions related to the region's development, the democratization of society, the development of civil society, and the comparison of these phenomena in the "old" and "new"

member states of the EU. In the Slovak Republic, this approach is primarily implemented by an orientation towards European history, European regions, the category of citizenship, and the extent of democratization and the development of civil society in Central Europe. The current European debate on the further development of civil society focuses mainly on the topical issues of asylum policy and immigration; from this point of view, the constant revitalization of national questions is becoming anachronistic.

In the chapter "Slovakia's National Interests and Slovak-Russian Bilateral Relations in the Context of the Ukrainian Crisis (2013-2018)," Juraj Marušiak tries to identify how Slovakia's relations with Russia influence the formation of the former's national interests and to what extent Slovakia's discussion about its "Eastern policy"—and especially its relations with Russia—divide the Slovak political scene. Because of the complexity of the issue, Marušiak narrows his focus to the post-2013 period; that is, after the outbreak of the Ukrainian crisis. The author states that in the context of the Ukrainian crisis, Slovakia's national interests differ from Russia's policies in relation to Ukraine. Although Slovakia does not have a consolidated position regarding its relations with Russia—mainly because of the discrepancies between the Slovak political elite's words and actions, even within the EU—we can still conclude that Slovakia's key foreign policy priority (or more precisely, its national interest) remains integration into the EU, whereas establishing a dialogue with Russia is only secondary.

This publication is concluded by David Reichardt's chapter, "Slovak National Interest: A Difficult Pursuit. The Three Key Blockages to the Attainment of the National Interest," in which the author examines why Slovakia's promotion of its national interests slowed down after 2004 compared to the previous decade. The author argues that the reasons are largely three-fold and concern ideology, corruption, and short-term decision-making. Reichardt bases his hypothesis on the interpretation of the concept of "national interest" and the exploration of its application to Slovakia's political and social environment.

This publication wishes to make a contribution to Slovak discourse on foreign policy and the role of its individual participants. The authors try to outline a possible direction the discussion about Slovakia's national interests might take. Their studies aim to identify the conflicts that characterize Slovakia's national interests in relation to those pursued by the organizations in which Slovakia holds a membership, focusing mainly on the European Union. The authors believe this publication might be of educational use to universities, but could also be perused by a wider academic and lay public who take an interest in the issues underlying Slovakia's domestic and foreign policies.

1. What is Slovakia's "National Interest" and Where is it Created? In Lieu of an Introduction

Juraj Marušiak

In their attempt to influence public opinion both in domestic and foreign policy matters, politicians and journalists tend to bandy about the term "national interest." However, it is profusely used not only by the traditionalist and nationally-oriented camp but also by those in favor of an enhanced integration process.

The following excerpts illustrate it well: "*Slovakia needs to think and act more in accordance with its interests*" (Brožík 2012). Or: *"What kind of a president would prioritize equipping an army over tackling the problem of his nation being brainwashed, its lack of education, or inadequate health care... Is he more concerned about foreign interests than Slovak ones?"* This was the question Maroš Smolec, the editor of the weekly newspaper Matica slovenská, fired at the Slovak president Andrej Kiska (Smolec 2013). In contrast, Kiska believes that "*the ones who threaten national interests are those who clamor for the need to protect the sovereignty of the country while spreading hoaxes and propaganda*" (Teraz.sk 2018). Meanwhile, Andrej Danko, the Speaker of the National Council of the Slovak Republic, claims that "*Slovak politicians and those working in the civil service must hold the country's national and state interests sacred*" (Sme 2018).

With regard to the European Union's anti-Russian sanctions, Robert Fico, then Slovak prime minister, said: "*As an EU member, Slovakia supports taking a uniform approach to the Ukrainian situation. However, as a sovereign state we reserve the right to defend our national interests, without disrupting the unity of the EU and its uniform position*" (Noviny.sk 2015). He repeatedly described his Russia policy as one in accordance with the national interests of Slovakia: *"Where Slovakia's national interests are concerned, no one can stop me. We had to turn to Russia because the volume of economic and business relations has been diminishing"* (Sme 2015).

However, his critics and political rivals also argue for "national interests." For instance, conservative journalist Jaroslav Daniška opined that "*with his foreign policy, Prime Minister Fico is also harming Slovakia's national interests. His first year of premiership offers us several examples, the three most serious being obsequiousness toward the EU, hypocrisy toward the traditional Balkan ally, and underrating Poland's strategic significance and the Visegrad concept of Central Europe*" (Daniška 2007). Veronika Remišová, a member of the National Council for OĽaNO ("Ordinary People and Independent Personalities") claims that "*with its inability to manage EU funds in an honest and fair way, the government has been damaging the national interests of Slovakia for a long time*" (Králik 2018). However, even those members of the intellectual elite who question the idea of a state being built on the values of ethnic nationalism talk about "national interests". They believe that what they see as the National Council's nationalistic manifestation in regard to the Act of Hungarians Living Abroad of February 2002 threatens such interests (Changenet.sk 2002).

In public discourse, Slovakia's presence in the EU is also seen through the prism of "national interests" which, according to Slovak politicians, do not necessarily have to overlap with "European interests." The supporters of European integration talk about the alignment of national interests with European ones. This idea appeared in the rhetoric of Robert Fico, the leader of Smer-SD ("Direction—Social Democracy") and the former prime minister, when addressing the issue of Ukraine's natural gas supplies (Aktuality.sk 2015) as well as in the discourse of Ivan Štefanec, MEP for the opposition party Kresťanskodemokratické hnutie ("Christian Democratic Movement," KDH), who described the EU as a "union of nation-states." He believes that in this context, the most important interest is "aligning [Slovakia's] national interests with the common European interest," defining a common goal for the future, and being able to operate in the common European system (Glob.Zosnam.sk 2018). Euroskeptic political parties have a much clearer idea of the contradiction between "Slovak" and "European" interests. Richard Sulík, the leader of the right-wing Sloboda a Solidarita ("Freedom and Solidarity," SaS), makes

practically no mention of "European" interests in his agenda, stating that "*in Brussels, I am representing Slovak interests and I will continue to do so"* (Sulík 2016). The extreme right-wing party Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko ("People's Party Our Slovakia") referred to supporting a pan-European solution to the refugee crisis by establishing mandatory quotas for refugee reallocation as passed by the European Parliament (EP) in the 2015 BC-R8-0367/2015 resolution as "a betrayal of the national interests of the Slovak Republic." urging Slovak MEPs who voted for it to give up their mandate (L'sNS 2015).

The theoretical and methodological framework

The above-cited excerpts clearly indicate that political discourse sees "national interest" as one of the country's key priorities—if not the most important. Because of the high emotional value and relevance certain politicians attach to "national interests," it is evident that they still consider the nation-state to be the most important and dominant participant in international relations. This is also how they see the European Union and its common foreign and security policy in spite of the transnational elements that characterize its economy and some other areas of society (Weiss 2008, 113). Referring to certain topics as the "national interest" has a strong mobilizing effect on voters. In naming a particular priority a "national interest," politicians try to emphasize its relevance. The attribute "national" indicates that it is a society-wide priority. On the other hand, saying that an idea, priority, or policy goes against the national interest results in discrediting and delegitimizing it as well as its supporters. Therefore, politicians tend to delegitimize their rivals by misusing the term "national interest."

As Oldřich Krpec points out, politicians try to define the "national interest" in "objectivist" categories. This is especially true for the realist tradition of political thinking where politicians define the "national interest" normatively as an objectively existing category that primarily concerns issues that affect the basic survival of a state. It is thus considered a category of power. A "subjectivist," or so-called structural functionalist, definition does not try to

objectively define the national interest but attempts to identify the process of its formation by means of the social sciences (Krpec 2009, 16-17). The present publication is based on the assumption that a state's behavior in an international environment is defined not only by its interactions with other states but also by the activity of its domestic political actors. As Krpec points out, citing Alexander Wendt, a state's identity and interests are to some extent dependent on a social environment, and the international system constitutes such an environment. Within such a system, the state is perceived as a corporate agent through which individuals enter an international process. Thus, the above-mentioned authors maintain that common interests are formed as a result of social interaction around shared values and ideas (Krpec 2009, 45-48). According to Krpec, this interpretation of "national interests" is characterized by a contradiction between the fact that externally "the state speaks in a unified voice" while internally it is significantly divided (45-48). Similarly, supporters of liberalism recognize a plurality of actors and interests, taking into account the internal subjects as well as cultural values and institutional traditions (62-63).

The formulation of national interests is critically influenced both by the interests of particular political actors and the values and concepts shared by a society (or at least the majority of its members). So, if we agree that the national interest is the result of social interactions, we cannot interpret it as a static and objectively definable category but only as a phenomenon that is subject to changes dependent on the actors who participate in its creation. A state's foreign policy as a set of external activities in an international environment is also subject to changes. According to Šárka Waisová, if in the pre-WWII period a considerable part of a state's policy was autonomous and independent from internal political affairs, in the second half of the twentieth century it started to become increasingly domesticized, meaning that the influence of domestic actors grew and civil society started to take a keener interest in foreign policy matters. It also had to reflect the growing influence of transnational actors, which resulted in the expansion of the economic factor (Waisová 2011, 9-10). Thus, we can observe

an increased interconnectedness between a nation-state's internal and foreign policies.

State sovereignty as we currently understand it is also subject to change. In the past, its interpretation was based on definitions like those of Jean Bodin, who believed it to be "the absolute and permanent, legally guaranteed" (1955, 25) power of a state, independent from external actors. It is therefore considered to be an indisputable and essential aspect of a conditioned life (Königová 2001, 41). On the other hand, authors nowadays emphasize that it is a socially and historically conditioned entity which can be obtained or lost gradually, while the *"Westphalian idea of states as cue balls with an impenetrable surface"* (Königová 2001, 41, 47) is now being contested. Richard Bellamy opines that the transnational interpretation of human rights is above all challenged by the traditional concept of state sovereignty.He talks instead about a post-sovereign or late-sovereign international order (Hloušek 2004, 94; Walker 2003, 3-32). He believes that state sovereignty, which is defined by the "demos" and its ability to rule, together with "popular sovereignty," which defines the scope and nature of the law, can endanger human rights, since state sovereignty might impede humanitarian intervention against repressive regimes while popular sovereignty can lead to the tyranny of the majority (Bellamy 2003, 168). Human rights violations and the compromised safety of individuals are legitimately recognized reasons for external intervention (Königová 2001). Where the EU's multi-level governance is concerned, Bellamy talks about an organisation betwixt and between a sovereign and a post-sovereign system, which is built both on a federal and an intergovernmental principle, while also being characterized by a regulatory regime based on the rule of law (Bellamy 2003, 186-187). In this situation, as Brian Hocking and David Spence note, the role of foreign affairs ministries as gate-keepers, responsible for controlling a state's borders and all communication that occurs through them, is replaced by the role of the boundary-spanner, who is aware of the mixed character of the international system, the increased permeability of state borders, and the multi-layered nature of

foreign policy, leading to an increased demand for interactivity and complexity (Carlsnaes, Sjursen, White 2004, 11).

From this point of view, an "objectivistic" interpretation of national interest seems insufficient. According to Oldřich Krpec, an "objectivistic" approach means that a national interest enters politics from an international environment at the moment of its articulation, which occurs at the domestic political level and is based both on collective and individual interests and shared values. It is then incorporated into foreign policy (Krpec 2009, 68), having progressed from social groups and individuals through interest groups all the way to political representation (71).

Even nowadays, there are authors like Oskar Krejčí who base their definition of the national interest on realist or neorealist interpretations such as those of Hans Morgenthau, for instance. Krejčí opines that the national interest is marked by a struggle to survive and represents a policy geared towards "survival" and "*the protection of physical, political and cultural identity against encroachments by other nation-states*" (Morgenthau 1951). Based on these definitions, Krejčí sees national (or state) interest as an "objectively determined set of goals of a state, defined by its material characteristics and external environment" (Krejčí 2014, 265). Jiří Valenta also largely agrees with Morgenthau's definition, especially where the relevance of interests and the stability of their vital importance are concerned. However, he also shares Arnold Wolfers' opinion that "*the decisions of policy-makers based on national interests cannot be separated from moral and ethical interests*" (Valenta 1992, 16-17).

The state is not a homogenous actor. Therefore, an "objectivistic" definition of national interest only reflects the subjective beliefs of the entity who offers such a definition, whether it is a politician, or an expert, or the state and its administration. Especially in democratic conditions, a state cannot be perceived as monolithic, since public authorities are not separate from society. Society is differentiated and its individual segments or political actors have different priorities, which are then pursued at the state level through political competition.

On the other hand, liberal (e.g., Robert Keohane, Andrew Moravcsik, David Mitrany, and Robert Putnam [cf. Drulák 2010, 13]) and constructivist authors (Jutta Weldes and Martha Finnemore [Drulák 2010]) reject the "top-down" perspective. The liberal thinkers base their theories on the idea that the state is not a homogenous actor and that the national interest as the guiding principle for a state's foreign policy is the result of the aggregated interests of individuals and groups in the domestic political scene. Meanwhile, constructivists rely on discourses, norms, and identities (Drulák 2010).

To analyze the processes which govern the creation of Slovakia's foreign policy, identify the factors that influence it, and examine to what extent these issues become a national interest, we used Petr Drulák's and Petr Kratochvíl's criteria (Drulák 2010; Kratochvíl 2010a, 21-34). This approach allows us to separate scientific analysis from the political elite's attempts to have their particular goals accepted as the "national interest" and converted into the normative principles applied to foreign policy. On the contrary, Drulák's and Kratochvil's approach allows us to discern the legitimacy of goals—defined as national interests—as a socially construed phenomenon and not as an empirical necessity (Kratochvil 2010a, 24). It also takes into consideration plurality and the existence of several parallel and often competing state interests (Bátora 2004a, 40).

The first criterion is the criterion of relevance; that is, whether certain issues are of importance to Slovak society and the political elites, and to what extent they constitute a long-term interest. The criterion of consensuality allows us to identify how acceptable—and therefore legitimate—a particular policy seems to the majority of society, which is also the precondition for an interest's long-term relevance, regardless of changes in government brought about by elections (cf. Drulák 2010, 14).

Finally, if we accept that the "national interest" is not an objectively definable category but is rather the result of interactions between domestic actors and the external environment of the state, then its development is dynamic. It can be defined in relation to a specific issue, but it can also be redefined, challenged, and re-

established. The goal of this publication is to identify the topics that are becoming a part of Slovakia's national interests in its foreign policy, together with the actors who participate in their formation and the platforms where they are negotiated or where attempts to challenge and renegotiate them take place.

The conceptual definition of foreign policy depends on a state's identity—that is, the way it defines its own position in the system of international relations, the type of relations it establishes with the external environment, and the partners it chooses. But at the same time, a state's identity is also defined by the way it is perceived by other states. For this reason, when analyzing national interests, we also need to identify how acceptable a particular policy is to other states. Last but not least, a state's identity at the international level also depends on its internal policies. Choosing a domestic policy direction has a crucial impact on a state's foreign policy orientation, since to identify its potential partners, a state has to take into account its economic or security interests as well as the extent to which cooperation with those partners allows it to fulfill its domestic political goals. According to political scientist Erik Ringmar, a state's actions are not necessarily driven by rational motives, but also by irrational or non-rational ones. As he further notes, citing philosopher Georg W. Hegel and the sociologists George Herbert Mead and Alessandro Pizzorno, "*an individual cannot decide on their own who or what they are, as every such decision is made collectively. We need approval to become the person we want to be, and only when approved can we finally create the identity*" (Ringmar 2008, 13). On the other hand, direct and long-term state interests can also affect the process of identity-building. Thus, even a measure (or a set of measures) with the aim of forming a postulated identity can become an interest.

After the fall of communism, Slovakia as a newly established nation-state faced several challenges in reformulating its identity, which meant renouncing its previous identity and embracing new metaphors, meanings, and narratives. Erik Ringmar calls these crucial moments in the creation of a new identity "formative" (Ringmar 2008, 81, 86). Because of its multiple internal and external

conflicts, we can identify several formative moments in the history of Slovakia when the country had to decide about its future.

Attempts at institutionalizing Slovakia's "national interests" by means of a "State Doctrine"

In post-1989 Slovakia, a discussion about national interests as a set of consensually defined priorities to designate the further development of the country's internal and foreign policy had been long absent or at least marginalized. With the exception of the fall of communism in 1989 and the accession to the European Union in 2004, all major changes—including the formation of an independent Slovak Republic, the choice of a socioeconomic transformation model, accession to NATO, and the rise and fall of the somewhat authoritarian "Mečiarist" regime—happened amidst much internal political dispute. Politicians failed to reach an agreement on what direction Slovakia should take. They started to exploit foreign policy matters in domestic political discourse and ignored any alternative scenarios, converting the issue into a question of their prestige

Another such divisive moment was the problem of defining the term "nation," which, especially during the 1990s rule of Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko ("Movement for a Democratic Slovakia," HZDS), Slovenská národná strana ("Slovak National Party," SNS), and Združenie robotníkov Slovenska ("Union of the Workers of Slovakia," ZRS), was often interpreted solely in ethnic terms. This was the time when the expression "nation-state interests" came into use, also being advocated by prime minister Vladimír Mečiar (HZDS), even though the academic literature, including Slovak and Czech authors (cf. Valenta 1992; Krejčí 2014; Weiss 2010; Kratochvíl 2010b), did not use this term. On the other hand, it was Mečiar's party that often called itself "the defender of Slovak interests," while accusing its opponents of being anti-Slovak (cf. Sme 1996). Similarly, HZDS and its leader Mečiar also blamed the Hungarian minority for sabotaging Slovakia's nation-state interests (cf. Haughton 2001, 112). The discussion about the "national interest" as an integrating factor of Slovak politics was

therefore limited only to a fragment of the political spectrum. It was systemically advocated by František Šebej, a member of Demokratická strana ("Democratic Party") as well as Peter Weiss, the leader of Strana demokratickej ľavice ("Party of the Democratic Left") (Weiss 2009). In fact, Šebej refuses to use the term "nation-state interest," as he considers the state an institution that should be neutral in terms of interests and opinions. He sees the nation as a whole as consisting of equal citizens, which is why he finds the term "national interest" more democratic (Šebej 2000).

An attempt to consensually define the priorities across the whole political spectrum appeared only later, after the establishment of a broad coalition of centre-right and centre-left parties following the parliamentary elections of 1998. The coalition government led by Mikuláš Dzurinda was in favor of accelerating the process of accession to the EU and NATO; however, the political scene continued to be strongly polarized. This is why in November 1999, when President Rudolf Schuster (1999–2004) made an appeal in the National Council to create Slovakia's state doctrine, which he hoped to be "*the result of an agreement between relevant political powers […] jointly defined by the coalition and the opposition*" with the aim of defining "*the reasons behind the creation of our state and its real goals for the future*" (Kancelária prezidenta 1999) he did not meet with much success.

Instead of reaching an agreement regarding the country's priorities, several competing state doctrine proposals appeared. These looked more like party manifestos, or projects approved by only one ideologically defined circle of intellectuals and public figures. That was the case with the national-conservative state doctrine proposal put forward by the members of Matica slovenská, Nezávislé združenie ekonómov Slovenska ("Independent Association of Slovak Economists," NEZES), and Ábel Kráľ, the leader of the executive committee of Spoločenstvo Kresťanské Slovensko ("Christian Slovakia Society"), who drafted the proposal (Kultúra 2001, 14-15). This circle was close to the HZDS. The doctrine's foreign policy plan for Slovakia was to "join the family of European states" as "a sovereign subject, in