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Great Expectations: Slovak Nationalist initiatives in the light of Communal Elections 2014

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Introduction

When Marian Kotleba, former leader of the far-right organization *Slovenská pospolitosť* (SP, Slovak Brotherhood) and an icon of Slovak “ultra-nationalism”, was elected to governor’s seat in the Banská Bystrica Region, nationalism became a hot topic in Slovakia once again.

Since the peak of Kotleba’s fame and media coverage (approx. 2005-2006), far-right organizations were seldom seen as acutely threatening stability of Slovak democracy. If so, then only by non-governmental organizations and thin yearly reports published by the Ministry of Interior. Kotleba himself seemed as a rather marginal figure. It was assumed that the aggressive, vulgar nationalism, as articulated by members of traditional *Slovenská národná strana* (SNS, Slovak national party) or *Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko* (HZDS, Movement for democratic Slovakia), was more or less gone. Representatives of the SMER-SD have often employed nationalist expressions in their speeches, however in a less threatening and profane manner – and rather as a populist symbolic tool than a real political agenda. It was thanks to the combination of this softer, populist nationalism, charismatic leader, institutional firmness and declared social-democratic policy that SMER-SD became a better choice for voters of both SNS and HZDS (later ĽS-HZDS).

Ján Slota, former leader of SNS, known for his aggressive xenophobic rhetoric, got succeeded in the mayoral seat of Žilina city after sixteen years by *Slovenská demokratická a kresťanská únia – Demokratická strana*’s Ivan Harman (SDKÚ-DS, Slovak Democratic and Christian union – Democratic party) in 2006 and finally by SMER-SD’s Igor Choma in 2010 (Choma got re-elected in 2014). While SMER-SD has gradually gained a big number of mayors (i.e. supported only by SMER-SD): from 68 in 2002 to 419 in 2006, 599 in 2010 and 847 in 2014, SNS gained only between 2002 and 2006 – from 38 to 85. Since then it has only been losing: in 2010 they supported 60 successful mayors, in 2014 only 41. The jump between 2002 and 2006 can be attributed to a significant loss in mayoral seats of other party whose agenda was laden with nationalism: HZDS, which declined from having 384 mayors in 2002 to 78 in 2010 (and finally ceased to exist in January 2014). As to the parliamentary elections, not even SNS currently reaches the 5% limit needed to enter the parliament, declining from 11.73 % in 2006 to 4.1 % in November 2014.¹ With such a shrinking of traditional nationalist

¹ The data are approachable on <http://www.median.sk/pdf/PAT2014/PAT1411P.pdf>

political parties there appeared to be no other option for voters sympathetic toward nationalism than to support SMER-SD.

Marian Kotleba was preceded in the governor's seat by the SMER-SD's Vladimír Maňka, his counter-candidate of 2013. It seemed to be a clear victory for the latter – even the Prime Minister Robert Fico plainly articulated the widely shared presumption that “a sack of potatoes would best Mr. Kotleba.”² That, however, did not happen. Kotleba appealed to 55.4 % of voters and hence won over a largely favored and financially significantly better subsidized candidate in the region dominated by the SMER-SD since 2006 (having contributed already to HZDS's Milan Marčok's successful run for governor in 2002). It is apparent that Kotleba was completely underrated by his opponents (despite his more than 10% result in the 2009 elections) – both on the side of the opposition and the SMER-SD. The consequence of not taking the ambitions of the far-right organizations seriously become apparent now: the state administrative becomes open to the threat of incompetence, nepotism and possible criminality.³

Kotleba's success showed that a combination of aggressive, racist and xenophobic rhetoric and small-scale activism can appeal to certain segments of disillusioned electorate. Choosing the far-right can at the same time be interpreted as an expression of protest toward the incompetence of both SMER-SD and the opposition to solve issues that are perceived as acute threats by electorate, for instance the “Roma problem.” For some, the thin, populist nationalism of SMER-SD can be insufficient – as opposed to the pure, rather malevolent version of it offered by Kotleba and his party, which was also unflawed by political and financial scandals.

Communal elections that took place on November 15th, 2014 shed a different light on Marian Kotleba's political triumph. It seems that he quickly failed to fulfil the expectations and hopes of his voters and his image is now, after almost a year in the governor's seat, flawed by accusations of incompetency and nepotism. Obstructing of the flow of European funds into the region also contributed to his unpopularity. Kotleba's insufficient political results and the inconsistency of his proposals and the political reality could have facilitated a rise of general distrust toward movements which define themselves as nationalist. ĽS-NS's electoral results speak for themselves – albeit they did manage to gain 33 deputies in the regional municipal councils, these are more or less separated

² See <http://www.sme.sk/c/7016975/fico-zvaluje-vinu-na-pravicu-no-extremista-dobyjal-basty-smeru.html>.

³ Transparency International Slovakia evaluated several of these flaws of Kotleba's performance on its blog: <http://transparency.blog.sme.sk/c/374261/rok-zupana-kotlebu-alebo-ako-sa-dari-lsns.html>.

with little or no position at all to enforce any kind of policies. All ĽS-NS's candidates for mayors were unsuccessful.

But ĽS-NS is not the only organization which establishes its political identity on a nationalist rhetoric. Numerous others are silently engaging in a small-scale activism, organization of memorial events and tiny social campaigns, possibly hoping to emulate Marian Kotleba's success of 2013. They are, like Kotleba once was, largely overlooked by the major political parties which simply do not see them as a threat to their position. There appears to be only limited collaboration with local administrations and no official support for them. Yet, it does not mean that they are free of ambitions. Did the nationalist agenda served them well in the elections, while it did not help SNS and Kotleba?

The following text attempts to name the most significant of these organizations, to describe a recent transformation of their strategies and to evaluate results of their members in the communal elections of 2014.

Who is who?

Contemporary scene of Slovak nationalist initiatives and movements consists of several groups which differ from one another in their agenda, strategies, spatial dissemination and degree of political ambitions.

Presumably the spatially most extended organization is *Slovenskí branci* (SB, Slovak Conscript) who, according to their own information, operate in fifteen Slovak counties. Their activity consists predominantly of military trainings, in which members refine their physical and tactical skills as well as weapon proficiency. Apart from these meetings, the members sporadically attend memorials and nationally oriented ceremonies where they usually serve as honor guards or they engage in minor activism – for example building of anti-flood barriers or cleaning unauthorized landfills. Although *Slovenskí branci* claim to be a priori apolitical, they often cooperate with other organizations and manifest obvious nationalist tendencies.⁴ The lack of ambitions to enter the institutional sphere might stem from relatively young age of the members – most of them are high school attendees. The official leader of the organization, Peter Švrček, is only eighteen years old.

⁴ Slovenskí branci make their nationalist and pan-Slavic affiliations clear in an “oath”, published on their website, as well as in the introductory text (<http://www.slovenski-branci.estranky.sk/>).

Nonetheless, there are several members, like e.g. Filip Rázga, who already have some experience with anti-system activities (in this case *Occupy the General Prosecution*), or served in armed forces.⁵

Other organization which appears to be apolitical is *Nové slobodné Slovensko* (NSS, New Free Slovakia). Although formerly an active nationalist initiative, particularly under the leadership of Radovan Novotný, the bass player of a neo-Nazi band called Dr. Martens Skinheads,⁶ its activity has diminished now, focusing mainly on organization of memorial events related to anniversaries of wartime Slovak State and its representatives and concentrating mainly on regions of Northern and Eastern Slovakia. NSS is very strongly influenced by conservative catholic agenda⁷ and demonstrates respect for the authorities of wartime Slovak State as well as for the Slovak awakeners of nineteenth century. Together with its hyper-conservatism, its manifests and reactions articulate strong anti-Roma, anti-Hungarian and homophobic (or generally anti-LGBTI) views.

Slovenská pospolitost' (Slovak brotherhood), once the most important Slovak nationalist initiative (used to be a political party from 2005 to 2006, when dismissed by the Supreme Court), formerly led by Marian Kotleba, was dispersed by Ministry of Interior in 2008 and later re-established after the Supreme Court re-evaluated the decision and allowed its existence again. Kotleba was in 2007 succeeded by Ivan Sýkora, in 2011 by Marcel Urban, and later by current leader Jakub "Hromoslav" Škrabák, and left the organization entirely (while retaining connection) for *Ľudová Strana – Naše Slovensko* in 2010.⁸

At the peak of its fame, *Slovenská pospolitost'* was famous for its members wearing controversial uniforms, resembling the uniforms of wartime Slovak militia, or organizing torchlight marches. Today, the uniforms are scarcely used as the members prefer less provoking street-wear or simple T-shirts with the symbol of the organization, visually referring to a particular form of double cross used in symbolism of Slovak State.⁹ Albeit reduced in numbers, they still continue to organize

⁵ Disclosed to the author by a member of the movement in personal communication.

⁶ Radovan Novotný, former leader of NSS is disclosed e.g. on page of Czech Anti-Fascists: <http://www.antifa.cz/content/poprask-kolem-normana-finkelsteina>.

⁷ Their catholic background is apparent from their webpage <http://nss.sk/> where the members publish reports from commemorative events as well as manifestos etc., e.g.: "National self-confidence based on Christian, or in Slovak context Cyril's and Methodius', tradition was the nation's shield in the time of enslavement, throughout the time of Hungarization, Bohemization, and socialist "Sovietization."

⁸ Well informed history and analysis of *Slovenská pospolitost'*'s activities can be found in Mikušovič, D. 2007. "Slovenská pospolitost' včera a dnes." [online] [Retrieved 7.12.2014]. Approachable from: <http://www.rexter.cz/slovenska-pospolitost-vcera-a-dnes/2007/05/01/>.

⁹ E.g. <https://pospolitost.files.wordpress.com/2012/10/znak.gif>.

memorial events and anti-Roma demonstrations.¹⁰ Apart from this, *Slovenská pospolitost'* operates its own e-shop, selling brands associated with neo-Nazi movement, like e.g. Lonsdale, Thor Steinar or Everlast, "Anti-Antifa" T-shirts, or among others, publications by W. L. Pierce and David Irving.¹¹ As a side activity, *Slovenská pospolitost'* engages in organization of a tourist club *Plesnivec*¹² for their nature-enthusiastic members, or a Slavic football cup, *SlavCup*. They maintain connections with the Czech far-right movement *Dělnická strana* (Workers' Party) and the Polish *Narodowy Front Czestochowa* (National Front Czestochowa).¹³ The organization currently operates mainly in the northern and western parts of Slovakia.

Slovenská pospolitost' and the clique around Marian Kotleba contributed to emergence of yet another far-right organization, *Akčná Skupina Vzдор Kysuce* (ASVK, Action Group Resistance Kysuce, formerly *Vzдор Kysuce*, not to be confused with far-left initiative *VZDOR*), that was founded by Kotleba's close collaborator, Richard Holtan, who appeared by his side during numerous protests and demonstrated the connection once again at Kotleba's inauguration.¹⁴

ASVK started as paramilitary organization, possibly an extended hand of *Slovenská pospolitost'* in the northern part of Slovakia. ASVK frequently voices not only nationalist, but openly racist and neo-Nazi opinions. Until 2014, its activity consisted mainly of physical trainings,¹⁵ not unlike the ones of *Slovenskí branci*, but throughout the last year their activity increased as they launched social and ecological projects. The heightened activity seems to be connected with the active involvement of the currently most visible member, Marián Magát, who already unsuccessfully ran as a candidate in the European Parliament elections. ASVK is currently active in the northern region of Slovakia, operating among Považská Bystrica, Žilina, Čadca, Turzovka and Kysucké Nové Mesto.

¹⁰ For example recent commemorative event of 1907 massacre in Černová:
<http://pospolitost.wordpress.com/category/akcie/>.

¹¹ E-Shop is approachable from: <http://www.brotherhood.sk/>.

¹² TK Plesnivec can be seen here: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Turistick%C3%BD-klub-Plesnivec/451173898287071?fref=ts>.

¹³ Slovenská pospolitost' in Czestochowa: <http://pospolitost.wordpress.com/2014/09/02/prejav-vodcu-sp-na-akcii-v-polskom-meste-czestochowa/>

¹⁴ Holtan can be seen with Kotleba on photography from Kotleba's inauguration ceremony:
http://farm8.staticflickr.com/7451/11478682984_e6284aaa6d_z.jpg or
http://farm8.staticflickr.com/7394/11478655855_e402021f19_z.jpg.

¹⁵ Audiovisual documents can be seen e.g. here:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wO6RiZHJtDU&list=PLQJj1KHZ8Lpn4cv0zIRW3lVS8wdJ92w-i>.

Probably the most important and influential nationalist initiative is *Slovenské hnutie obrody* (SHO, Slovak revival movement), active since 2004 and led by Róbert Švec. SHO engages in a number of activities, including social campaigns ecological activities and regular organization of commemorative events mostly referring to the wartime Slovak State, or attendance of ideologically concurrent demonstrations (mainly anti-Roma, anti-LGBTI¹⁶). Online activities include their own e-shop *vlastenec.sk*,¹⁷ replete with ideologically laden objects – T-shirts praising Jozef Tiso, Vladimir Putin and claiming “Kosovo is Serbia” as well as Slovak flags or stickers with anti-multicultural inscriptions; and independent news source *neprisposobivi.sk*¹⁸ that covers crimes of “the inadaptable citizens”. The term is commonly viewed as a politically correct expression referring to Roma population, which the server apparently mirrors – overwhelming majority of the “news” is devoted to supposed crimes of citizens of Roma origin. Occasionally they organize cultural events like e.g. the concert of an ex-member of neo-Nazi band *Biely odpor* (White Resistance), Ondrej Ďurica.¹⁹

Their activities are, when physical force is necessary, performed by paramilitary unit *Oddiel Dobrovoľník* (OD, Division Volunteer) that claims to “bring Slovaks together in order to renew the spiritual values and stop the general decay of morals.”²⁰ *Oddiel Dobrovoľník* is active mainly in the northern Slovakia, its leader Patrik Kubička coming from Žilina and more official events often being organized in the Nitra region.

While it would seem reasonable for particularized nationalist organizations to unite their powers before the upcoming elections, such tendencies did not occur, despite their relative spatial and ideological proximity (e.g. overlap of activities in the northern Slovakia and the praise of the wartime Slovakia). Generally there appears to be a lack of will for such collaborations, though it was not always so – for example, SHO closely collaborated with *Slovenská pospolitosť* and NSS throughout the time of SP’s heightened activity, but now appears to rather distance itself from other initiatives. Reasons for such animosity are often very simple and mundane, like, in case of collaboration between SHO and *Slovenskí branci*, a lack of reciprocity perceived from the latter and

¹⁶ For example here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fb792gII9MU>.

¹⁷ See <http://vlastenec.sk/>.

¹⁸ Currently out of order, can be approached via the Internet Archive: <http://web.archive.org/web/20140903214824/http://www.neprisposobivi.sk/web/>

¹⁹ SHO organized his gig in Nitra, claiming that Ďurica’s lyrics „grab the hearts of people from both sides of Morava river“, <http://sho.sk/clanok/1364/ondrej-durica-vlastenectvo-je-laska>.

²⁰ See <https://www.facebook.com/OddielDobrovolnik?fref=ts>.

unauthorized appropriation of a photograph.²¹ Others (e.g. ASVK) have targeted internal politics of SHO (such as banning members on Facebook) or brought up personal issues of the leader, Robert Švec, mostly related to his alleged homosexuality. On the other hand, SHO apparently does not seek collaboration with much profaned *Slovenská pospolitost'* or similar organizations like *Akčná Skupina Vzdor Kysuce* that are commonly associated with neo-Nazism, and might endanger SHO's strive for polished and serious look.

This is by no means a complete record of initiatives, movements and organizations with nationalist character, yet we believe it covers the most important ones. Other, currently less active and those that did not rise to importance are for example: *Nedajme si náš Slovenský národ* (Defend our Slovak nation), *Národný odpor* (National resistance), *Oravská stráž* (Orava guard), *Bratstvo vlkov* (Brotherhood of Wolves), *Rodobrana* (Militia), *Akčná Skupina Vzdor Trnava* (Action Group Resistance Trnava), *Akčná Skupina Vzdor Košice* (Action Group Resistance Košice), *Slovenská Garda* (Slovak Guard), *Hnutie za Oslobodenie Slovenska* (Movement for Liberation of Slovakia), *Mea Patria*, or *Troublemaker Gemer*.

New Strategies

The most evident change these organizations are undergoing in recent years is a transformation in strategies of acquiring support of local communities. While formerly nationalist initiatives paid very little attention to the citizens' quality of life and environmental problems, focusing rather on organization of events and memorials, this has been changing significantly since 2012.

Slovenské hnutie obrody is particularly engaged in a small-scale activism and already started several campaigns. They engage in ecologically oriented activities (*Nebud' sviňa/Don't be a rat*²²) like cleaning illegal landfills and polluted areas, as well as social ones (*Staráme sa/We care*,²³ and *Kvapka krvi/A drop of blood*²⁴). Project *Staráme sa* is the more interesting here as it helps the disadvantaged

²¹ As presented on personal blog of member of Slovenskí branci: <http://jarocabuk.blogspot.cz/2013/10/pravda-o-slovenskom-hnuti-obrody.html>.

²² See <http://www.nebudsvina.sk/>.

²³ See <http://www.sho.sk/starame-sa/1/>.

²⁴ See <http://www.sho.sk/clanok/1461/dobrovolnicka-kvapka-krvi>, the event having been peculiarly scheduled on the exact date of the establishment of wartime Slovak State.

families by providing them with food and occasionally with things of daily use. *SHO* claims to cooperate with the Labour Office, however, this has been proved untrue. It seems that there is more to those projects than a pure compassion for a fellow citizen in need as photographic documentation of the occasional support is mostly used as a self-praise and self-advertisement. These activities were used in similar manner in the programmatic statements and self-descriptions of their electoral candidates, who both defined themselves as “community activists”.

While *Slovenské hnutie obrody* profiles itself as rather conventional volunteer organization that promotes healthy, responsible and nationally oriented lifestyle, *Akčná Skupina Vzduch Kysuce* intends to create a completely independent counterculture. Probably inspired by *SHO*, the group, originally rooted in Nazi-skinhead context, launched a social campaign *Slovák Slovákov*²⁵ (From Slovak to Slovak) and started to gather used clothing and food for disadvantaged families, organize blood donations to local clinics and engage in creating bio-gardens. They occasionally engage in protests for animal rights. Recently established *ASVK*'s cell in Trnava (*Akčná Skupina Vzduch Trnava*) already started their activist projects as well. *ASVK* is involved in a political project as well, participating in the initiative *Život pre Kysuce* (Life for Kysuce) that apparently aims to enhance the well-being of the inhabitants of Kysuce region.²⁶

Slovenskí branci every now and then lend a helping hand to the official authorities in cleaning unauthorized landfills and building anti-flood barriers, or removing debris from flooded localities. *Slovenská pospolitost'* phlegmatically attempts to keep up, organizing occasional ecological activities.

These projects appear to be rather calculated attempts to legitimize the existence of these initiatives and persuade the public about their pure intentions, supposedly in order to gain more votes. People who are helped this way often do not realize that by smiling at a camera and holding flag of one or another initiative they are getting used as a means of propaganda with very clear objectives. Photographic documentation is commonly spread publicly and often accompanied by self-praising texts that make it plain whom these people owe their luck to. On the other hand, how can anyone blame multiple child families or unemployed single mothers for accepting a favor?

25 See <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Slov%C3%A1k-Slov%C3%A1kovi/685344378224613?fref=photo>.

26 *ASVK* (through Magát) cooperated with a candidate for the mayor of Čadca, Tomáš Urbaník on the project, yet their mutual connection is unclear: <http://alternativnacesta.blogspot.cz/2014/10/zivot-pre-kysuceod-aktvizmu-k-politike.html>

New Enemies

Not only strategies were transformed. With new political and geopolitical situation the traditional targets of nationalists' animosity shifted as well.

Roma While formerly nationalists deemed that the most acute threat to the integrity of Slovakia were Hungarians, considered responsible for the thousand-year suppression of the Slovak nation, Czechs, who exploited and suppressed Slovaks in the Czechoslovak state, and Jews, enslaving and looting the Christian majority, currently it is the Roma population who is in the centre of criticism. It has to be said that certain overtones of the former hatred towards Hungarians, Czechs and (especially) Jews are yet sustained in the rhetoric of most of the organizations, but they are not impossible to overcome (except, again, for the Jews) - ASVK even meets and trains with *Magyar Nemzeti Arcvonal* (Hungarian National Front)²⁷ and most organizations are in at least slight contact with their counter-parts in other countries of V4. Using mainly essentialist and racist argumentative corpus, the initiatives (SHO, NSS, ASVK, and SP) often criticize assumed "inadaptability" of the Roma population as well as the indifference of the Slovak government to the "problem" or even favoring the Roma institutionally against the Slovak majority.²⁸ Roma people are bluntly presented as parasites who do not wish to work and simply take advantage of the social system. It is paradoxical that the actual size of the Roma population in the Žilina region which appears to be nationalist initiatives' milieu is actually very low.²⁹ The opposite is true of Košice and Prešov region where the activity of nationalists is rather sporadic.

European Union, NATO and USA: Criticism of the European Union and NATO and the Slovak involvement in these organizations (since 2005) is another important topic. These aggregates are perceived as principal threats to national integrity and sovereignty of Slovakia, encompassing the country into morally deprived West³⁰ and robbing it off its distinctive national character (e. g.

²⁷ The cooperation is documented e.g. here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vtHzMOCcqE8> or <http://vzdorkysuce.sk/madarsko-matrahaza-17-11-2012-akcia-magyar-nemzeti-arcvonal/>.

²⁸ E.g. <http://sho.sk/clanok/1531/peter-morvay-a-jeho-pismenkovy-gulas>: "Gypsies are just like the Jews. Both nations are characterized by frustration of their own fate and lack of self-reflexivity. Gypsy slum is basically a small Israel."

²⁹ Hurrle, J., Matlovičová, K., Mušinka, A., Škobla, D. 2013. Atlas rómskych komunit na Slovensku. [online] [retrieved 12.12.2014]

³⁰ See <http://sho.sk/clanok/1217/mama-chcel-som-zit>: "European Union is anti-Christian, antinational and amoral offspring of Fascism and Communism."

autonomous currency). On top of that, it approximates Slovakia to the USA, supposedly directed by ill wishing Jewish circles. “The West” is seen as a synonym for totalitarianism, falseness and unstoppable capitalist monopolies (such as pharmaceutical companies) that wish to exploit Slovak population endlessly, depriving Slovaks of their identity and turning it into another rootless crowd.

Western fashion (LGBTI and multiculturalism): With the Western economic interests comes the moral deprivation, which according to nationalists is incongruent with Slovak traditions. Two main topics here are the rights of the LGBTI community and the policy of multiculturalism. The demands (however modest in the Slovak context) of the LGBTI community are met with vicious response, accusing the NGOs articulating rights of the group of attempts to destroy the Slovak culture and traditional family based on Christianity, or even to “steal” children of Slovak parents as a consequence of allowing homosexual couples to provide foster homes for kids in the state’s care. Homosexual relationships are interpreted as perverse.³¹ Multiculturalism is similarly perceive as an attempt of the West to destroy authentic, traditional culture of Slovakia. The main threat here is the asserted possibility of a vast immigration from Muslim countries that would pose a threat not only to the culture but to the national security as well.

The Candidates

As has already been indicated, several members of the abovementioned organizations tried their luck as candidates in the Slovak communal elections that took place on November 15th, 2014. Their expectations were, as it turned out, a bit exaggerated.

As expected, SHO was the most ambitious, with its leader Róbert Švec running for the mayoral seat in Nitra, the fourth largest city in Slovakia, and the leader of its paramilitary unit *Oddiel Dobrovoľník* Patrik Kubička for the deputy in Žilina, Solinky district.

Róbert Švec, 38, attempted to become a mayor of Nitra for the second time already, having gained only 1487 votes, about seven times fewer than the winner Jozef Dvonč (supported by SMER-SD). Although Švec is a leader of one of the most active nationalist organizations in Slovakia, his campaign almost completely lacked this perspective, accenting conventional aims like improving the status of Nitra as one of the economic, cultural and educational centers of the Slovak republic. He

³¹ See <http://sho.sk/clanok/1391/kosicky-80-tisicovy-pochod-je-porazkou-homosexualov>: “[...] homosexuals and other suspicious orientations.”

defines himself as being “devoted to the community activism.”³² While dropping the explicit nationalist elements SHO commonly voices, except for links to his controversial articles on Slovak National Uprising, Švec at least did not forget to remind the electorate of the acuteness of the problem with “the inadaptable”. His result was, however, four times better than in the last elections.

Patrik Kubička, aged 20, was presented by SHO together with Švec as a key candidate and is probably holding a strong position in the structure of the organization. He was unsuccessful as well, having gained 672 votes, 66 fewer than the last elected candidate. Kubička’s electoral webpage states explicit nationalist background and describes the candidate as being a devoted national activist with three years of experience as regional leader of the initiative. His program focused on solving urban problems – supporting new apartment buildings, leisure centers for kids and protection of cultural heritage.³³

It is paradoxical that while Švec and Kubička were presented as the top candidates, they lost, while on the other hand others, whom *SHO* failed to even mention on their Facebook page, succeeded. Namely it was Tomáš Kopřiva, now a deputy in Stráňavy, Žilina county, and Martin Kereškéni (ran as a candidate of *Národ a spravodlivosť – naša strana*, Nation and Justice – Our Party) who became a deputy in Valaská Dubová. Kopřiva succeeded as a deputy (albeit failing as a mayoral candidate) with a well-structured program concentrating on development of the community and enhancement of cultural life of Stráňavy.³⁴ Kereškéni’s program was not made public.

Marián Magát, an active member of *Akčná Skupina Vzduch Kysuce*, ran for the mayoral seat of Dunajov, a small village in Čadca district, northern Slovakia. Since *ASVK* is not registered as a political subject, Magát participated in the elections as a candidate of *Slovenská ľudová strana* (Slovak People’s Party) that often serves far-right nationalists as an institutional platform. Magát, 29, had already taken part unsuccessfully in the European Parliament elections in May 2014. While there appears to be no publicly approachable program, his ideological background is apparent from the other statements and performances.³⁵ In these, Magát voiced opinions that range from a conventional nationalist vocabulary (apologetics of Jozef Tiso and the wartime Slovak State, or hyper-

³² See <http://www.robertsvec.sk/>.

³³ See <http://patrik-kubicka.webnode.sk/program/>.

³⁴ See <http://www.tomaskopriva.sk/> - Kopřiva describes himself as a member of SHO and community activist, while his program more or less lacks accent on nationality.

³⁵ Pre-elections might be exemplary (<http://www.protiprudu.org/kandidat-na-europoslanca-marian-magat-eu-je-komunisticke-zriadenie/>): “My ambition is the well-being of the Slovak nation.”

conservatism) to a dangerous idolization of the Nazi Third Reich and Adolf Hitler – calling Hitler a peacemaker and an outstanding economist.³⁶ Magát gained 186 votes.

Candidate for a deputy in Madunice, western Slovakia, Jakub Škrabák, the current leader of *Slovenská pospolitosť*, resigned altogether on almost any form of virtual campaign, launching his webpage only a week before the elections and with very little information.³⁷ When asked on Facebook, *Slovenská pospolitosť* even denied any form of involvement in the elections, accenting its apolitical character. Nonetheless, its members helped Škrabák in contact campaign that gained him 293 votes, 7 fewer than the last elected candidate.

Škrabák, 28, is not silent about his involvement in *Slovenská pospolitosť*, although he presents it as a peaceful initiative that engages solely in organization of cultural and sports events, occasionally demonstrations. From the mixture of plans for the village, consisting of support of local folklore and traditional artisanship, sport and creation of local social and ecological programs, one stands out – creation of an independent militia that would cooperate with local police force and take care of Madunice’s safety. Jakub Škrabák already organized such action, after a murder of a local who was murdered in what was described as a racially motivated attack by two men of Roma origin.

Former Trnava city police officer Marián Mišún is a figure with no recent association with any of the abovementioned organizations, but well known as an important player in the field of nationally oriented initiatives. Mišún closely cooperated with Marián Kotleba, *Slovenská pospolitosť*,³⁸ ASVK and others, however quickly he lost his position after having been critical to Kotleba’s activities in the governor’s seat. He was already in the centre of several public controversies, once when his nationalist affection got disclosed and he was forced to leave the police and for the second time when he publicly burned the flag of the European Union and was sentenced to pay a fine of 300 EUR.³⁹ Already unsuccessful as a candidate in the European Parliament elections, Mišún attempted to become a deputy in Púchov, northern Slovakia. He did not succeed, having

³⁶ From his Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/marian.magat.5/posts/575544099145331>, “Adolf Hitler was born on this day, 124 years ago. Aside from being Reich Chancellor, he was a peacemaker, outstanding economist, rhetorician, and great person altogether. Who has ever read his speeches, knows how amazing he was. Honor his memory.”

³⁷ See <http://jakub-skrabak.sk/>.

³⁸ Report from protest, co-organized by Mišún and Kotleba: <http://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/170435/pochod-maticiar-misun-mal-tvrdsi-slovník-ako-kotleba/>.

³⁹ See <http://www.pluska.sk/krimi/domace-krimi/policajt-ktory-podpalil-vlajku-eu-pracu-dostal-pokutu.html>.

gained only 261 votes. He was unsuccessful in 2010 and in the European Parliament elections in May 2014 as well.

Mišún is not only attached to notion of Slovak nation, his relation to the Nazi Third Reich is as far from mere coquetry as Marián Magát's. The unofficially published book authored by Mišún bears the title "Our fight against lies, ignorance and cowardice" – "by accident" almost identical with the original title of another book: "Four and half years of fight against lies, ignorance and cowardice", abbreviated as "My fight", or *Mein Kampf*. Apart from an insight into the history of the Slovak nationalist movement, the tractate discloses much of Mišún's visions of Slovakia's future – eugenics, labor camps and direct inspiration from NSDAP's approach to economy.

For current elections, Mišún apparently gathered five of who appear to be his trainees from the local gym where he makes a living as a martial arts teacher: Radomír Kvasnička, Luboš Pagáč, Michal Lednický, Stanislav Školek and Milan Panáč. Panáč seems to be particularly involved in not only nationalist, but again neo-Nazi movement as he has motto of SS corps ("Meine Ehre heißt Treue") and a hand giving Nazi greeting "Sieg Heil" tattooed over his abdomen.⁴⁰

Despite their plan to establish autonomous municipal currency and viral video that envisioned establishment of a powerful and self-sustaining region, all six candidates received only 750 votes, none of them surpassing the threshold of 300 (most of them not even 150).

Name	Organization	Locality	Votes	Elected
Róbert Švec	SHO (leader)	Nitra (mayor)	1487 (8,3%)	no
Patrik Kubička	SHO (regional coordinator)	Žilina – Solinky (deputy)	672	no
Martin Kereškéni	SHO (regional coordinator)	Valaská Dubová (deputy)	176	yes
Tomáš Kopřiva	SHO (PR manager)	Žilina – Stráňavy (mayor/deputy)	177 (17,95%)/387	no/yes
Jakub Škrabák	SP (leader)	Madunice (deputy)	293	no
Marián Magát	ASVK (member)	Dunajov (mayor)	186 (31%)	no
Marián Mišún	-	Púchov (deputy)	261	no

⁴⁰ See <http://www.antifa.cz/content/white-rex-hatecore-shop-zoufalstvi-tuzemskych-nacku>.

Conclusion

As I have attempted to show, contemporary Slovakia provides fertile ground for lively field of nationalist initiatives that, despite not being registered as political subjects, have been attempting to penetrate official administrative structures by taking part in the process of democratic elections. Their results were pitiful regardless of the wrapping – SHO's polished formal look did not help any more than the aggressive and rather primitive stylization of Marián Mišún and his clique of trainees. It is somewhat paradoxical that the only members of these organizations who succeeded, Tomáš Kopřiva and Martin Kereškéni of SHO, did not receive any visible support and did not even emphasize their relation to the movement.

The electoral failure might be attributed to several reasons. Firstly – insufficient campaign. Only two of the abovementioned candidates bothered to create functional web pages while others restricted themselves to a contact face-to-face campaign, leaflets distribution and sporadic Facebook posts, presumably due to a lack of financial capital or a will to use it. Róbert Švec denied any kind of input into the campaign, stating that “(his) daily work for people will be (his) campaign.”⁴¹ With all respect, the 35 thousand EUR invested by the winner of the elections in Nitra Jozef Dvonč (SMER-SD) proved to be, as mentioned above, at least seven times more effective. The only billboard that could have been observed was that of Marián Mišún, who, together with his colleagues, produced a promotional video as well. The video became a moderate viral, but rather for its grotesque character than for being seriously perceived as interesting.

Second important reason might be the lack of notoriety in region – as well as the excess of it. Jakub “Hromoslav” Škrabák is well known (and never attempted to hide it) as a leader of *Slovenská pospolitosť*, an organization that is widely perceived as a milieu for dangerous individuals. However, Škrabák's candidacy was completely overlooked by the media and while he declared his relationship to the organization, *Slovenská pospolitosť* denied any involvement in the elections. Marián Mišún's clique was not that lucky. Their billboard drew not only attention of voters but the media as well and, in the end, they got labeled by one of the most-read tabloids as “extremists,” “primitives” and

⁴¹ See <http://nitra.sme.sk/c/7314160/kandidat-na-primatora-sefuje-hnutiu-ktore-predava-tricka-s-tisom.html>.

“bullies”.⁴² Róbert Švec did not escape the media and the widely popular periodical SME described him as having sympathies for the pro-Nazi wartime Slovak state.

Given the unflattering results of Marian Kotleba’s LS-NS, the general association with a nationalist movement might have impaired the chances of members of these initiatives as well. It appears that Kotleba failed to fulfill the expectations of his voters, both of those who expected “change” or “new face” and far-right radicals – not a single member of his party managed to become mayor and only 33 became deputies, however separated and with very few possibilities to influence political or social reality beyond the municipal borders. Media often exploited the topic, openly criticizing his political steps and accusing him of incompetency. As to *Slovenská ľudová strana* (SLS), only six of its candidates were elected as deputies.

The failure of nationalist parties and organizations, as indicated above, is not only a problem of small, new, or overly radical subjects. Traditional, firm and institutionally anchored former “Moloch of Slovak nationalism”, *Slovenská národná strana* (SNS) declined too. Recent communal elections are no exception – while in 2010, SNS managed to gain 60 mayoral seats, this year it was 41. Number of SNS’s deputies has diminished as well, from 938 to 841. This calculation does not entail the candidates who were only partially supported by SNS. Taking these into account, it was from 196 to 151 for mayors and from 1265 to 1122 for deputies. Decline in the latter numbers can be attributed to SNS’s failure in parliamentary election and generally diminished electorate, followed by considerable loss of institutional background.

This appears to indicate that the nationalist parties cease to be attractive for voters who rather support SMER-SD (as in the case of Jozef Dvonč in Nitra) or independent candidates. Possible connections with nationalist organizations and their agenda are yet to be analyzed. Counting 1104 independent mayors and exactly 6000 deputies, this is far beyond the ambition of this paper.

As we have shown, Slovak nationalist initiatives are often militant in nature and use social and ecological campaigns only to symbolically legitimize their existence. Most of these groups manifest strong racist attitudes and appear to be frequently using the term “nationalist” simply to provide a socially acceptable covering for their sympathies with Nazism and neo-Nazism. This from the discussed groups is particularly true of *Slovenská pospolitosť*, *Akčná Skupina Vzdor Kysuce* and Marián Mišún. The distrust of the electorate is hence a very well chosen attitude.

⁴² See <http://www.topky.sk/gl/252937/1429087/V-Puchove-kandiduje-vykvet-okolia--Su-to-primitivni-bitkari-a-grazli--stazuju-sa-domaci->.